

Transitions

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A Publication of the Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance

this month in...

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From the Commissioner

Dear Fellow Employees,

The much-anticipated Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) will begin deployment through the Virtual Gateway this month. As the sponsoring agency for this initiative, DTA has helped develop the new system for the Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS) as well as for our shelter and service provider partners. These HMIS users will be able to access the system, at no cost, by logging into a password-protected area of the <http://mass.gov/eohhs> website. HMIS is in keeping with our Department's goals to not only identify the issues that create homelessness but also provide better coordinated supports that will ease the transition from homelessness to permanent housing for our shelter individuals and families. The federal government, under the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), required each state to begin developing a homeless tracking system. In Massachusetts, formal plans for the system began over a year ago when the Massachusetts Interagency Council on Homelessness and Housing redoubled the state's efforts towards homelessness prevention, interagency service coordination and improved data collection and reporting.

Although local Transitional Assistance Office staff will not be directly accessing the new application, certain Department employees will be using HMIS for inquiry and data analysis. Once HMIS is fully operational and we begin building our database, the system will further several of our Housing Program objectives. These include:

- access to better and more timely information on the numbers and needs of our homeless clients;
- better reporting and analysis on shelter usage patterns and

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potential gaps in shelter availability;

- increased coordination within various affected agencies and even within our Department; and
- greater efficiency in the management of shelter intake procedures.

For shelter providers and our other service partners, HMIS offers:

- a web-based check-in and bed assignment mechanism;
- a web-based tracking program for homeless families and individuals (some of the client demographic data in BEACON will be transferred to HMIS); and
- the ability to produce housing and shelter profiles as well as reports on demand.

While HMIS may be our Department's lead news story this month, the "back-story" on this system is in many ways as significant. The Homeless Management Information System was developed, in part, with savings achieved through the efficient implementation of our other Department housing initiatives, including the Shelter-to-Housing Placement Program. Without the savings accumulated through your diligent efforts in eliminating hotel usage while at the same time placing and referring homeless clients to appropriate shelters and homelessness prevention services, HMIS would not have been possible.

Although the issues facing homeless individuals and families are great, your efforts prove that these challenges are not insurmountable. Each year, we gain more knowledge and experience in helping our homeless clients. For the remainder of *this* year, we will be focusing resources on prevention and permanent placement alternatives through the Housing Assistance Program and the Residential Assistance for Families in Transition Program. Thank you for continuing to show a commitment towards making all Department housing initiatives successful. I appreciate your cooperation with these initiatives, past and present; your work is helping to make a difference in the lives of homeless families when they need it the most.

Sincerely,



John Wagner, Commissioner

July 2005

Quality Corner

This month we will discuss three errors, one involving child support paid directly to the client and two related to the issue of household composition.

Child Support Paid Directly to the Client

A TAFDC household consisted of a mother and her five children. At the time of the TAFDC application, the father of four of her children paid child support of \$100 weekly directly to her. As part of the TAFDC application process, the client was referred to DOR and child support payments went to DOR. One of the four children for whom she received child support was receiving SSI. Since September 2004, the client has been receiving the DEFRA payment of \$50 monthly.

During the QC review, the DOR payment records were checked and showed that \$25 in weekly child support was going directly to the client for her son on SSI, causing a food stamp overissuance. DOR, in fact, received \$100 weekly from the non-custodial parent, but sent \$25 to the mother for her son on SSI, who does not receive TAFDC.

What's an AU Manager to Do?

The client should have reported that she was receiving child support each week for her child on SSI. However, this information had also been displayed on View Direct since September 2004 which coincided with the start of her \$50 DEFRA payment. A DEFRA payment is always an indication that child support payments are being made. Since the AU consisted of a child who receives SSI, the AU Manager should have checked View Direct to see if child support payments were being made for the child receiving SSI. If the AU Manager had followed up with the child support income, the error would have been prevented.

PA Household Composition

A client received TAFDC for a niece (age nine) and nephew (age five) for whom she had legal custody, and who both received a small amount of RSDI income. The TAO was notified by Learnfare in January 2005 that the girl was not in school and had been placed with her mother out of state. The niece was removed from the TAFDC and FS AUs in February 2005, while the nephew continued to live with his aunt. Quality Control

determined that both children had left the home and returned to their mother in December 2004. This change was not reported to DTA by the client.

The BENDEX record shows that a change of address and change of payee were done in January at both SSA and school. Since the nephew was no longer in the home, the case was overissued.

What's an AU Manager to Do?

Again, this was obviously a client error since she failed to report the change in circumstances. Since both children belonged to the same parent, the AU Manager could have contacted the client to determine if her nephew was also being placed with his mother. The boy was only five years old and not subject to Learnfare which was the aspect of the case that revealed that the niece was being removed from the client's home. With a little more probing, the AU Manager could have prevented the error.

