



Transitions

A Publication of the Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance

this month in...

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From the Commissioner

Dear Fellow Employees,

Last month I told you that I was very excited about a new initiative which will provide employment opportunities for recipients who may be considered to have significant barriers to employment. To undertake this initiative, we are collaborating with the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission (MRC) to develop a special Employment Services Program (ESP) component to assist disabled recipients who want to work. I know, simply from day-to-day observation, that many individuals who have a disability also work. I believe that a work opportunity provides those individuals the same sense of satisfaction and independence that other working people experience. It is time to offer our recipients with disabilities the same opportunity.

Initially this component will be relatively small, serving approximately 200 disabled recipients during the first year. TAFDC recipients who are determined disabled by Disability Evaluation Services (DES) will be the prime candidates. The component will also serve individuals who have been determined to be not disabled by DES but who may still have some impairment which appears to hinder their ability to work. These individuals would be eligible to participate in the component in addition to meeting any work requirement they may have. This component is completely voluntary for anyone who chooses to try it and there will be no consequences for those individuals who are unable to complete the component.

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From the Hotline

Q. When is a food stamp AU entitled to the Heating SUA?

A. A food stamp AU is entitled to the Heating SUA when the food stamp AU:

- incurs heating costs separately from its rent or mortgage and is billed regularly for its heating costs; or
- receives Low Income Home Energy Assistance Act (LIHEAA) payments; or
- incurs out-of-pocket heating expenses in excess of an energy assistance payment received other than a LIHEAA payment.

Q. Is a food stamp AU's eligibility for the Heating SUA based on: a) *eligibility* for the LIHEAA Program; b) actual *receipt* of a LIHEAA payment; or c) the *authorization* of a LIHEAA payment?

A. Eligibility for the Heating SUA is based on the receipt of a LIHEAA payment - either already received or reasonably anticipated to be received. If a LIHEAA payment has been authorized, the AU Manager can anticipate with reasonable certainty that it will be received.

Note: AUs that have their utilities included in their rent may receive a LIHEAA payment.

Q. What is considered "reasonable anticipation" of receipt of LIHEAA?

A. "Reasonable anticipation" of receipt of LIHEAA must be determined on an individual household basis. There are some guidelines that may be used. For example, if a food stamp AU received LIHEAA during the previous heating season and anticipates applying again and LIHEAA funds are available, it is likely that a LIHEAA payment will be received and the AU would then be entitled to the Heating SUA. Provider agencies for the LIHEAA payment are the best source of information for questions if receipt of LIHEAA funds is questionable.

Q. I think that my food stamp AU meets the criteria for a LIHEAA payment and would be eligible if she applied. Can I give this household a Heating SUA?

A. No. If the AU has not applied and does not intend to apply for LIHEAA, it cannot be anticipated with reasonable certainty that a LIHEAA payment will be received. The Heating SUA is given to AUs who have received or will be receiving LIHEAA. You should encourage all individuals who may be eligible for LIHEAA to apply.

Q. How would a LIHEAA payment made to the landlord be handled?

A. A LIHEAA payment could be sent directly to the landlord and the rent the AU must pay is reduced by the amount of the LIHEAA payment. For food stamp purposes, the full amount of the rent must be allowed as a shelter deduction and the AU must be given the full Heating SUA.

BEACON Action Center

All Field Operations Memo 2000-33

This Field Operations Memo clarifies the process which has been developed to receive and respond to BEACON Release 2.0 issues via the BEACON Action Center.

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From the Forms File

Revised Forms

02-737-1200-05
24-EXAGR (Rev. 12/2000)
Extension Agreement

This form has been revised by removing all references to the 35-hour requirement, as mandated by the Smith lawsuit. The Spanish version will be available soon.

18-053-1200-05
AL-1 (Rev. 12/00)
Appointment Letter


This letter has been revised by removing references to AFDC and adding a statement that an appointment has been scheduled for finalizing a TAFDC extension approval. The Spanish version will be available soon.

During January you will receive procedures giving you more detailed information on how the component will be implemented. But I want to take this opportunity to seek your help and support in this important undertaking. I want to ask you to do several things. I want you to talk to disabled recipients and tell them about the component. I want you to make sure they understand that this is an opportunity with no downsides. I want you to encourage them to take a chance. And when they take that chance, I want you to encourage them to succeed. I also want you to let them know that if it doesn't work out, it's okay. Nothing will happen to their benefits and they may try again at a later date. I want you to help them see this as a chance for themselves and their families to succeed in the same way as thousands of other families transitioning from welfare to work.

Over the years, you have done an outstanding job of encouraging many recipients to become self-supporting. Now it is time to provide the same opportunity to a different group. I know I can count on you to provide information and support to those who choose to give this component a chance. Thank you in advance for your commitment to this new undertaking.

I also want to wish you and your families a very happy 2001.

