

Transitions

March 2001
Vol. XVI No. 3



A Publication of the Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance

this month in...

Transitions

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From the Commissioner

Dear Fellow Employees:

During March we will be celebrating diversity. Language, race, food, religion, place of birth, politics, family and ethnic traditions are some of the things which reflect the diversity we all experience every day. The February edition of the Department newsletter, *News in Transition*, quoted a number of fellow DTA employees on their view of diversity and how it impacts their lives. Reading these I was struck by the common themes of respect for and interest in other cultures and life experiences and a recognition of how we are all enriched by what we learn from one another. Diversity is not divergent; rather, it is unifying.

Throughout this month you will have the opportunity to participate in events celebrating our diversity. I urge you to participate in whatever way you choose. Perhaps you will share a family history story, prepare an ethnic food specialty or display artwork representative of your background. Perhaps you will not be an active participant but rather will listen and observe. Perhaps your listening and observation will be the catalyst to your active participation next year.

These celebrations belong to each and every one of us—whether your family arrived in this country five years ago or 150 years ago. It is this richness of heritage which both binds us together and makes each of us unique. Sharing this diversity of heritage broadens our understanding and appreciation of one another. This understanding is based on a respect and acknowledgment of the history, language and culture which each group has brought to this country. We have been enriched by these varied backgrounds, and this enrichment

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From the Hotline

- Q. I have an individual applying for TAFDC and expedited food stamp benefits. He has a car with a fair market value of \$9,000.00. How do I treat the value of the car for food stamp benefits?
- A. If he is approved for TAFDC, he would be categorically eligible for food stamp benefits and he would automatically satisfy the asset eligibility criteria. See 106 CMR 365.180(D).

However, if he is not eligible for TAFDC, he would not be categorically eligible for food stamp benefits. In this case, the equity value would be exempt for one vehicle per household regardless of use, but the countable fair market value ($\$9,000 - \$4,650 = \$4,350$) would make him ineligible because his assets exceed the Food Stamp Program limit of \$2,000. See 106 CMR 363.110 and 363.130(F)(1)a.1.

- Q. Is the Department required to provide interpretation services for non-English speaking applicants and recipients?
- A. Yes. Interpretation services must be made available to non-English speaking applicants and recipients and American Sign Language (ASL) users who call or come to a Transitional Assistance Office (TAO). They must not be turned away and told to return with their own interpreter. If a bilingual AU Manager or interpreter who speaks the language of the applicant or recipient is not available, the applicant or recipient should be given an appointment to return at a time when the TAO is able to provide interpretation services. However, if an applicant or recipient calls or comes to a TAO and prefers to use the services of his or her own interpreter, he or she is allowed to do so. See 106 CMR 701.360, 106 CMR 360.510, and Field Operations Memo 99-31.
- Q. A food stamp applicant receives Subsidized Adoption income for a severely disabled child. The child must stay in the hospital at least three days per week. Do we count this income toward the food stamp assistance unit's eligibility?
- A. Yes. Subsidized Adoption income is unearned income and must be counted in determining eligibility. Only income listed in 106 CMR 363.230 is excluded in determining eligibility for food stamp benefits.

Criminal Offender Record Information (CORI) Checks

All State Letter 1199

This State Letter transmits the final 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.

F.O.R. Families

TAFDC *The TAFDC Procedural Guide Update 035*

- This update incorporates a change made to the F.O.R. Families Referral Form. The original was a two-sided form to be used for referring both adults and teen parents. There is now a separate form for teen parents.
- *The TAFDC Procedural Guide Update* also deletes the outdated fax number and contact name at DPH. The fax number to be used appears at the bottom of the forms: (617) 624-5003.

BEACON Release 2.0 Pilot Activities - Phase II

All Field Operations Memo 2001-7

The purpose of Field Operations Memo 2001-7 is to provide procedures for the following BEACON Release 2.0 Pilot activities:

- 1) reviewing and resolving benefit discrepancies; and
- 2) processing monthly reports using the special process for Monthly Reporting AUs for any month when conversion occurs, including February and the month of final conversion.