NPA Household Composition

Another household composition error occurred in the NPA case of an elderly couple. At the last recertification, they listed their 21-year-old son on the application and reported that he contributed \$200 a month to the rent. He was removed from the food stamp household after this certification with the explanation that he should be a separate household. This appears to have been a mistake on the part of the AU Manager who seemed to believe that the son was 22 years old and eligible to be emancipated from his parents' FS AU. QC determined that, since the son was not yet 22 years old, he had to remain in his parent's AU based on food stamp household composition rules, and could not be granted separate household status. The son was employed full-time, so when he was added to his parent's FS AU, his earnings caused the AU to be over the income limit for the AU size. This resulted in an overpayment error.

What Can an AU Manger Do?

Food stamp regulations state that a child under 22 years old cannot have a separate FS AU while living with his or her parents. See 106 CMR 361.200(A). If there is any reason for separate household status to be granted or if the child is ineligible (as a college student, for example), this should be noted in the case record when the action is taken. Since there was no reason for the son to be excluded, the QC reviewer had no choice but to call an error.

From the Hotline

- Q.** My TAFDC recipient's only child will soon be turning six years of age. How do I know when this recipient needs to begin increasing her work program requirement hours?
- A.** There is a BEACON view called "Youngest Child Turns 6 or 9." Your recipient's AU will appear on this view one month prior to her child's sixth birthday.
- Q.** What do I do once my TAFDC recipient whose youngest daughter will be six years of age next month appears on the BEACON view "Youngest Child Turns 6 or 9?"
- A.** When your recipient appears on this view, contact her as soon as possible and schedule a meeting to explain that her hourly work program requirement will be increasing from 20 hours to 24 hours each week as required in the regulations at 106 CMR 203.400(A)(5). Also, determine whether the recipient has a Good Cause reason for not meeting the new hourly requirement. (Refer to 106 CMR 701.380 for a complete list of Good Cause reasons.)
- Q.** If my TAFDC recipient's youngest child is turning six years of age, are there additional activities to complete aside from meeting with her and explaining the new hourly work program requirement and Good Cause reasons?
- A.** Yes. Remember to review and complete the *TAFDC Work Program Requirement* brochure with your recipient. Circle her new hourly requirement and enter "N/A" in the 60-day Work Search Period Begin and End Date fields. This must be noted on the Narrative tab. Refer to Field Operations Memo 2004-37 for more information on this brochure.
- Q.** How many days does my TAFDC recipient with a youngest child turning six have before she must comply with the increased hours of her work program requirement?
- A.** Your recipient is allowed 30 days from her daughter's sixth birthday to arrange for the **increase in hours** and begin working or participating for 24 hours each week. **During this 30 day period, sanctions should not be authorized for failure to meet the new hourly requirement (24 hours). A sanction can only be authorized if the recipient fails to meet the old hourly requirement (20 hours).**

- Q.** If my TAFDC recipient is unable to arrange for additional hours at her current ESP activity or job, she must look for a different placement or additional employment. However, what happens if she does not do this?
- A.** If your recipient does not arrange to comply with her new hourly work program requirement or if she is unable to arrange for the additional hours of participation, ask her if there are ways in which you can assist her in referrals for a placement or additional ESP support services.

From the Forms File

Revised Forms

18-083-0705-05
LL/VER (Rev. 7/2005)
Landlord Verification

This form has been revised to accurately capture the rent that the tenant is obligated to pay. To accomplish this, changes have been to Part IV B, the ***Rental Information*** section of the form.

09-250-0705-05
09-251-0705-05(S)
RR-FSP-1B
Rights, Responsibilities and Food Stamp Penalty Warning

This form has been revised to include a place for applicants

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to print their name. This change will ensure that the form is connected to the correct AU record and will prevent AUs from being erroneously denied.

TAFDC - 12-Month Limit on Education or Training Activity Meeting the Work Program Requirement

TAFDC
Field Operations Memo
2005-23A

This Field Operations Memo issued a correction to information given in Field Operations Memo 2005-23. Due to a BEACON design change, the notice telling the recipient that at least nine of 12 months have been used in an education or training activity will now be mailed in a batch job processed on the 1st **business** day of the following month, not on the 25th of each month as stated in Field Operations Memo 2005-23.

Housing Assistance Program (HAP) Referrals and the Toolbox

EA
Field Operations Memo
2005-24

This Field Operations Memo informed TAO staff about new procedures for providing toolbox money to EA-eligible families.

- TAO staff will make a preliminary determination of financial eligibility before referring a family for HAP services.
- If the HAP determines that the family could benefit from access to the toolbox, the family will be referred to the TAO to complete an EA application on BEACON.
- Toolbox money will continue to be available to families in shelter without any additional steps being taken by TAO staff.
- Field Operations Memo 2005-5 is obsolete.

