

Transitions

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this month in...

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From the Commissioner

Dear Fellow Employees,

Looking back on 2004, I'm reminded of one of our most visible benchmarks: eliminating the need to use hotels as an option for homeless families. In August of 2003, our hotel population consisted of nearly six hundred homeless families. Last year we were able to eliminate the need to place EA families in hotels. For the new year, we plan to build on this progress.

While shelters remain the first step for many of our homeless families, we are focusing also on measures that help families locate and remain in more permanent housing. Many of you have worked with homeless families and have first-hand knowledge of their needs. When a homeless family walks into one of our local offices, the need to transition this family quickly from a shelter to a more stable, permanent setting is clear. To make this transition, some families may need child care services or mental health supports, while others may need time to acquire the savings necessary to secure an apartment. We have spent the past year creating the following service connections tailored to fit these needs:

- With the Housing Assistance Program, we are helping families maintain their own unsubsidized housing units (*Shelter-to-Housing Placement*);
- With the Office of Child Care Services, we are authorizing child care to homeless EA families who are looking for housing;
- With the Massachusetts Behavioral Health Partnership, we are facilitating mental health assessments, referrals and services; and

From the Hotline

In response to TAO requests, a “From the Hotline” index of the questions and answers written in *Transitions* during 2004 has been compiled. The index is intended to provide quicker access to policy background information. *Please remember that the indexed information explains policy as of the month/year in which the question and answer were issued.*

EA

Topic	2004 Month	Related Policies 106 CMR:
Shelter Benefit	March	309.040

EAEDC

Topic	2004 Month	Related Policies 106 CMR:
EIC	June	321.120(I)
Tax Refund	June	321.120(I)

Food Stamps

Topic	2004/ Month	Related Policies 106 CMR:
Caretaker Exemption	September	362.310(B)
Cash Contributions	September	363.230(A)
EIC	June	363.140(G)
Excluded Earnings	July	363.230
Homelessness/USR	June	366.110
LIHEAA/Fuel	December	364.400(G)
Lump Sum	January, June	363.230(E)
SUA(Heat/Cool)	December	364.400(G)
Tax Refund	June	363.130(E), 363.230(I)
Teen (Household Concept)	August	361.200
USR (Earnings)	September	366.110
USR (Exception)	June	366.110(C)
USR (Unearned Income)	April	366.110
Vendor Payment	May	363.230(B)

FYI

H&R Block Food Stamp Outreach Program

During the 2005 tax season (January 1 – April 15), H&R Block tax preparation offices in Massachusetts are providing their clients with a DTA-approved food stamp application form, contact information, and brief instructions to help them begin the application process. Massachusetts joins 11 other states in the outreach initiative at H&R Block offices. Tax professionals are able to tell their clients they may be eligible for food stamps, based on the income and household information provided in the tax interview. Their clients will be responsible for completing the applications and submitting them to the appropriate local DTA office. The source code “H&R Block” will be pre-printed on the paper food stamp application in the top right-hand corner of the form. The Source dropdown list on the Application window of BEACON is being updated to include H&R Block. AU Managers must use the dropdown list to identify the source of the application when entering the information on BEACON.



TAFDC – Stopping the BEACON Participation Sanction Batch Job

TAFDC
Field Operations Memo
2004-46

This Field Operations Memo told TAO staff about stopping the Participation Sanction Batch Job. This means that until further notice:

- a Work Program required recipient participating in an ESP activity or working (including in Work Program Alternatives),
- an exempt teen parent not meeting the school attendance requirement, or
- a categorically ineligible noncitizen who is exempt and required to participate in community service,

who does not return the Participation and Attendance form or who does not meet the required hours for participation will not be sanctioned.



Winter

Continued from Page 1

- With the Department of Housing and Community Development, we are helping to locate public housing units for families (*Local Housing Authority Placement Program*) as well as referring families to the RAFT (*Residential Assistance for Families in Transition*) Program for housing stabilization.

Looking forward, our plans for 2005 include an expansion of the Local Housing Authority Placement Program to communities beyond Worcester, Taunton, Lowell and Woburn. Further coordination between agencies remains on the list of goals for 2005, as well as plans for the development of a statewide Homeless Management Information System (HMIS). When completed, this new web-based system will offer up-to-date information on the overall characteristics and service needs of our Commonwealth's homeless population.

Your work continues to drive these efforts. By pushing the boundaries on what we can achieve, you are redefining how we help homeless families as they establish their own path towards stability, independence and self-sufficiency. As always, there is one constant I know I can rely on, and that is your commitment to treat with dignity and respect all who seek our services.

I hope you enjoyed your holidays, and I look forward to working with you all in 2005.

Sincerely,

John Wagner, Commissioner



COMMUNICATION is the KEY

TAFDC

Topic	2004 Month	Related Policies 106 CMR:
Asset Transfer	January	204.135
AU Composition	August, October	204.305
Child Care	February	207.210(A)
Dependent Child (Under Age 18/Income)	July	203.570, 204.260
Dependent Child (Age 18/MCAS)	July	203.575
Dependent Earnings	July	204.260
EIC	June	204.120(I)
GED Vouchers	October	207.140(C)
Good Cause	November	701.380
Income In-kind	May	204.510
Learnfare	August	203.900
Lump Sum Income	January	204.240
Noncountable Income (Cash Contributions)	May	204.250(AA)
Relationship	April	203.585
Step parent Income	October	204.210(D)
Tax Refund	June	204.210(I)
Teen Parent	August, October	203.600, 203.610, 204.305
Transfer of Assets	January	204.135
Work Program	November	203.400, 207.205

ESP – Changes to Young Parents Program Enrollment - TAFDC

TAFDC

State Letter 1289

This State Letter transmits the following change:

For purposes of the Young Parents Program, the participant must be age 14-through 21-years-old. Once a YPP participant reaches age 22, he or she may no longer participate in YPP. Enrollment is limited to age 14 through 20 years of age.

