



DEVAL L. PATRICK  
Governor


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Lieutenant Governor

**Commonwealth of Massachusetts**  
*Executive Office of Health and Human Services*  
**Department of Transitional Assistance**  
600 Washington Street • Boston, MA 02111

JUDYANN BIGBY, M.D.  
Secretary

JULIA E. KEHOE  
Commissioner

**Field Operations Memo 2009-56**  
**September 24, 2009**

**To:** Transitional Assistance Office Staff  
**From:**  John Augeri, Assistant Commissioner for Field Operations  
**Re:** 10/1/2009 Cost-of-Living Changes for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program

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**Overview**

The annual SNAP COLA was processed during the weekend of September 18, 2009. This a mass change affecting the entire SNAP caseload.

The following is a summary of the cost-of-living changes in SNAP:

**Gross, Net and 165 Percent Income Eligibility Standards** - The Gross, Net and 165 Percent Income Eligibility Standards have increased.

**Shelter Deduction** - The maximum shelter deduction (for households not comprised of any elderly or disabled member) has increased to **\$459**.

**Standard Deduction:** The standard deduction for all household sizes has changed:

- The standard deduction for household sizes 1 to 3 **has decreased**.
- The standard deduction for household sizes 4 and above has increased.

**Standard Utility Allowance (SUA)**

- The Nonheating SUA remains \$375;
- The Phone SUA remains \$44;
- The Bay State CAP SUA remains \$375;
- The Heating/Cooling SUA has decreased to **\$611**.

**Maximum Benefit Levels** - The maximum SNAP benefit levels for all household sizes remain at the amounts issued with the April 2009 ARRA changes.

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**Overview  
(Continued)**

**Minimum Benefit Level** - The minimum benefit level for eligible one- and two-person households remains at **\$16**.

**Homeless Shelter/Utility Deduction** - The Homeless Shelter/Utility Deduction remains at **\$143**.

See Attachment A for revised COLA standard amounts.

The COLA State Letter will be issued later.

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**Impact of  
COLA on  
SNAP  
Benefits**

The COLA recalculation results show that the majority of SNAP households who will be sent a change notice are negatively impacted by the COLA. Most households will receive a small decrease in SNAP benefits caused by the reduction of the standard deduction amount (for household sizes 1, 2 and 3) and the reduction of the heating/cooling SUA. The COLA notices to active households have been carefully worded to alert clients that this COLA will result in a decrease in benefits for some households.

To alleviate the burden the anticipated high call volume could place on TAOs and Recipient Services, a special phone bank has been established to address COLA-related calls. In addition, this year, the COLA notices do not include the case managers' phone numbers or Recipient Services phone number but instead include only the unique phone number activated to handle COLA-related calls.

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**Automatic  
Update of  
Active SNAP  
Households**

As of the close of business on 9/18/09, active SNAP cases on BEACON, including Bay State CAP, were automatically recalculated using the new COLA standards. SNAP cases with a change in benefit amount were automatically authorized. The newly calculated benefit amount is now displayed on the Active by Grantee Name view, under Assistance Unit Lists.

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**Report of  
Updated  
Households**

A report entitled "Food Stamp 10/2009 COLA Updated Case":

- is now available on View Direct, Report ID:DTA 9023;
  - lists all households that have a change in benefit amount as a result of the COLA;
  - lists the household's old and new SNAP benefit amounts (as adjusted by the system);
  - lists the amount added to the 10/2009 issuance (benefits owed from 10/1/2009 to 10/2009 cyclical date), if appropriate; and
  - can be used for reference by TAO staff.
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**Client Notices**

The following notices will be sent to households listed on the “Food Stamp 10/2009 COLA Updated Case” report:

- an English/Spanish notice (Attachment B) to SNAP households;
  - an English/Spanish notice (Attachment C) to Bay State CAP households; and
  - a multilingual notice that states, “Important! Please have this notice translated immediately.”
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**Households With Decreased SNAP Benefit Amounts**

SNAP households with a decrease in benefit caused by the COLA will not pend. The COLA is regarded as a mass change; therefore, the normal pending period required for negative actions such as a decrease in benefit will not apply in this situation.

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**When to Use New Standards**

SNAP cases authorized after the close of business on 9/18/2009 were recalculated using the new COLA standards. As of Monday, September 21, 2009 the new COLA standards must be used in all SNAP calculations, including any necessary manual calculations.

