

Transitions



A Publication of the Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance

this month in...

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From the Commissioner



Caption: Clockwise from bottom left: Todd Maio, Deputy Commissioner for Operations Management; Apefa Ashiagbor, Assistant Commissioner for Management Information Systems; Koren Christensen, First Deputy General Counsel; Julia Kehoe, Commissioner; Birgitta Damon, Deputy Commissioner for Program, Policy and Field Operations; Vera Ward, Administrative Assistant; Carol Moran, Assistant Commissioner for Administration and Finance; Tom Noonan, General Counsel; Victor Vasquez, Assistant Commissioner for Policy and Program Management; and Suzanne Cray, Chief of Staff.

Dear Colleagues,

I hope you are enjoying the summer weather. As you make your plans for the season, I would like to extend to you the opportunity to **SERV**.

State Employees Responding as Volunteers (SERV) was established one year ago in response to Governor Patrick's Executive Order Establishing a Policy for State Employees to Provide Voluntary Services. This benefit is available to eligible employees in the Executive Branch who have at least six months of state service. With your supervisor's approval, you may volunteer

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during your regular work schedule for up to one day per month at an approved Massachusetts nonprofit organization (7.5 or 8 hours/month; pro-rated for part-time employees). Or, if it's more convenient there are a number of weekend opportunities as well. Eligible areas for volunteering include education, youth mentoring, public and charter schools, health and human services, public safety, and the environment.

The Governor and Executive Office of Health and Human Services Secretary JudyAnn Bigby have emphasized the importance of the SERV Program and I encourage all of you to participate. I can say from personal experience that this is a wonderful and rewarding opportunity. Recently, I went with several Central Office colleagues to volunteer at the Greater Boston Food Bank. We spent the morning working as a team to sort donations - and the ten of us went through more than 8,000 pounds of food! We are very proud of this accomplishment and I greatly enjoyed spending time outside the office with my fellow DTA employees.

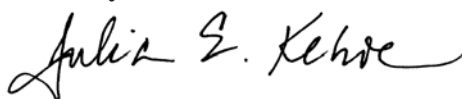
Our own Peter Sasso recently volunteered at Community Servings in Jamaica Plain with Secretary Bigby and representatives from the Department of Mental Health, the Department of Mental Retardation, the Department of Youth Services, the Division of Health Care Finance and Policy, Massachusetts Commission for the Blind, and the Department of Veterans Services. Together, they prepared over 600 meals for homebound individuals with HIV/AIDS and other acute-life threatening illnesses. Congratulations, Peter!

These are just two examples of the many volunteering events happening across our state. I look forward to hearing about yours.

To find a volunteer opportunity in your area, please visit www.mass.gov/serv and click on the Volunteer Opportunities Calendar. SERV is especially important as a vehicle for us to connect with our communities, where we spend each day helping others.

Thank you as always, for everything you do.

Sincerely,



Julia E. Kehoe, Commissioner

Quality Corner

This month we will discuss a case with multiple errors. The errors are related to countable unearned income, allowable expense deductions, an expired disqualification period and shelter expenses in merged households.

Multiple Error Case

This NPA case consisted of a TAFDC mother, five children and another adult. The mother was not included in the food stamp household because she had been previously disqualified because of an Intentional Program Violation. Two of her five children were Family Cap children and therefore not included in the TAFDC grant. The food stamp case was certified for one year by the PA case manager. The client also received the monthly \$50 DEFRA payment because the father of all five children paid child support through the Department of Revenue. The other adult in the home had no income.

The BEACON case record showed that the household was allowed a rental amount of \$461.50. The shelter cap was erroneously lifted based on a disability determination dated February 2007. The disability form indicated that the client met the disability criteria for EAEDC and TAFDC.

