

Transitions



A Publication of the Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance

this month in...

Transitions

| | |
|--|----|
| From the Hotline | 2 |
| Quality Corner | 3 |
| From the Forms File | 5 |
| 2006 Social Security/ SSI COLA Correction | 6 |
| Requests for Family Shelter: Level Two and Three Sex Offenders | 6 |
| Food Stamp AUs Closed/ Denied in Error | 6 |
| ESP-Supported Work: Post-Employment Services | 7 |
| Substance Abuse | 7 |
| FYI - BEACON Help Revisions | 7 |
| FYI - Changes to DTA Online | 8 |
| FYI - Changes to Policy Online | 9 |
| FYI - Meeting the Work Program Requirement through Education or Training Activities | 9 |
| FYI - Referrals to Domestic Violence Unit Specialist | 9 |
| FYI - Updates to the EOHHS mass.gov DTA Homepage | 10 |
| FYI - USDA Food Stamp Outreach Radio Campaign | 10 |
| Virtual Gateway/Consumer Face Food Stamp Application | 10 |

From the Commissioner

Dear Fellow Employees,

After several years of discussions, debate, and extensions, Congress has reauthorized the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Block Grant. As you know, the TANF Block Grant provides funding for the Commonwealth's Transitional Aid to Families with Dependent Children (TAFDC) Program, and a host of federal requirements accompany that funding.

The new federal legislation, the Deficit Reduction Act of 2006 (DRA), was signed by the President on February 8, and for the most part becomes effective on October 1, 2006. For the Department, the most significant changes are related to TANF work participation targets. Like the original TANF legislation, the Deficit Reduction Act requires states to meet ambitious participation targets of 50% for all families and 90% for two-parent families. However, under the original welfare reform law, states received a credit towards participation based on caseload declines since 1996 (about 43% for Massachusetts). States were also allowed to exclude certain families in a "separate state program." Under the DRA, the caseload reduction credit is updated to only reflect declines from 2005, and families in a separate state program are not excluded.

The impact of these changes is a substantial increase in the TANF work participation targets for Massachusetts and every other state. Because welfare reform in the Commonwealth started before the original federal reforms occurred in 1996, Massachusetts' current work participation provisions do not satisfy federal requirements. This has not been a significant problem, first due to the federal waiver in place in Massachusetts until last fall, and more recently due to the caseload reduction credit. However, when the caseload reduction credit is updated in October, we will need to meet the

federal requirements or potentially face fiscal penalties.

The Governor has filed legislation to expand participation requirements, and the Legislature is also considering changes. The outcome of that process will change the way that we approach participation for many families. In the meantime, we need to maximize work and training activities among families that are subject to participation requirements.

While this will present a significant challenge for all of us, helping families to move out of poverty represents the right policy direction for the nation. As we all know, remaining on welfare indefinitely only ensures continued poverty. But a family on TAFDC that goes to work, even part-time at minimum wage, can combine wages and benefits such as the state and federal Earned Income Tax Credits to increase the family's income well over the poverty level.

The federal Department of Health and Human Services will also be issuing regulations this summer to define the activities that can count towards federal participation targets, and specifying the ways that those activities must be verified. In the past, these decisions were left up to states, which led to broad differences in interpretations of what constituted work participation. All states will now be held to a consistent standard.

Over the past year, we have been anticipating the end to our waiver, and now we have begun to prepare for the impact of the reauthorization of the TANF Program. Many of you will recall the changes that occurred in 1995, when we undertook our first major welfare reform initiative. As was the case a decade ago, we anticipate changes to several aspects of the TAFDC Program, and a greater emphasis on engagement in work activities for families receiving assistance. Although this will be a significant challenge, I am confident that working together, we will be successful in rising to the occasion, and helping thousands of families in Massachusetts move out of poverty.

Sincerely,



John Wagner, Commissioner

From the Hotline

- Q.** Last week, a mother came into our office with her daughter and applied for food stamp benefits. She and her child have Legal Permanent Resident (LPR) status but both have been in the United States for only 18 months. Are they eligible for food stamp benefits?
- A.** Since the mother has been in this country less than five years, she may not be eligible for the Food Stamp Program unless she meets one of the other eligibility criteria in 106 CMR 362.220(B)(7). However, the daughter is eligible for food stamp benefits as a noncitizen child under 18 years of age.

Note: In the TAFDC Program, this LPR child under 18 years of age who has been in the country less than five years is still considered an ineligible noncitizen. Refer to 106 CMR 203.675(A)(2) for more details.

- Q.** Besides children, can other types of LPRs become food stamp eligible, even

if they have been in this country less than five years?

- A. Yes. The regulations at 106 CMR 362.220(B) state that *certain* LPRs may be food stamp eligible noncitizens. For example, LPRs whose status prior to the LPR adjustment was refugee, asylee, noncitizen whose deportation was withheld, Cuban/Haitian entrant or Amerasian may have eligible noncitizen status. The following may also be considered eligible noncitizens in the Food Stamp Program: those LPRs who are elderly noncitizens born on or before 8/22/31 and who were lawfully residing in the U.S. on 8/22/96; ***children who are under 18 years of age***; disabled individuals; LPRs who have worked or can be credited with working a minimum of 40 qualifying quarters, or veterans or active duty personnel.
- Q. Are the requirements concerning verification of citizenship status in the Food Stamp Program the same as those regarding verification of noncitizen status?