Sincerely,



Claire McIntire
 Commissioner



COMMUNICATION is the KEY

Success of the Section 8 JOBLink Housing Voucher Program

TAFDC, EA
Field Operations Memo 2000-32

This Field Operations Memo informs AU Managers that 2500 JOBLink Section 8 housing vouchers have been issued to date (500 more than originally expected). Thanks to the referrals by the AU Managers, DHCD was able to issue all of these vouchers within this short period of time.

- DHCD has created a waiting list for JOBLink Section 8 housing vouchers for all **new referrals**. **AU Managers should advise recipients that, because of the waiting list, many families will not be contacted by the Project Coordinator or have their applications further processed in the near future.**
- Use the JOBLink Section 8 Housing Referral form JOBLink-8 dated 7/2000. Discard any remaining JOBLink-8 (3/2000) forms, as they are obsolete.
- Referrals should be sent directly to the JOBLink Project Coordinator for the community where the recipient lives, unless the case has been closed for 12 to 24 months, which requires the referral to be sent to Centralized Eligibility Operations, Income Verification Unit.
- A revised list of DHCD Regional Subcontractors is attached.

FYI

SSI Recipients Residing in Rest Homes or Community Support Facilities (Level IV)

In December, SSI recipients residing in rest homes or community support facilities (Level IV) received a notice informing them that their monthly income will increase on 1/1/01 due to a cost-of-living adjustment in SSI benefits. This increase is \$18 per month. The patient paid amount (PPA) will increase by the same amount and the personal needs allowance (PNA) will remain at \$60. This notice also showed the old and new PPA amounts.

January 2001

Systems User's Guide Update 147

TAFDC, EAEDC
Volume 3: *SSPS User's Guide*
Chapter II: Data Entry & Retrieval

- The SSPS Recipient Inquiry screen has been modified and includes the following: an open shelter stay indicator and a new PF6-SHELTER option. The accompanying procedural changes have also been incorporated into this documentation.
- A new inquiry screen, Recipient Shelter Summary has been added to the list of available inquiry screens. This screen provides a history of a recipient's shelter stays.

Criminal Offender Record Information (CORI) Checks

All
State Letter 1195

This State Letter transmits the regulations on Criminal Offender Record Information (CORI) checks for DTA employees or other persons regularly providing client or support services in any DTA program or facility or in vendor agency programs funded by DTA.

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TAFDC and EA Countable Assets: Vehicles

TAFDC, EA
State Letter 1196

- The first \$10,000 of the fair market value and the first \$5,000 of equity value of one vehicle owned by the filing unit are noncountable.
 - Any fair market value in excess of \$10,000 is a countable asset.
 - Any equity value in excess of \$5,000 is a countable asset.
 - If there is an excess in both the fair market value and the equity value, only the excess which is the greater amount shall be counted.
- If the filing unit owns more than one vehicle, the full fair market value or the full equity value, whichever is greater, of each additional vehicle shall be a countable asset.



TAFDC Extensions Beyond the 24-Month Period

TAFDC
Field Operations Memo 2000-29 A

This Field Operations Memo changes the extension approval process:

- An extension approval is finalized when the recipient signs the Extension Agreement and, if necessary, the Extension Plan.
- Once an extension has been approved by the Commissioner or designee, the TAO Director informs the Supervisor, who in turn notifies the AU Manager.
- The AU Manager sends the appointment letter to the recipient giving the recipient no more than 10 days to come into the TAO to sign the Extension Agreement.

This Field Operations Memo also changes the Extension Agreement form.

FYI

Sanctioned Recipients Child Support Report

During the first two weeks of November, TAOs received a list of TAFDC AUs sanctioned for noncooperation with a child support requirement. Staff were instructed to review the list for accuracy. The *Sanctioned Recipients Child Support Report* will be issued monthly to each TAO indicating the TAFDC recipients currently identified as having a child support sanction. AU Managers should use this report to ensure accurate systems coding for sanctioned TAFDC recipients or TAFDC recipients whose sanction has been removed. No reporting to Central Office is needed.

Personal Computer User's Guide Update 033

TAFDC

Volume 7: *Extension Tracking/Notice Application User's Guide*

Update 033 transmits modifications to the *Extension Tracking/Notice Application* (ETNA). These modifications include:

- Two new statuses:
 - **Transfer Out (Xfer Out)** - Applies when transferring a case with an approved extension that has not expired. A new button Xfer Out changes the status from approved to Xfer Out.
 - **Transfer In (Xfer In)** - Applies when the case is received in the new TAO with an existing approved extension. The person needs to be added to ETNA at the new TAO. Selecting Xfer In button will change the status from pending to Xfer In.
- **New Reason 50 (Administrative)** - To be used when the TAO incorrectly approves a request or makes an error on the request.
- **New printing procedures** - ETNA will automatically print a notice once the notice is created and saved. It is no longer necessary to run the batch job at the end of the day.
- **New application configuration** - The Extension Notice and Extension Tracking are now one single application.
- **New Summary screen** - This screen captures all the information the new TAO needs to create the new Transfer In request. The sending TAO sends a copy of this screen with the case record.
- **New Notice View screen** - After a termination or denial notice is created and saved, all reason(s) and freeform text, if applicable, will be displayed as it will appear on the actual notice. You can cancel the notice if corrections are needed or you can print the notice.