Note: Example 4 on page 4 incorrectly states that if the BEACON Benefit Amount and PACES Benefit Amount differ, the reason might be that the EAEDC rest home per diem rate was not entered on BEACON Release 1.0. However, per diem rates are not entered on BEACON Release 1.0; they must be entered on BEACON Release 2.0 by the Resource Coordinator. Additional information about this benefit discrepancy will be forthcoming.

Continued from Page 1

continues with each new wave of immigrants.

When I wrote to you a year ago on this topic, I said that I was proud to be part of an agency which so reflects the cultural diversity of this country. I attended the diversity events at Central Office and I was again struck by how varied our staff is. I heard inspiring stories of overcoming personal difficulties, of learning to adjust to a new and very different culture, of hard work and dedication to make life better for the next generation. These stories were told with dignity—and sometimes humor—and they reflected the commonality of what we care about. We all want to be accepted for who we are, to be treated with respect and dignity and to celebrate our backgrounds while looking forward to a shared future.

The day-to-day acknowledgment of those shared goals is the cornerstone of our diversity. Celebrate that diversity every day.

Sincerely,



Claire McIntire
Commissioner



COMMUNICATION is the KEY

Quality Corner

One of the most difficult errors to control is a change not reported by the recipient between food stamp certifications. We must rely on the recipient reporting the change accurately (including all verifications) and timely.

In September 2000, Field Operations Memo 2000-26 contained significant relief from this problem for NPA earnings cases. That memo expanded a quarterly reporting waiver (an exception to federal food stamp rules) from USDA. NPA earnings cases that are properly certified following the procedures described in Field Operations Memo 2000-26 do not have to report changes between certifications. This has the potential to eliminate a considerable number of NPA errors.

Because it is anticipated that following the procedures in the memo will significantly reduce errors, all NPA earnings cases which meet the criteria described in the memo must be placed on quarterly reporting. Local offices which had developed office specific reporting processes must place all appropriate NPA earnings cases on the quarterly reporting system.

For the waiver to reduce the error rate, however, it is critical that the certification is done correctly. Field Operations Memo 2000-26 requires that workers use eight pay stubs, not six as previously required. By using eight pay stubs and completing the certification correctly for all elements of eligibility, the recipient does not need to report changes. Instead, every three months they will receive a copy of the "Food Stamp Benefits Recertification for Households with Earnings" (FSP-RCF) – the quarterly report – that will be used to certify benefits for the following three months.

Two recent errors could have been eliminated if the eight weeks wages was used for quarterly reporting. Since eight weeks wages were not used, the certification was not done correctly. When Quality Control reviewed the case eight weeks wages were used and it was determined that the case had been overpaid and an error was called.

While a recipient who is on quarterly reporting is not required to report changes between certification, it is important to note that if the recipient does notify the worker of a change, that information **MUST** be used timely. Failing to act on reported changes will continue to result in errors.

The quarterly reporting process has the potential to eliminate a number of errors that are otherwise difficult to control. It will also save time and effort. It relies, however, on accurate treatment of mail-in certifications, accurate annual face to face certifications and accurate treatment of information reported by the recipient.

Participation in the Employment Services Program

TAFDC Field Operations Memo 2001-9

The purpose of this memo is to inform Transitional Assistance Office Staff that recipients:

- exempt from time-limited benefits who volunteer to participate in an ESP activity are no longer sanctioned for failing to meet the participation requirements; and
- nonexempt and not subject to the Work Program will be mandated to participate in ESP activities at any time within their 24-month period, not just the last 12 months as stated in Field Operations Memo 2000-7B. Other than this change, all instructions in Field Operations Memo 2000-7B remain the same.

Medex Premium Rate Changes

NPA FS Field Operations Memo 2001-6

Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Massachusetts has announced Medex premium rate changes to six non-group plans, Basic, Bronze, Gold, Standard, Core and Silver, effective February 2001.

This memo:

- identifies the plans that have changed and the corresponding rate changes
- identifies the date of the changes and the effect these changes will have on the amount of food stamp benefits;
- transmits information for the Medex Premium Rate - Update Report; and
- provides information of updates to food stamp benefits and the Medex premium amounts on PACES.