- A. No. There is no requirement to always verify citizenship. As stated in 106 CMR 362.210, citizenship shall be verified ***when the information on the application is questionable***. Verification of noncitizen status in the Food Stamp Program must be submitted at application, recertification or when the status of the noncitizen changes or is questionable. Refer to 106 CMR 362.220(C) for more information on verifying noncitizen status in the Food Stamp Program.
- Q. My food stamp applicant says that he arrived in this country 10 months ago. He has already verified his LPR status, and it has been determined that he is an ineligible LPR. He has also told me that his daughter is a U.S. citizen who was born in this country. Must I ask for a birth certificate to verify his daughter's citizenship status?
- A. No. As long as the father provides you with information that appears consistent with all of the other information he has already presented to you, there is no need to verify his daughter's citizenship status. Remember, for food stamp purposes, citizenship needs to be verified only when the information on the application is questionable. Also, make note of the daughter's citizenship status on the Narratives Tab. Refer to 106 CMR 362.210 for more details.

Quality Corner

This month we will review three errors — the first related to income, the second to shelter and the third to duplicate food stamp issuance.

Self-Employment Income

In this eight-person household, both parents were employed as part-time music teachers for a local school. One of their children received SSI income. In addition, self-employment income was also checked off on the application. The AU's tax return was found in the AU record and showed that one parent had received \$11,000 in self-employment income from a partnership. The AU was recertified as a semiannual reporting AU, using only the music school earnings.

QC verified that there was self-employment income from the partnership and that the husband received \$200 a month from it

during the school year and \$250 a week in the summer. Neither the husband nor the wife worked at the school during the summer months. Since there was self-employment income reported, the household should not have been on semiannual reporting. This income caused a large overissuance.

What's an AU Manager to Do?

The AU Manager must review each AU to determine the correct reporting requirement the household is subject to, based on income and circumstances. Since this household had self-employment income, the income should have been considered at the time of the recertification. If there were outstanding issues about the self-employment income, the AU Manager should have questioned the AP and requested additional verification as needed. Based on food stamp regulations at 106 CMR 366.110(C), an AU that receives self-employment income is not subject to semiannual reporting.

Shelter

A disabled AP was on both EAEDC and food stamps as a change reporter. At the time of the last recertification (dated 2/25/2005), the BEACON application showed that he paid \$50 per month for rent. The AU was recertified using the \$50 monthly amount. A completed Shared Housing Verification Form was received in the office on March 16, 2005. It showed that the AP paid \$50 a week for rent. A previous certification with the same living arrangement listed the rent as \$50 monthly but there was no other recent rental verification in the AU record. When QC contacted the primary tenant to verify the AP's rental amount, she verified that he had been paying \$50 a week since the last recertification. This caused an underissuance error.

What's an AU Manager to Do?

The AP may have misinformed the AU Manager at the time of the recertification about the amount of rent he paid. The AU Manager should have requested additional verification. In this case, that is exactly what the AU Manager did. Unfortunately, the AU was certified on BEACON before the verification was received. Furthermore, when the verification was received in March, the AU Manager should have responded by changing the shelter amount.

Duplicate Food Stamp Issuance

Recently, FS benefits were issued to an FS AU with the father as the head of household.

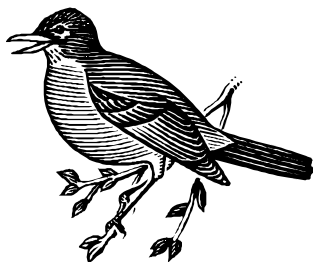
Four days after the monthly FS benefit was issued, the father suddenly left the home, taking the EBT card with him. The mother applied for FS benefits the next day, and a new AU was established for her and the children. The mother and children were closed out of the father's AU, and an overpayment claim was entered on BEACON. Although the AU Manager conscientiously followed through and established an overpayment claim on the father's AU, the mother's AU was later selected in a QC sample and determined to be in error due to duplicate issuance.

What's an AU Manager to Do?

Establishing an overpayment claim was the correct thing to do; unfortunately, this did not eliminate or reduce the error. Food Stamp policy at 106 CMR 362.100 outlines the general rule against duplicate issuances, and 106 CMR 365.550(C) explains that battered women and their children can be an exception to this rule. In this situation, the applicant never claimed to be battered.

The task of assessing the household circumstances and weighing what is in the best interest of the family versus the risk of error is indeed difficult. When faced with similar situations, AU Managers are advised to seek guidance from TAO Management on how to proceed.

Error reminder: An AU was recently reviewed and determined to be an error of \$242. After the QC reviewer realized that the AU was under BSI fraud investigation, the AU was withdrawn from the sample and therefore did not have to be counted as an error. If you have information showing that an AU may be fraudulent, make sure a BSI referral is completed on that AU.



“Friendship with oneself is all important because without it one cannot be friends with anybody else in the world.”