- **New report**
Completed Extension Reports
- Captures all existing approved extensions with an expired approval date.
- **Elimination of the language** referencing the 35-hour rule and Program Code 4.
- **Length of time an extension is approved** - one or two months are only valid choices.

2001 Social Security/SSI COLA for TAFDC, EAEDC and FS

TAFDC, EAEDC, FS Field Operations Memo 2000-34

This Field Operations Memo provides the following information about the yearly Social Security/SSI COLA:

- the scheduled COLA dates for each category of assistance;
- the date the new Social Security and SSI amounts can be used; and
- the arrival of the reports generated as a result of the COLA in TAOs in February 2001.

Increased Food Stamp Heating Standard Utility Allowance (SUA)

FS
State Letter 1197
Field Operations Memo
2001-1

State Letter 1197 transmits Food Stamp Program policy changing the Heating SUA from \$349 to \$389 per month effective January 1, 2001. This change is due to anticipated increases in fuel (oil and gas) costs and heating expenses expected in the Northeast.

The Non-heating SUA (\$211) and the Telephone SUA (\$25) are unchanged.

Field Operations Memo 2001-1 issues the procedures implementing the changes required due to the increased Heating SUA.



BEACON Release 2.0 Pilot Activities

All
Field Operations Memo 2000-31A

This memo:

- informs Transitional Assistance Office Staff that the checklists for AU Managers, TAO Supervisors and Implementation Managers have been revised;

Note: The checklists have been changed to capture not only the activities completed, but also those activities that AU Managers attempted to complete and those that were not started at all. The original checklists did not record information on activities that AU Managers started but were unable to complete.

- defines the terms “completed,” “started,” and “not started”; and
- introduces the TAO summary form completed by Implementation Managers to capture the TAO total activities “completed,” “started” or “not started.”

Other than the changes made in this memo, all instructions in Field Operations Memo 2000-31 remain the same.

Timely Food Stamp Case Processing for Homeless AUs

FS
Field Operations Memo 2000-35

This memo addresses timely food stamp case processing for homeless AUs who are not otherwise entitled to expedited service.

Prompt application processing and provision of food stamp benefits will help to meet the needs of homeless families by allowing available cash to be used for housing or other immediate needs required to lessen the impact of homelessness.

Quality Corner

We are almost at the end of the federal Quality Control year. Recent corrective actions, such as the 100% case record review done by all PA and NPA staff and more frequent LOQC reviews, have helped lower our error rate somewhat. The rate, however, is still too high and, unfortunately, much of it is still agency caused. We need to continue our current corrective action efforts to address those problems that can be avoided. Several error areas will be discussed this month including inconsistent verifications and terminated income.

Inconsistent verifications

Recently, there was a \$101 Quality Control error involving an SSI recipient. According to the case record, she was living alone. The landlord verification was unusual in that the landlord was also the recipient's mother, who was also listed as a tenant. That alone should have raised some concerns. In addition, the SSI recipient was receiving \$542.40 in SSI, which is the amount paid when there are shared living expenses. Since the information was at least inconsistent, it should have been clarified with the SSI recipient and the landlord. As it turned out, rather than one SSI recipient living alone, there were three households: the SSI recipient, her mother, and her sister with her child. Rather than the SSI recipient being allowed the entire shelter and SUA, it should have been prorated three ways. By investigating either of these discrepancies the AU Manager could have identified the three separate households, corrected the proration, and prevented the error.

In a different case the landlord verification itself incorrectly stated that the rent did not include heat. At the application the recipient reported that the rent included utilities. To avoid the error, that type of discrepancy should have been resolved by investigating the facts with both the landlord and the recipient.

What can an AU Manager do?

To correct these types of problems:

1. Look closely at cases with a shared living expense payment.
2. Question the recipient if he or she is receiving an SSI payment for shared living expenses that is inconsistent with their food stamps shelter/SUA.
3. Follow-up on inconsistent or questionable verifications.

Terminated Income

In August Quality Control reviewed a recipient who lost a job due to an injury at work. The recipient had been receiving food stamps for some time, but was injured on the job in April. For the June recertification the income was removed for food stamps, but not investigated further. Also in June the recipient applied for TAFDC. The TAFDC AU Manager discovered that the applicant was still considered employed and would be receiving short-term disability benefits for April to June. This information was not followed-up and no income was deducted for food stamps until September.

What can an AU Manager do?

If the Food Stamp AU Manager had questioned the job loss at the recertification, it would have been discovered that the recipient was receiving short-term disability income with the expectation to return to work. Likewise, if information from the TAFDC AU Manager had been acted upon, earnings information would have been known in June, in time to change the August NPA issuance. Either source of information should have provided enough information to correct this error, but neither was pursued.