BEACON *Today*



Stay Informed!

BEACON Action Center

All
Field Operations 2001-11

This Field Operations Memo updates the process to receive and respond to BEACON Release 2.0 issues via the BEACON Action Center. Specifically, all unresolved problems must be reported to the BEACON Action Center, even if they were previously reported. This Memo obsoletes Field Operations Memo 2000-33.

Food Stamp Program - Increased Maximum Excess Shelter Deduction

FS
State Letter 1201

State Letter 1201 transmits Food Stamp Program policy increasing the maximum excess shelter deduction, which applies to food stamp assistance units not containing an elderly or disabled member, from \$300 to \$340 effective 3/1/2001.

FYI

Voter Registration Forms

The Elections Division of the Secretary of the Commonwealth has notified us that there is a change to the *Voter Registration Form*. The Green Party has been added as a political party choice on the forms. A supply of the revised forms will soon be sent to Transitional Assistance Offices. When the revised forms are received, begin using them immediately and destroy the old forms.

Reminder: To order Voter Registration Forms or Voter Registration Handbooks, call the Secretary of the Commonwealth - Elections Division at 1-800-462-8683.

FYI

BEACON *Today* Index Online

Online BEACON information will now include a *BEACON Today* Index. This index lists by topic and corresponding issue number all *BEACON Today*s currently available online.

The *BEACON Today* Index allows topics to be found easily and links directly to issues that address a specific topic.

To view a particular topic using the index, click on the chosen topic, and the *BEACON Today* that addresses that topic will be displayed. If more than one issue of *BEACON Today* deals with the same topic, click on the desired issue number. Click on each issue number for a complete discussion of the chosen topic. The topics are listed alphabetically under the header Topic, and the corresponding number(s) of the *BEACON Today* issues is listed to the right under the header Issue.

As additional *BEACON Today*s are issued, they will be added to the Index.

Emergency Assistance

EA

State Letter 1200
Field Operations Memo
2001-10

- A recent court order enjoined implementation of certain new EA regulations regarding the 12-month rule. Certain regulations in 106 CMR 309.020 rescinded by State Letter 1198 are being repromulgated. While still part of the official regulations, a specific section in 106 CMR 309.040 is not being implemented at this time (the grayed-out section of policy). This matter continues to be argued in court.
- Because of the court order, the repromulgated policy states that an EA AU may not be authorized to receive EA benefits more than once in a 12-month period unless one of the three special conditions apply, i.e., the 12 months from the start of the EA must elapse before EA eligibility begins again.

2001 Social Security/SSI COLA Update and 2001 COLA Reports

TAFDC, EAEDC, FS, SSI
Field Operations Memo 2001-5

Effective January 2001, Social Security benefits and SSI payments increased by 3.5 percent; the patient paid amount (PPA) increased by \$18 for SSI rest home cases; and the base level Medicare Part B premium increased from \$45.50 to \$50.00 per month.

This memo:

- identifies COLA cases;
- summarizes the procedures followed for updating the 2001 Social Security/SSI COLA;
- provides information about the COLA processing problem that impacted category 2 and 4 cases with SSNs ending in 6-9;
- describes the TAFDC/EAEDC corrected COLA Report for SSNs ending in 6-9 and instructs the AU Manager to review the cases listed on the report to determine if the AU received an overpayment, and to initiate recoupment procedures, if necessary;
- provides information and the procedures to be followed, if appropriate, concerning the reports used to monitor and track the 2001 Social Security/SSI COLA updates; and
- displays a facsimile of the mailing to recipients entitled "SSI Recipients Residing in Rest Homes or Community Support Facilities (level IV)."

Request for a Waiver of TAFDC Program Requirement(s) Due to Domestic Violence Waiver (DVWR) form

TAFDC
Field Operations Memo 2001-8

This Field Operations Memo informs TAO Staff about the new *Request for a Waiver of TAFDC Program Requirement(s) Due to Domestic Violence Waiver (DVWR)* form. The form replaces the two forms currently used by recipients who request a domestic violence waiver.

