

# T Transitions

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## *this month in...*

### *T Transitions*

From the Hotline	2
Issuing a Mass EBT Card or PIN by Mail	2
Elimination of Funding for Employment Services Program (ESP)	3
Quality Corner	4
Systems User's Guide Update 153	4
FYI - Clarification of State Letter 1245 and the Full Family Sanction	5
BEACON <i>Today</i> Issued in February 2003	5
FYI - Changes to Policy Online	5
Farm Bill 2002: 4/1/2003 Noncitizen Restoration	5
From the Forms File	6
EA Procedural Changes	7

## *From the Commissioner*

Dear Fellow Employees,

The last week of February was an eventful one in state government. On February 24, Governor Romney unveiled his plan for reorganizing the Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS), and on February 26, the Governor's budget proposal for the next fiscal year was released. Also on February 26, I sent all staff a memo outlining a number of office closings and use of surplus space in our offices by other agencies. I am fully aware that this is a tremendous amount of information to absorb in a short period of time, and that many of you may have questions about the potential impact of this information on you and on DTA. Please direct your questions to your manager. As I have tried to do since becoming Commissioner, I will keep you informed to the best of my ability.

The Governor's budget is a large document, and because of the commitment to restructuring state government, the budget is organized differently than in past years. DTA budget staff are reviewing the sections that impact DTA and will develop an analysis of those areas. A summary of the main items was sent out to all staff on February 28.

I am sure many of you have accessed the EOHHS reorganization proposal (available at [www.masscares.org](http://www.masscares.org)). The proposal groups the agencies into four "clusters": Children, Youth and Families; Disabilities and Community Services; Health; and Elder Affairs. DTA is part of Children, Youth and Families, along with the Department of Social Services, the Office of Child Care Services, the Department of Youth Services and the Massachusetts Office for

Continued on Page 3

## *From the Hotline*

The questions and answers in this month's "From the Hotline" column concern the elimination of funding for the Employment Services Program (ESP). Refer to Field Operations Memo 2003-6 and Field Operations Memo 2003-6A for additional information on this topic.

**Q.** Will I receive a printout listing the AUs affected by the elimination of funding?

**A.** A list of impacted AUs in your caseload may be identified by accessing the "ESP Active Component Activity" View.

**Q.** Can I still authorize child care for recipients participating in programs that are not funded through ESP? For example, I currently have a recipient in a GED program funded by the Department of Education. Can I authorize child care for this AU?

**A.** Yes. You can continue to authorize child care for non-ESP-funded activities. To ensure that the child care is authorized for your recipient, remember to include the approved activity in this recipient's Employment Development Plan (EDP).

**Q.** Have regulations concerning the sanctioning process been changed?

**A.** No. Policy regarding sanctions has not been revised as a result of the elimination of funding for ESP. However, remember that:

- until recipients have been informed at their scheduled appointment of their revised responsibilities, they may not be sanctioned for failure to participate in an ESP-funded activity; and
- exempt recipients cannot be sanctioned for failing to participate.

Finally, any individual who is a victim of domestic violence may request a good cause waiver of the work program requirement as well as the 24-month time limit. Refer to 106 CMR 203.110 for more information.



## *Issuing a Mass EBT Card or PIN by Mail*

All

***A User's Guide:  
Transitional Assistance  
Programs and BEACON  
Update 040***

This update allows all applicants and recipients eligible for Valid-Without-Photo Mass EBT cards to be issued an original or replacement Mass EBT card or PIN by mail.



## ***Elimination of Funding for Employment Services Program (ESP)***

TAFDC

Field Operations Memo  
2003-6

Field Operations Memo  
2003-6A

Due to a \$10 million reduction in funding, the Department has no money remaining for its Employment Services Program (ESP) and for transportation payments for the remainder of FY 03 (ending June 30, 2003). Field Operations Memo 2003-6 provided initial information on the impact of this reduction.

Field Operations Memo 2003-6A provided additional information on the impact of this reduction including:

- TAO responsibilities;
- how to process recipients on BEACON;
- scheduling appointments for ESP participants; and
- ensuring that no negative action is taken for failure to attend an ESP-funded activity.



Continued from Page 1

Refugees and Immigrants. While agencies continue to be independent and Commissioners continue to report to the Secretary, the role of Assistant Secretary for each cluster has been introduced. This role will be filled by one of the Commissioners in each cluster. In the case of Children, Youth and Families, the Assistant Secretary will be Harry Spence, Commissioner of the Department of Social Services. The purpose of the clusters and the role of the Assistant Secretary are to increase and ensure coordination among agencies that in many instances serve the same families. The overall goal of the reorganization is to improve the quality of services and streamline service delivery by better coordinating the activities of all human service agencies.

As I told you in my message of February 26, the Haverhill and Westfield offices will be closed and a number of DTA offices will welcome staff from other agencies that will utilize our excess space. This consolidation of space is necessary to ensure that in these serious fiscal times, all facility-related dollars are being spent appropriately. The consolidation also moves us in the direction of coordinated services that is the core of the EOHHS reorganization. I know that you will welcome these colleagues to their new home.