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**Closed SNAP Households**

Closed SNAP households, including Bay State CAP households owed additional benefits for the 10/2009 COLA, will be issued benefits. These closed households will:

- have benefits dated and issued in mid-October 2009;
- be listed on the Closed/Denied Within the Last Two Months view under Assistance Unit Lists;

**Note:** In mid-October the “Last Paid” date and “Benefit” amount column on this view will show which households received a prorated SNAP benefit amount for the period between 10/1/2009 and the household’s cyclical start date for October;

- be sent an English/Spanish notice (Attachment D) to SNAP households;
  - be sent an English/Spanish notice (Attachment E) to Bay State CAP households; and
  - be sent a multilingual card that states, “Important! Please have this notice translated immediately.”
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**Location of Eligibility Charts and Issuance Tables**

Last October, effective with the new COLA standards, the eligibility charts and issuance tables associated with the COLA were removed from the regulations and posted to the [mass.gov/dta](http://mass.gov/dta) website. This change has eased the administrative burden on the Department by eliminating the need to submit numerous pages through the State Letter process each year.

All remaining pages that were formerly a part of the SNAP COLA State Letter will be removed from the regulations this year and posted to [mass.gov](http://mass.gov). The remaining regulation pages that will be posted to [mass.gov/dta](http://mass.gov/dta) website include figures representing:

- the standard deduction;
- the shelter deduction;
- the standard utility allowances; and
- the Bay State CAP utility allowance.

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**Fuel Assistance Mailing**

This year clients receiving COLA notices will also receive information about fuel assistance included with their COLA notice. This combined mailing includes the COLA notice, the income verification letter, the fuel assistance brochure and the multilingual card. Other households, who are not scheduled to receive a COLA notice, will receive the fuel assistance information through a separate mailing.

During the fuel assistance season (November through April), case managers are reminded to ask clients at every contact, if they receive fuel assistance. Remember to allow the heating/cooling SUA for clients in receipt of fuel assistance even if the client does not pay heat separately from his or her rent.

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**Questions**

If you have any questions, please have your Hotline designee call the Policy Hotline.

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<b>MAXIMUM BENEFIT LEVELS</b> (no change since Stimulus)	
<b>HOUSEHOLD SIZE</b>	<b>MAXIMUM BENEFIT LEVELS</b>
1	\$ 200
2	\$ 367
3	\$ 526
4	\$ 668
5	\$ 793
6	\$ 952
7	\$ 1,052
8	\$ 1,202
<b>Each additional HH member will increase by \$ 150</b>	

<b>MAXIMUM MONTHLY GROSS INCOME LEVELS</b>	
<b>HOUSEHOLD SIZE</b>	<b>GROSS INCOME LEVELS</b>
1	\$1,174
2	\$1,579
3	\$ 1,984
4	\$ 2,389
5	\$ 2,794
6	\$ 3,200
7	\$ 3,605
8	\$ 4,010
<b>Each additional HH member will increase by \$406</b>	

<b>MAXIMUM MONTHLY NET INCOME LEVELS</b>	
<b>HOUSEHOLD SIZE</b>	<b>NET INCOME LEVELS</b>
1	\$ 903
2	\$ 1,215
3	\$ 1,526
4	\$ 1,838
5	\$ 2,150
6	\$ 2,461
7	\$ 2,773
8	\$ 3,085
<b>Each additional HH member will increase by \$312</b>	

<b>STANDARDS FOR SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES INVOLVING AN ELDERLY &amp; DISABLED INDIVIDUAL</b>	
<b>HOUSEHOLD SIZE</b>	<b>165% OF POVERTY LEVEL</b>
1	\$ 1,490
2	\$ 2,004
3	\$ 2,518
4	\$ 3,032
5	\$ 3,547
6	\$ 4,061
7	\$ 4, 575
8	\$ 5,089
<b>Each additional HH member will increase by \$515</b>	

<b>STANDARD DEDUCTION AMOUNTS</b>	
<b>HOUSEHOLD SIZE</b>	<b>STANDARD DEDUCTION</b>
1	\$ 141
2	\$ 141
3	\$ 141
4	\$ 153
5	\$ 179
6 or Greater	\$ 205

<b>STANDARD UTILITY ALLOWANCES</b>	
<b>TYPE</b>	<b>AMOUNT UTILITY ALLOWANCE</b>
Heating/Cooling	\$ 611
Non Heating	\$ 375
Telephone	\$ 44

## ATTACHMENT B

300 Ocean Ave. CAN 710  
Revere, MA 02151

Important Notice - Read Carefully  
Este Mensaje Es Importante - Lea Cuidadosamente

### Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance

Mary Jones  
101 Main Street  
Somerville, MA 02148

SSN: 999-99-9999  
Revere TAO - DTA

10/01/2009

### Notice of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) COLA and Fuel Assistance Information

Dear *Mary Jones*:

Each year, the federal government makes a cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) to the calculation of your SNAP benefit amount. SNAP benefits are changing as of October 1, 2009 due to this adjustment. Because your benefit calculation will change, your SNAP benefits may either increase or decrease.