Continued on Page 3

During the QC review it was determined that the client's disqualification period had ended more than two years ago, so she should have been included in the food stamp household. In addition, she was not eligible to have the shelter cap lifted since the disability form did not indicate that she met the SSI definition of disability. The household's rent was only \$305 and not \$461.50 as recorded on BEACON. The client also admitted she had been receiving support payments through DOR for her two Family Cap children. This was verified by DOR. The combined effect of all these errors caused a substantial overpayment to the client.

What's a Case Manager to Do?

Family Cap Children Receiving Child Support

The client did not start receiving child support for the two Family Cap children until after her last recertification. She should have reported this new income to the TAO. The case manager should also have checked the DOR screen because a DEFRA payment on the case indicated that she received child support. Since the five children all had the same father, it was likely that the client would also receive

child support for the Family Cap children. It is always important to check for child support, especially when the case includes a Family Cap child(ren). For more information on the income of Family Cap children, see *A User's Guide: Transitional Assistance Programs and BEACON*, Chapter XIII-J.

Expired Disqualification Period

Once the client's disqualification period had expired, which had been a significant amount of time prior to the last recertification, the client should have been added to the food stamp household. Before an application or recertification is processed, the case manager must look at his or her *Assessed Person Potential Changes > Clients in Active AUs with Expiring IPV End Dates* view to determine if reinstatement is appropriate for the household member. For more information on Expiring IPV Disqualifications, see *A User's Guide: Transitional Assistance Programs and BEACON*, Chapter II and an FYI in *Transitions* of September 2005.

Uncapped Shelter Deduction

The shelter cap must be lifted only for those clients who meet the definition of elderly and/or disabled as outlined at 106 CMR 361.210. In this case, the client's disability was not classified as SSI, so she was not eligible for an uncapped shelter deduction as part of her food stamp benefit calculation. For more information on the uncapped shelter deduction in the Food Stamp Program see 106 CMR 361.210.

Shelter Expenses in Merged Households

The shelter deduction error was worsened by the fact that at one time the other adult in this food stamp household had his own food stamp case and was allowed \$156.50 for rent. When the previously separate cases became one food stamp household, his rental amount should have been removed from the shelter expenses window since the total rent for the household had already been attributed to the grantee. There are times when separate shelter expense amounts are entered under two or more household members in the same food stamp household, and sometimes this is appropriate. However, the sum of the shelter expense entries must not exceed the total shelter expense amount paid by the household. When entering a second shelter expense amount on a household, a pop-up edit will appear asking the user to indicate whether or not this second shelter expense is appropriate for the household. Case managers must carefully consider this edit before wrapping up the case.

From the Forms File

Revised Forms

02-557-0608-05

DVWR-CL (Rev. 6/2008)

Checklist for a Domestic Violence Waiver Request

This form has been revised. In the fourth checkbox section, the page number listed has been changed from page 9 to page 4 due to the revision of the *Request for a Waiver of TAFDC Program Requirements Due to Domestic Violence (DVWR)* form. In the fifth checkbox, the revision date for the DVWR form has been changed from Rev. 2006 to Rev. 5/2008.

15-042-0608-05

CTC (Rev. 6/2008)

Checklist for Transfer AUs

This form has been revised. Questions have been added to prompt case managers to review the case and make appropriate BEACON window changes if the client who is being transferred has moved into or out of a waiver-approved area. Refer to Field Operations Memo 2008-33 for more information on the use of this form.



From the Hotline

- Q.** Our TAO is currently implementing the new food stamp benefit procedures for verifying the disability of elderly non-citizens receiving EAEDC. When reviewing the completion of the new *Food Stamp Disability Verification for Elderly Noncitizens* form, FS-DVEN (6/2008), what types of licensed medical practitioners are acceptable for signature?
- A.** When reviewing the new *Food Stamp Disability Verification for Elderly Noncitizens* form, acceptable signatures include doctors (MD), osteopaths (DO), nurse practitioners (NP), physician's assistants (PA) or psychologists (PhD).

For more information on providing food stamp benefits to elderly noncitizens receiving EAEDC, refer to Field Operations Memo 2008-28.