Local Housing Authority Transitional Housing Program II: Renewal and Expansion of LHATHP

EA
Field Operations Memo
2005-25

This Field Operations Memo informed TAO staff that DTA and the Department of Housing and Community Development have renewed and expanded the Local Housing Authority Placement Program under the name *Local Housing Authority Transitional Housing Program II* (LHATHP II) to include LHAs in Brookline, Fitchburg, Springfield, Weymouth, Attleboro, Worcester, Taunton, Woburn and Lowell. The memo also:

- defines criteria for participation in LHATHP II;
- describes procedures for referring families to the program; and
- instructs TAO staff on procedures relating to EA countable asset limit that does not apply to families in LHATHP.

TAFDC: Structured Job Search (SJS) Meeting the Work Program Requirement

TAFDC
Field Operations Memo 2005-26
State Letter 1298

The Field Operations Memo informs TAO staff that Structured Job Search (SJS) may be used to meet the work program requirement at any time within the 24 months of time-limited benefits; introduces the process for prioritizing referrals to SJS; and

provides procedures for creating a referral to SJS.

The State Letter also transmits a change to the TAFDC Program regarding applicants and recipients who can meet the work program requirement with Structured Job Search as determined appropriate by the Department.

Bay State CAP Outreach Plan

FS

Field Operations Memo 2005-27

The Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA) implemented the Bay State CAP project on February 1, 2005. As part of the initial implementation, DTA converted existing eligible Food Stamp Assistance Units (AUs) to Bay State CAP. There are approximately 60,000 recipients of SSI who are eligible for, but not receiving, Food Stamp benefits. In the waiver with the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), DTA agreed to outreach to these individuals.

DTA will outreach to SSI recipients who appear to be eligible for Bay State CAP in two phases.

Phase One will target 30,000 Bay State CAP eligible individuals who are coded for SSI purposes in State Living Arrangement A (living alone) and will be implemented through automatic enrollment. Phase One will take place between June 30 and August 12, 2005.

Phase Two will target SSI recipients who are coded for SSI purpose in State Living Arrangement B (sharing expenses). DTA must explore the "purchase and prepare" arrangement for these households. Phase Two is slated to happen during the fall this year.

TAFDC - Distance Learning Sites

TAFDC

Field Operations Memo 2005-28

This Field Operations Memo informs TAO staff about Distance Learning. Distance Learning refers to a video-and computer-based educational activity available on the Internet. The Department has identified six Distance Learning sites funded by the Massachusetts Department of Education (DOE) that help recipients get their GED

or high school equivalency diploma and that meet the work program requirement through education for up to **20 hours** per week. It includes the site addresses, e-mails and contact persons' names.

FYI

BEACON Help Revisions

The following is a list of Help windows that have been updated. The list reflects updates made to both the primary and secondary windows.

- Eligibility Explorer Summary Tab
 - People Tab
 - Program Tab
 - Q & A Tab
 - Activity Tab
- Eligibility Explorer Verifications Tab
 - Fields & Buttons
- Eligibility Explorer Results Tab
 - Fields & Buttons
 - Selection Tab
 - AU Members Tab
 - Financial Tab
 - Updates Tab
 - Authorization Tab
- Eligibility Explorer Document History Tab
 - Fields & Buttons
 - Document Preview Window

- Eligibility Explorer Warnings, Edits and Messages
- Interview Wrapup EBC Results
 - Fields & Buttons
 - Warnings, Edits and Messages
 - Updates Tab
 - Updates Tab Fields & Buttons
 - AU Members Tab
 - Financial Tab
- Interview Wrapup Selection
- SDX CAP Inquiry
 - Warnings, Edits and Messages



Happy 4th!

“We could learn a lot from crayons. Some are sharp, some are pretty, some are dull, some have weird names, and all are different colors. But, they all fit nicely into the same box.”

Unknown

FYI

MBHP Assessments and EA Shelter Families

On October 20, 2004, a New Initiative memo entitled “MBHP Assessments and EA Shelter Families” was sent out. This memo announced that the Department and the Massachusetts Behavioral Health Partnership would work together to make referrals for mental health assessments for families in shelter. This partnership has now been expanded to include the Malden TAO.

FYI

Policy Online Changes

This month you will see the following changes to Policy Online.

Reference Documentation

The following SSI Area Offices have closed; North Adams, Revere and Worcester. All SSI offices have merged into one centralized office in Malden, which is now called the Malden Centralized SSI Office.

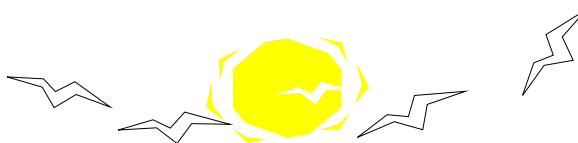
The following options listed on the Reference Documentation window have been updated to reflect this change:

SSI Area Office Listing – City/Town
SSI Area Office Listing; and
TAO Information Listing.

BB Options

The following option has been revised:

- Financial History Report Codes
The format of this option has been revised and now includes the TAO Requestor ID (TAO Number).



SUMMER