On October, 1, 2009, your SNAP benefits will go from \$xxx to \$xxx. This change is based on the adjustment in the cost of living and any changes in your circumstances.

If your benefits are increasing, you may receive an additional one-time payment for the period between October 1, 2009 and the date of your October 2009 benefits. Your October 2009 benefit will include this one-time payment of \$X in addition to your scheduled benefits. You do not need to do anything to receive these benefits.

If you disagree with the amount of your SNAP benefits, you have the right to a fair hearing. The back side of this notice contains important information about your hearing rights. To request a hearing, complete the back side of this notice. The regulation(s) used in reaching these decisions are 106 CMR: 364.500, 364.600, 366.130.

You may call 1-888-483-0255 if you are having trouble reading or understanding this notice.

Please note: Enclosed with this notice is a brochure that gives information about fuel assistance. There is also an income verification letter that you should take with you when applying for fuel assistance.

## ATTACHMENT C

300 Ocean Ave. CAN 710  
Revere, MA 02151

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### Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance

Mary Jones  
101 Main Street  
Somerville, MA 02148

SSN: 999-99-9999  
Revere TAO - DTA

10/01/2009

### Notice of Bay State Combined Application Project (CAP) Benefits COLA and Fuel Assistance Information

Dear Mary Jones:

Each year, the federal government makes a cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) to the calculation of your food assistance benefit amount. Food assistance benefits through the Bay State CAP changed as of October 1, 2009 due to this adjustment. Because your benefit calculation will change, your food assistance benefits may either increase or decrease.

On October, 1, 2009, your food assistance benefits will go from \$xxx to \$xxx. This change is based on the adjustment in the cost of living and any changes in your circumstances.

If your benefits are increasing, you may receive an additional one-time payment for the period between October 1, 2009 and the date of your October 2009 benefits. Your October 2009 benefit will include this one-time payment of \$X in addition to your scheduled benefits. You do not need to do anything to receive these benefits.

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Revere, MA 02151

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### Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance

Mary Jones  
101 Main Street  
Somerville, MA 02148

SSN: 999-99-9999  
Davis Square TAO - DTA

10/1/2009

### Notice of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) COLA and Fuel Assistance Information

Dear *Mary Jones*:

Each year, the federal government makes a cost-of-living (COLA) adjustment to the calculation of your SNAP benefit amount. SNAP benefits changed as of October 1, 2009 due to this adjustment.

As you were informed, your SNAP case recently closed due to changes in your household circumstances. Due to the COLA adjustment, you are owed a one-time payment of SNAP benefits in the amount of \$XX for the period between October 1, 2009 and the date your SNAP case closed. These benefits are now in your EBT account.

If you disagree with the amount of your SNAP benefits, you have the right to a fair hearing. The back side of this notice contains important information about your hearing rights. To request a hearing, complete the back side of this notice. The regulation(s) used in reaching these decisions are 106 CMR: 364.500, 364.600, 366.130.

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Revere, MA 02151

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### Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance

Mary Jones  
101 Main Street  
Somerville, MA 02148

SSN: 999-99-9999  
Revere TAO - DTA

10/01/2009

### Notice of Bay State Combined Application Project (CAP) Benefits COLA and Fuel Assistance Information

Dear *Mary Jones*:

Each year, the federal government makes a cost-of-living (COLA) adjustment to the calculation of your Bay State CAP food assistance benefit amount. Food assistance benefits changed as of October 1, 2009 due to this adjustment.

As you were informed, your Bay State CAP case recently closed due to changes in your household circumstances. Due to the COLA adjustment, you are owed a one-time payment of food assistance benefits in the amount of \$XX for the period between October 1, 2009 and the date your Bay State CAP case closed. These benefits are now in your EBT account.

If you disagree with the amount of your food assistance benefits, you have the right to a fair hearing. The back side of this notice contains important information about your hearing rights. To request a hearing, complete the back side of this notice. The regulation(s) used in reaching these decisions are 106 CMR: 364.500, 364.600, 366.130.

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