From the Forms File

New Forms

02-559-0201-05

DVWR (2/2001)

Request for a Waiver of TAFDC Program Requirement(s) Due to Domestic Violence

This new form combines information from the *Request for a Waiver of TAFDC Program Requirement(s) Due to Domestic Violence (DV/WVREQ)* and the *Request for a Waiver Continuation of TAFDC Program Requirement(s) Due to Domestic Violence (DVCONTREQ)* forms. Refer to Field Operations Memo 2001-8 for more information. The Spanish version will be available soon.

02-772-0301-05

DPH-REF-2 (3/2001)

Department of Public Health Referral Form (Teen Parent Referral)

This new fax referral form was created to better assist F.O.R. Families staff in providing services to teen parents. Additional questions for the AU Manager to complete and added space for narrative comments have been added to the form.

13-210-0301-05

TES-IC (3/2001)

Informational Contacts

The EA AU family is given this form with the names, addresses and telephone numbers of the shelter, the HAP and DTA contact persons. The Spanish version will be available soon.

Revised Forms

AU Managers are reminded to discard the old version of any revised form and use the new revised form.

02-770-0301-05

DPH-REF-1 (Rev. 3/2001)

Department of Public Health Referral Form (Adult Parent Referral)

This fax referral form has been revised to provide DPH more information on an Adult Parent TAFDC recipient referred to the F.O.R.

Families Program. The teen parent section of the original form has become a separate form (see New Forms).

The following Emergency Assistance forms have been revised. Spanish versions will be available soon.

13-004-0301-05

EA-6 (Rev. 3/2001)

Emergency Assistance Application

13-061-0301-05

EA-10 (Rev. 3/2001)

Rental Information Form

13-030-0301-05

EA-1 (Rev. 3/2001)

EA Noncompliance Referral

13-200-0301-05

HM-NT (Rev. 3/2001)

Notice to Recipients of Emergency Assistance (EA) Staying in Hotels/Motels

02-035-0301-05

02-157-0301-05 (S)

NFL-9 (Rev. 3/2001)

Notice of Approval, Denial or Termination for Emergency Assistance or Other Financial Services

02-043-0301-05

NFL-16 (Rev. 3/2001)

Notice to Individuals Requesting Emergency Assistance Services

02-121-0301-05
13-022-0301-71 (S)
NFL-18 (Rev. 3/2001)
*Notice to Individuals Requesting
Financial Assistance Services*

13-039-0301-05
NFL-ST (Rev. 3/2001)
*Notice of Termination of Tempo-
rary Emergency Shelter*

13-214-0301-05
RHAPS (Rev. 3/2001)
*Referral for Housing Assistance
Program Services*

13-093-0301-05
TESR-3 (Rev. 3/2001)
*Acknowledgement of Recipient
Responsibilities While in Tempo-
rary Emergency Shelter*

02-202-0301-05
02-204-0301-05 (S)
TES-TR-1 (Rev. 3/2001)
Notice of Shelter Transfer

02-280-0301-05
02-281-0301-05 (S)
TES-TR-3 (Rev. 3/2001)
*Notice of Transfer Due to Shelter
Termination*

13-040-0301-05
TES-WN-1 (Rev. 3/2001)
Warning Notice of Noncompliance

13-041-0301-05
TES-WN-2 (Rev. 3/2001)
*Warning Notice of Noncompliance/
Temporary Emergency Shelter
Placement*

Obsolete Forms

18-155-1298-71
18-156-1298-71 (S)
SSA/VR (12/98)
Social Security/SSI Verification Request Form

AU Managers can now use the State Verification Eligibility System (SVES) to verify the most updated information available from Social Security on RSDI/SSI income; therefore, this form is no longer needed.

The following two forms have been incorporated into the new Request for a Waiver of TAFDC Program Requirement(s) Due to Domestic Violence (DVWR) form.

02-562-1098-05
02-563-1098-05 (S) (Rev. 10/98)
DV/WVREQ
*Request for a Waiver of TAFDC Program Requirement(s) Due to Domes-
tic Violence*

02-566-1299-05
02-567-0100-05 (S)
DVCONTREQ
*Request for a Waiver Continuation of TAFDC Program Requirement(s)
Due to Domestic Violence*