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Department of Transitional Assistance
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Field Operations Memo 2007-32
June 29, 2007

To:  **Transitional Assistance Office Staff**
From: **John Augeri, Assistant Commissioner for Field Operations**
Re: **Virtual Gateway Enhancements and the Elimination of the Signature Page for Food Stamp Applications**

Background

Tentatively effective July 18, 2007, the Virtual Gateway online food stamp application will be modified to comply with USDA minimal FS application requirements (*name, address and signature*). It will also be enhanced to allow applicants to submit the application using an electronic signature. This enhancement will streamline the application process as it eliminates the need for a web applicant to sign and return the *Notice of Rights, Responsibilities and Food Stamp Penalty Warning* (RR/FSP-1B) to complete the application. Both the provider FS application and the consumer application (**Fall River TAO only**) will be updated with these changes. (On July 18, Central Office will send TAOs an e-mail message to confirm implementation of the Virtual Gateway changes.)

In addition, the one page *Application For Food Stamp Benefits For Pure SSI Households* (FSP/SSA-1) has been revised to contain attestation language to eliminate the need for a signature page for SSA applicants. As a result, the RR/FSP-1B will be revised as a *Notice of Rights, Responsibilities and Penalties* form (RR/FSP-1B (Rev. 7/2007)).

Overview

The purpose of this memo is to inform TAO staff about;

- the minimal requirements change;
- the electronic signature functionality;
- the revised FSP/SSA-1 form; and
- the revised RR/FSP-1B form.

**Virtual Gateway
Applications:
Notice of
Minimal
Requirements**

The FS applicant will be notified on the *Before you begin* page of the Virtual Gateway Application (Consumer and Provider view) of the option to submit the application with only the minimum requirements of name, address, and signature. Those who choose this option must then file a paper application that can be downloaded and printed from a link provided along with instructions to mail, fax or drop off the application to the appropriate TAO identified on the link. The applicant will be advised of the steps required to complete the application process and that providing more information is helpful in expediting approval of the AU.

The new language reads as follows:

“Important: We must accept your application if it contains your name, address (if you have one) and your signature. To apply with only this minimal information, you must submit a paper application. This minimal information will establish your application filing date. However, the remaining information on the application must be completed and we must interview you to determine your eligibility. If you are eligible, your Food Stamp benefits will start as of the date we received your application.”

Please try to answer all of the questions on this application. The more information we have, the quicker we will be able to act on your application. If you aren't sure what the question means or how to answer it, leave it blank and we will talk about it during the interview.

To access the paper application click [here](#). You may mail, fax or drop off the application at the DTA office.”

After reviewing this language the applicant may choose to complete and submit the application online.

**Virtual Gateway
Applications:
Electronic
Signature
Functionality**

The Virtual Gateway online application will now collect an electronic signature from FS applicants who opt to apply via the Internet. The electronic signature has the same legal effect and enforceability as a written signature for FS purposes. Both the provider and consumer FS applications have been updated with this functionality.

**Virtual Gateway
Applications:
Electronic
Signature
Functionality
(continued)**

1. **Virtual Gateway/Consumer View:** If the applicant uses the online FS application, all mandatory information must be provided. Once application information is entered, the applicant will be required to read the *Notice of Rights, Responsibilities and Penalties* form before submitting the application. By checking the electronic signature block the applicant is attesting to having read the notice and understanding that the electronic signature is the same as a written signature.

2. **Virtual Gateway/Provider View:** The provider representative will assist the applicant with entering the required information. Upon completion of the application the provider's responsibilities include:
 - printing an Authorized Representative Form to be signed by the applicant;
 - printing and reviewing the application with the applicant; and
 - printing the *Notice of Rights, Responsibilities and Penalties* form.

As part of the application, the applicant will sign a *Request for Authorized Representative* form naming and giving permission to the provider to act as the authorized representative for the limited purpose of submitting the electronic application.