As I said earlier, I recognize that this is a tremendous amount of information and potential change, and I know that it has the potential to distract all of us from our day-to-day responsibilities. But that is the one thing we cannot allow to happen. The proposed changes will play out over time and, yes they may change how we operate. I believe these changes will be for the better. But right now, we must continue to focus on our mission of serving the Commonwealth's most needy citizens. You have always demonstrated professionalism and dedication, and I know I can count on that to continue now and into the future.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'John Wagner'.

John Wagner  
Commissioner



## Quality Corner

In January, DTA reported to the U.S. Department of Agriculture the results of the final Quality Control review for last year. Since together we have been trying to reduce our errors and avoid any penalties the federal government can impose for high food stamp error rates, it may be a good time to review DTA's error rate for last year.

Overall, the rate of 8.2 percent was slightly lower than last year's rate of 8.4 percent. Congratulations! In fact, each quarter of last year's rate was lower than the previous quarter. Both years' rates were highly influenced by BEACON implementation – last year's because it was the first year of full implementation and the year before because of the extensive training and piloting done in preparation for implementation. For the year we just completed, Federal Fiscal Year 2002, we estimate that one-third of the errors were BEACON-related, and were caused either by a problem with the system or by the worker using the system incorrectly. The initial upward bump in the error rate when such a complex computer system is first implemented was to be expected. Luckily, the bump was smaller and lasted a shorter time than had been predicted.

Among AUs carried by NPA AU Managers, the major error problem was earnings, primarily recipients not reporting it, accounting for about a quarter of all NPA error payments. While many of these errors were recipient-caused, paying closer attention to match information can go a long way toward minimizing these errors.

Both NPA and PA AU Managers had big error problems related to household composition and shelter. These errors were most often related to noncitizens and the proper determination of who in the household was eligible for federal food stamp benefits. If the household was incorrectly split between state and federal food stamps, the shelter, household composition and income were also likely to be wrong. Although the SSFSP has been eliminated, it remains critical that both NPA and PA AU Managers correctly identify noncitizens on the BEACON Noncitizen window to ensure that the proper food stamp calculation is performed. *See* 106 CMR 362.220 for food stamp noncitizen eligibility requirements.

Among SSI AUs, shelter and earned income were the largest error problems.

Based on the decreasing error rate quarter to quarter, the reduced number of BEACON problems, and the change to semiannual reporting, we are cautiously optimistic that error rates will continue to drop.

### ***Systems User's Guide Update 153***

#### **EA Volume 3: *SSPS User's Guide***

Modifications have been implemented in SSPS to reflect changes in Emergency Assistance policy. Two screens have been revised (Close EA-Entry screen and Close EA-Exit screen) and 2 new screens (Reactivate EA-Entry screen and Reactivate EA-Exit screen) have been created to accommodate these changes.

"Success is to be measured not so much by the position that one has reached in life as by the obstacles which he has overcome."

Booker T. Washington



## ***FYI***

### ***Clarification of State Letter 1245 and the Full Family Sanction***

TAOs are reminded that the TAFDC full family sanction should still be imposed where appropriate. State Letter 1245 amended regulations to eliminate the full family sanction at 106 CMR 207.200(B)(3). This change has not altered the Department's practice with regard to a full family sanction. This is because the Department employs a full family sanction for failure to comply with the Employment Development Plan as authorized by 106 CMR 207.200(A)(4), not for failure to comply with the work program requirement that was authorized by 106 CMR 207.200(B)(3).

### ***BEACON Today Issued in February 2003***

BT 101 Unemployment Compensation Extensions (2/4/2003)



## ***FYI***

### ***Changes to Policy Online***

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

#### ***FMCS Codes Windows***

The listing of the various options on FMCS Codes Page 1 and Page 2 has been consolidated. Instead of listing the various options by program type, only the option title is now listed. This eliminates the duplicate options listed on each window and will allow for more options to be listed on each window.

#### ***AU Processing – Second Quarter – Case Closing and Reduction Schedule***

The 2003 Second Quarter Schedule (April – June) can be accessed by selecting the Second Quarter from the AU Processing window.

#### ***Farm Bill 2002: 4/1/2003 Noncitizen Restoration***

FS  
Field Operations Memo  
2003-7

Effective April 1, 2003, the Farm Bill restores food stamp eligibility to qualified noncitizens who have lived in the United States for five years or longer as defined in 106 CMR 362.240.

The Department received a waiver from the U.S. Department of Agriculture to extend the processing timeframes on these AUs. Effective February 20, 2003, TAO staff may accept applications from AUs that are currently ineligible due to their noncitizen status but **may** be eligible on April 1, 2003 under the noncitizen restoration rule. These applicants must not be denied and told to reapply on April 1, 2003.

Field Operations Memo 2003-7 informs TAO staff about:

- extended processing timeframes for re/applications under the Noncitizen Restoration Waiver;
- 30-day processing of re/applications for Combination FS AUs; and
- outreach to former SSFSP AUs who appear eligible under the noncitizen restoration rules.