- Q.** Is the list of acceptable licensed medical practitioners signing the new *Food Stamp Disability Verification for Elderly Noncitizens* form different from the signatures we accept on the *Food Stamp Program Work Requirement*

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Medical Report form?

- A. Yes. For the *Food Stamp Program Work Requirement Medical Report* form, a broader range of signatures is acceptable including: physicians, physician's assistants, designated representatives of the physician's office, nurse practitioners, osteopaths, licensed or certified psychologists, drug and alcohol abuse counselors, certified mental health counselors, licensed independent clinical social workers, licensed certified social workers, and certified midwives. For purposes of verifying an individual's participation in a rehabilitation program or counseling program, the director of the program or the individual's counselor may also sign the form.

For more information on the *Food Stamp Work Requirements Medical Report* form, refer to Field Operations Memo 2004-22.

- Q. Now that the rules for categorical eligibility have been expanded, how does this impact the expedited food stamp benefit request of my applicant who has no children and falls into one of the new categori-

cally eligible groups identified in Field Operations Memo 2008-27? Specifically, if this individual is requesting expedited food stamp benefits, do I ask him about his income and assets?

- A. Yes. The rules for expedited food stamp benefits have not changed. For all categorically eligible households, continue to follow standard policy and procedures for expedited service. This means that for a food stamp applicant to qualify for expedited food stamp benefits, he or she must meet the requirements at 106 CMR 365.800 and 106 CMR 365.810.

If you have any questions on this column or other policy and procedural material, please have your Hotline designee call the Policy Hotline at 617-348-8478.

Family Self-Sufficiency (FSS) Program Expansion: Public Housing Authorities (Somerville and Framingham)

TAFDC

Field Operations Memo 2008-30

To ensure that clients enroll in an activity that can lead to economic self-sufficiency, as well as meet their work program requirement, the marketing of the FSS Program is being expanded to reach a new group of clients, those who live in Somerville or Framingham Public Housing Authorities (PHAs) or have their Section 8 certificate administered by the Somerville or Framingham PHAs. A list of those clients who have been asked to participate will be e-mailed to the Brockton, Dudley Square, Framingham, Milford, Newmarket Square and Revere TAOs.

The purpose of this Field Operations Memo is to:

- remind case managers about the FSS Program;
- explain the benefits of the FSS Program;
- advise case managers and Full Engagement Workers of their roles;
- give case managers information about the PHAs participating in the FSS Program; and
- provide the FSS contact list for the Regional Non-profits (RNPs) and the PHAs.

Homeless Child Care Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) Document

All

Field Operations Memo 2008-32

DTA and Department of Early Education and Care (EEC) have compiled a document entitled, *Streamlining Access to Child Care for DTA Homeless Families: Homeless Child Care Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)*. The FAQs document provides ready access to DTA homeless child care eligibility information, EEC/CCR&R programmatic issues, EEC website links for resource information and homeless child care referral procedures.

This memo instructs case managers on how to access the FAQs document in DTA Online and on the EEC website.

Food Stamp Program - Waiver Exemption for Able Bodied Adults Without Dependents (ABAWDs)

FS

Field Operations Memo 2008-33

In an effort to increase food stamp participation among the ABAWD population, the Department applied for and received a waiver to exempt individuals in certain areas of the state from Food Stamp Work Program rules.

This memo:

- implements the ABAWD waiver and describes BEACON procedures for processing ABAWDs living in waived areas, and ABAWDs who move into or out of a waived areas;
- eliminates the use of the *Inappropriate Candidate for CS* and *No Available FS CS Site* designations in BEACON; and
- introduces a new job aid that will help case managers to appropriately code ABAWDs on BEACON.

EA Noncompliance Q&A's

EA

Field Operations Memo 2008-34

Answers to questions raised by DTA staff and EA providers may be accessed in the *EA Noncompliance Q & A's* section of *DTA Online*.