2005 Social Security/SSI COLA for TAFDC, EAEDC and FS

ALL

Field Operations Memo 2004-45

This Field Operations Memo identified:

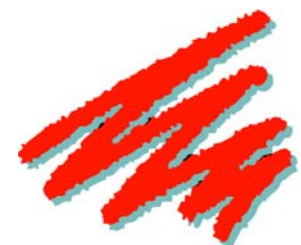
- general BEACON activities for processing the 2005 Social Security/SSICOLA; and
- AU Manager and Supervisor activities required to prepare for the 2005 Social Security/SSICOLA.

EA Program: Accessing Escrowed Funds

EA

State Letter 1290

The EA regulation concerning when the Assistance Unit may access escrowed funds has been revised to allow access when the escrowed funds are needed by the recipient to secure permanent housing, such as for first and/or last month's rent or security deposit.



FYI

Changes to *Transitions*

Starting this month, TAO staff will receive printed copies of *Transitions*. You will also see a change to the format and design. *Transitions* continues to be available also from Policy Online. Although there has been a change in design and format, you can continue to navigate through *Transitions* online by selecting a topic listed in the Table of Contents.

FYI

Changes to Policy Online

This month you will see the following change to Policy Online:

The SSI Regional Office/ZIP Code for the East Boston/02128 TAO has been corrected to show its assignment to the Malden SSI office.

This change appears in the following options accessed from the Reference Documentation Window:

- SSI Area Office Listing - City/Town
- SSI Area Office Listing



FYI

Foster Grandparent Program

Under the TAFDC and Food Stamp programs, foster grandparent income is income excluded by law. See 106 CMR:204.250(P) and 106 CMR:363.230(K)(5). The Foster Grandparent Program provides a way for persons 60 and over whose income is limited to serve as extended family members to children and youth with exceptional needs. Foster grandparents serve 20 hours a week in schools, hospitals, correctional institutions, daycare facilities, and Head Start centers. They help children who have been abused or neglected, mentor troubled teenagers and young mothers, and care for premature infants or children with physical disabilities. Foster grandparents receive \$2.65 an hour for their service.

Clarifications to the Medicare Prescription Drug Discount Program

FS

State Letter 1291

This State Letter issues clarification to the Medicare Prescription Drug Discount Program (MPDDP) as originally outlined in State Letter 1287. The medical expense deduction derived from MPDDP participation must be determined as follows:

The values of the monthly subsidy and the monthly flat allowance must always be allowed unless the applicant/recipient makes a claim for the amount of actual prescription drug expenses incurred prior to participation in the Medicare Prescription Drug Discount Program.

“As long as the differences and diversities of mankind exist, democracy must allow for compromise, for accommodation and for the recognition of differences.”

Eugene McCarthy

Quality Corner

This month we will discuss errors involving Unemployment Compensation.

Unemployment Compensation (UC)

Recently there have been a number of errors involving UC payments. In the most recent case, the recipient applied for TAFDC and FS for herself and two children in June. At the time, she told the AU Manager she had quit her previous job for a new one, but the new job had fallen through. During the interview, she also informed the AU Manager that she had applied for UC but “it did not look good.” During the review, Quality Control found that the recipient received her first UC check five days after she applied for TAFDC/FS and before the application was approved. The UC benefit information appeared on the October match, resulting in a very large error. AU Managers must check DET online before approving applications with recent work history.

In another case, the person applied for EAEDC in March 2004 as disabled, having last worked in September 2003. He was living with his brother, paid minimal rent, and claimed no other income. The AU Manager did not check DET online, and the AU was approved for EAEDC and FS with no income. Quality Control found that the recipient had been eligible for UC since November 2003 and had received benefits continuously since then. His UC information appeared on the May match. The error could have been prevented if the AU Manager had acted on the match information promptly.

Another case error involved using the net amount rather than the gross amount of UC. Taxes were being deducted from the UC benefits, and the net amount showed on the match. The AU Manager incorrectly used the net income in the FS calculation.

What Can an AU Manager Do?

When an applicant has recently stopped working, the AU Manager must always have the TAO designee check DET online to see if the applicant filed a UC claim, and to determine the status of the claim. If the UC payment date and amount have been determined, the AU Manager must use the UC income in the food stamp calculation, but only if the payment date of **the first UC check occurs in the first month of the AU’s certification period**. If the payment date does

not fall in the first month of the AU’s certification period, the AU Manager must process the AU without counting the UC benefits. However, the AU Manager must follow up and add the UC income at the appropriate time, based on the UC payment date; this also applies to USR AUs (which are adversely affected only by income that exceeds the income limit). For TBA AUs, make a note to add the income to the AU at the next recertification.

Finally, always use the gross amount of UC in the calculation, except when there are mandatory child support payments. The gross amount of UC benefits and the types of deductions, if any, can be determined from DET online or from the recipient’s UC stub.

From the Forms File

Brochure

18-825-0402-05

18-826-0402-05(S)

EBT-TB

*Electronic Benefit Transfer
Brochure*

This obsoleted brochure (July, 2004) is now available again for ordering from the Document Production Unit. Please order accordingly.