## ***From the Forms File***

### ***New Forms***

***13-057-0203-05***

***13-058-0203-05 (S)***

***TESI (2/2003)***

***Shelter Interruption Statement***

This form will be used to capture information about an EA family who will be moving temporarily from a shelter placement.

***13-075-02003-05***

***13-076-0203-05 (S)***

***TES-WN-13 (2/2003)***

***Warning Notice of Noncompliance***

The TES-WN-13 combines information previously recorded on both the TES-WN-1 and TES-WN-2 forms.

### ***Revised Forms***

***16-015-03•03-05***

***Image-1 (Rev. 3/2003)***

***Request for Mass EBT Card***

Reference to faxing this form to the EBT Management Unit at Central Office has been deleted from this form.

***09-181-0203-05***

***09-182-0203-05 (S)***

***FSP-RCF (Rev. 2/2003)***

***Food Stamp Benefits Recertification for Universal Semiannual Reporting Households***

This form has been revised to comply with DTA's U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) waiver for certain NPA FS AUs. USDA has approved the Department's request to expand the Food Stamp Earnings Waiver process. AUs with earned or unearned income (or a history of income within the past six months) will now be required to report changes semiannually and not quarterly.

The following Emergency Assistance (EA) forms, flyer, brochure and poster have been revised due to changes in EA shelter regulations.

***13-001-0203-05***

***EA-1 (Rev. 2/2003)***

***Authorization for Emergency Assistance Benefit***

***13-039-0203-05***

***13-042-0203-05 (S)***

***NFL-ST (Rev. 2/2003)***

***Notice of Termination of Temporary Emergency Shelter***

***13-200-0203-05***

***13-201-0203-05 (S)***

***HM-NT (Rev. 2/2003)***

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

***02-280-0203-05***

***02-281-0203-05 (S)***

***TES-TR-3 (Rev. 2/2003)***

***Notice of Transfer Due to Shelter Termination***

***02-202-0203-05***

***02-204-0203-05 (S)***

***TES-TR-1 (Rev. 2/2003)***

***Notice of Shelter Transfer***

***13-093-0203-05***

***13-094-0203-05 (S)***

***TESR-3 (Rev. 2/2003)***

***Acknowledgement of Recipient Responsibilities While in Temporary Emergency Shelter***

***02-403-0203-05***

***02-404-0203-05 (S)***

***TESR-1 (Rev. 2/2003)***

***Recipient Responsibilities While in a Temporary Emergency Shelter***

***02-043-0203-05***

***02-158-0203-05 (S)***

***NFL-16 (Rev. 2/2003)***

***Notice to Individuals Requesting Emergency Assistance Temporary Emergency Shelter Services***



**02-035-0203-05**  
**02-157-0203-05 (S)**  
**NFL-9 (Rev. 2/2003)**  
**Notice of Approval, Denial or Termination for Emergency Assistance or Other Financial Services**

**Revised Flyer**

**02-814-0203-05**  
**02-817-0203-05 (S)**  
**RBP – Flyer (Rev. 2/2003)**  
**Relocation Benefits Flyer**

**Revised Brochure**

**02-810-0203-05**  
**02-811-0203-05 (S)**  
**RBB (Rev. 2/2003)**  
**Relocation Benefits for Certain TAFDC and EAEDC Recipients**

**Revised Poster**

**02-815-0203-05**  
**02-816-0203-05 (S)**  
**RBP – Poster (Rev. 2/2003)**  
**Relocation Benefits Poster**

**Obsolete Forms**

**13-040-0602-05**  
**13-044-0602-05 (S)**  
**TES-WN-1**  
**Warning Notice of Noncompliance**

**13-041-0602-05**  
**13-043-0602-05 (S)**  
**TES-WN-2**  
**Warning Notice of Noncompliance/Temporary Emergency Shelter Placement**

**EA Procedural Changes**

EA

**EA User's Guide: Emergency Assistance, SSI Special Benefits and BEACON Update 009**

This Update reflects the changes to policy found in State Letters 1247, 1249 and 1250. Some of the changes include the following.

- All income of an SSI recipient counts in EA.
- An applicant is not eligible for EA more than once in a 12-month period. The 12-month period begins on the last day that shelter was paid. There are four exceptions to the 12-month rule.
- Shelter benefits will be terminated if the AU refuses placement.
- EA eligibility is affected if the EA applicant or the EA recipient quits a job or reduces earnings without good cause.
- Good cause reasons will be considered if the AU fails to appear at the placement or fails to complete the activities included in its Self-Sufficiency Plan.
- An additional 30 days (a total of 40 days advance notice) are allowed when shelter benefits are being terminated for income.
- Two SSPS screens have been modified: the **Close EA-Entry screen** and **Close EA-Exit** screen and two SSPS screens have been added: the **Reactivate EA - Entry screen** and **Reactivate EA - Exit screen**.
- The special 15-day advance notice period has been eliminated. Termination notices must meet the 10-day advance notice period.

Be sure to use the new versions of the EA notices and forms. The new notices and forms conform to the current EA regulations. See the Forms File in this **Transitions**.