FYI

Changes to DTA Online

This month, you will see the following changes to **Policy Online**:

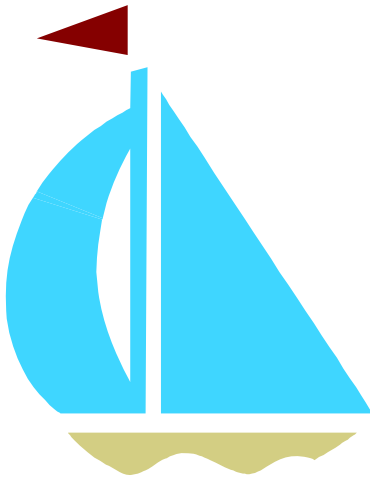
- A new Job Aid has been added. *NPA Food Stamp Coding for ABAWD Work Requirements* is a new tool to help staff determine whether or not a client meets the new Waiver Exemption for Able Bodied Adults Without Dependents (ABAWDS) outlined in Field Operations Memo 2008-33.
- A new online guide has been created to help clarify child care issues regarding homeless families. The *Homeless Child Care Frequently Asked Questions* guide provides ready access to DTA homeless child care eligibility information.
- A new online guide called *Emergency Assistance Noncompliance Questions and Answers* has been added to address EA noncompliance issues.

Also this month, the *FSS Contact Lists* (Family Self-Sufficiency) referenced in Field Operations Memo 2008-30 have been added to the **Resource Inventories**.

FYI

Changes to the EOHHS mass.gov DTA Homepage

This month, a *Disability Accommodation Contacts* list has been added to our DTA Homepage, under *Related Links*. It contains disability accommodation contact information for each TAO.



FYI

EAEDC: SSI Application and SSI Appeal Denial - TAO Director Override

BEACON sends a closing notice when the SDX file indicates that an EAEDC client did not complete an SSI application or file an appeal of an SSI denial. Case managers are reminded that if the client shows proof that he or she has filed the SSI application or filed an appeal of the SSI denial prior to the BEACON-initiated case closing, after the closing has been initiated or after the closing has occurred, case managers must ensure that the TAO Director Override procedure is implemented to prevent the case closing or that the override is implemented when the case is reopened. Refer to Field Operations Memo 2005-21, pages 4 and 5 - "TAO Director Override" - for detailed procedures on how to implement the TAO Director Override. Using the override will also prevent warning notices from being generated inappropriately.

If the BEACON-initiated closing is in progress and the client has filed an aid-pending appeal to prevent the case closing, the TAO Director Override cannot be applied. The client should be advised to withdraw the appeal in writing to the Division of Hearings. It is important that this be done to allow the override to be applied. Once the appeal is withdrawn, be sure the TAO Director or designee completes the override procedures in Field Operations Memo 2005-21.

IMPORTANT: If the client does not withdraw the appeal and subsequently abandons the appeal which results in the case closing, the case manager must be sure to reopen the case retroactive to the closing date and make sure the TAO Director Override is applied.

"Friendship with oneself is all-important, because without it one cannot be friends with anyone else."

Eleanor Roosevelt

FYI

SSPS Vendor Payments

Effective with the June SSPS Protective/Vendor Payment Turn-around Documents, cases that have been transferred to or transferred from the Centralized TAFDC office (250) will no longer have their on-going vendor payments automatically terminated by the system.

This change will alleviate the need of preparing new invoice(s) following a transfer into or exit from Centralized TAFDC.

Case managers at the receiving TAO will be provided with alert '025-Protective Case Transferred from Office 999'. This will appear in the body of the TD (the 'Continue: "Yes or "No" 'section). Case managers at the former TAO will be advised of the transfer with message '146-Case Transferred to Office 999' in the "Discontinued T.D. Records" portion of the SSPS Protective/Vendor Payment Turnaround Document report

All other office transfers will still initiate discontinuation of the vendor payment.