Note: A signed Request for Authorized Representative- Authorized Agency-Authorized Payee form (AR-P-1) would be required if the applicant wishes that the provider act as their representative for application and recertification and/or to access the EBT benefits.

The provider will download and supply the applicant with a copy of the *Notice of Rights, Responsibilities and Penalties* form. The application will then be submitted with an electronic signature and may be processed once it is received in the appropriate TAO. The provider will also mail or fax a copy of the Authorized Representative form to the DTA FS Unit at Central Office.

Note: The *Request for Authorized Representative* forms will be maintained at Central Office. If the TAO requires a copy of the form for a fair hearing or any other reason, contact Isilda Francis at (617)-348-5849 for a copy of the form. The applicant name, SSN and date of application will be needed to request the form.

Both the Consumer View and the Provider View will contain the new attestation language that follows:

**Virtual Gateway
Applications:
Electronic
Signature
Functionality
(continued)**

- “I agree to submit this application by electronic means.
- I have read (or have had read to me) and understand the Notice of Rights, Responsibilities and Penalties.
- I understand the penalties for breaking any of the Food Stamp Program rules listed in the penalty warning of the above mentioned notice.
- I certify, under penalty of perjury, that all the answers in this application and any documents or information that I provide the Department now or in the future are true and complete to the best of my knowledge.
- I certify that all members of my food stamp household requesting food stamp benefits are either U.S. citizens or noncitizens in a satisfactory immigration status.
- I understand that an electronic signature has the same legal effect and enforceability as a written signature on a paper application.”

For both the consumer and provider FS Application, once the application is received in the appropriate TAO, the AU Manager must process the application in accordance with Field Operations Memo 2006-30. It is important to remember, however, that the return of a signed RR/FSP-1B will no longer be required. Each web applicant will receive a copy of the new *Notice of Rights, Responsibilities and Penalties* form (RR/FSP-1B (Rev. 7/2007)) as part of the BEACON application package (central print application) from the printing office at Schrafft’s.

**Revisions to
FSP-SSA-I
Paper
Application**

SSI households may apply for FS at the SSA office using the one page FSP/SSA-1. At the end of the application, the applicant will be required to read and understand the attestation language, cited below, before signing the application:

“By signing this application, I hereby certify under penalty of perjury that the answers in this application and/or any supplemental documents or information I may provide to the Department of Transitional Assistance in the future are accurate and complete to the best of my knowledge. I understand that providing inaccurate information or withholding information that affects my Food Stamp eligibility can lead to civil or criminal penalties. I also certify that all members of my food stamp household requesting food stamp benefits are either U.S. citizens or noncitizens in satisfactory immigration status.”

**Revisions to
FSP-SSA-I
Paper
Application
(continued)**

Once the application is received in the appropriate TAO, the AU Manager must process the application in accordance with Field Operations Memo 2006-30. It is important to remember, however, that a signed RR/FSP-1B will no longer be required. Each SSI applicant will receive a copy of the new *Notice of Rights, Responsibilities and Penalties* form (RR/FSP-1B (Rev. 7/2007)) as part of the BEACON application package (central print application) from the printing office at Schrafft's.

**Elimination of
the Signature
Page**

With the implementation of electronic signature for web applicants, a RR/FSP-1B as a signature page will no longer be required to approve a food stamp application. The form will now be called the *Notice of Rights, Responsibilities and Penalties* (RR/FSP-1B (Rev. 7/2007)). It will still be blue or yellow for Schrafft's identification purposes only. (The form will no longer contain a signature line.) The notice will be sent to the applicant with the BEACON application, centrally, with no requirement to sign and return the form to DTA.

This functionality streamlines the application process. The applicant no longer has to sign and return an additional form to complete the application process. The AU Manager no longer has to wait for the return of a signed RR/FSP-1B form to process an FS application once the interview has been completed and all verifications provided.

Questions

If you have any questions, please have your Hotline designee call the Policy Hotline at 617-348-8478.