Eleanor Roosevelt

From the Forms File

New Forms

13-300-0206-05

DTA-SORB (02/2006)

Sex Offender Registry Information Request

This form is used to request information from the Sex Offender Registry Board (SORB). The TAO SORB Liaison faxes the completed form to the SORB for the EA AU applicant or at the time of the next reevaluation or whenever questionable information is received on the EA AU recipient. Refer to Field Operations Memo 2006-9 for more information.

13-301-0206-05

DTA-SORB-Log (2/2006)

EA AU Sex Offenders Registry Board Log

The DTA-SORB-Log is used by the TAO SORB Liaison to maintain and monitor all faxes sent to and received from SORB. Refer to Field Operations Memo 2006-9 for more information.

Revised Forms

13-250-0206-05

APP St (Rev. 2/2006)

Applicant's Statement for Emergency Assistance Shelter

The *Applicant's Statement for Emergency Assistance Shelter* (APP-ST) has been revised to ask the applicant if any member of the AU is a Level 2 or Level 3 Sex Offender. It also informs the applicant that every member of the EA AU age 10 and older will be screened for Level 2 or Level 3 sex offender registration status using the Sex Offender Registry. The Spanish version will soon be available.

02-050-0206-05

PV-1 (Rev. 2/2006)

Postal Verification Form

The Agency Control Number has been added to this form. AU Managers must discard old versions of the Postal Verification Form and use the newly revised form.

15-120-0206-05
IRF (Rev. 2/2006)
Interpreter Request Form

The *Interpreter Request Form* (IRF) has been revised to include the AU Manager's name, to remove reference to applicant/recipient Social Security number and to add a new contact name for submission of the IRF.

Electronic Benefits Brochure

Please note that the *Electronic Benefits Brochure* (EBT-TB) is being revised and will soon be available for reordering.

2006 Social Security/SSI COLA Correction

All
Field Operations Memo 2006-2A

Field Operations Memo 2006-2, *2006 Social Security/SSI COLA Update for TAFDC, EA, EAEDC and the Food Stamp Program*, provided TAO staff with information and instructions about the Social Security/SSI COLA Update.

This Field Operations memo transmits a change to an incorrect date on pages 3 and 4 of Field Operations Memo 2006-2.

Requests for Family Shelter: Level Two and Three Sex Offenders

EA
Field Operations Memo 2006-9

Given the increased focus on registered sex offenders living in Massachusetts communities and the safety threat that such persons might pose in a family shelter, effective immediately, TAO staff will be required to determine if any member in the EA AU age 10 and older is listed as a sex offender with the Sex Offender Registry Board (SORB). Placement of the family will not be delayed while awaiting information from SORB. The EA AU member can self-declare or the TAO SORB Liaison can request information from the *Sex Offender Registry Board*.

The Housing & Homeless Services (H&HS) unit needs this information to ensure the appropriate placement of the family in one of their shelters. If, after placement, a family shelter or TAO staff

person discovers that one of the EA AU members is a level 2 or level 3 sex offender, the shelter staff or TAO staff must immediately fax the information to H&HS for review of the current placement and possible transfer of the EA AU.

Food Stamp AUs Closed/Denied in Error

FS
Field Operations Memo
2006-10

The Department determined that there are 89 AUs whose FS benefits were closed or denied in error because of incorrect monthly net income limits in BEACON. These AUs were calculated using the old net income limits (i.e., standards in place before the last FS COLA, effective September 23, 2005). The monthly net income parameters have since been updated in BEACON.

This memo issues procedures for:

- reopening affected AUs listed on the ***Report of AUs Closed or Denied in Error***;
- issuing Related Benefits for the period representing the erroneous closing or denial; and
- sending out the ***Notice to Households Closed or Denied in Error*** to AUs

that remain closed prior to the issuance of this memo or the *Notice to Ongoing Households Closed or Denied in Error* to AUs that were reopened before the issuance of this memo.

ESP – Supported Work: Post-Employment Services

TAFDC
Field Operations Memo
2006-11

Effective February 15, 2006, the ESP Supported Work Component will offer Post-Employment Services (PES). The PES component is a voluntary program to provide current and former recipients with services that lead to career advancement and employment stability. This memo tells TAO staff that no additional referral is needed for this Supported Work component, and explains the length of time participants may attend this component.

Substance Abuse

EA
Field Operations Memo
2006-12

This memo provides updated information to AU Managers, Homeless Coordinators, Intensive Case Managers

(ICM) and shelter providers about substance abuse services available to EA AUs through:

- residential treatment programs;
- sober living programs; and
- Project RISE II.

FYI

BEACON Help Revisions

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

Activity Search List

- Fields & Buttons
- Select a New Activity (“How To”)

Alternate SSN

- Assign TAO-Issued Numbers (“How To”)
- Alternate SSN Identifiers (Pop-up)
- Alternate SSN Tracking Tools (Pop-up)
- Clients with Facsimile/Systems Generated SSNs (View)

Application

- Fields & Buttons
- Complete the Secondary Reasons Window (“How To”)
- Create a Recipient Referral to Vocational Rehabilitation (“How To”)
- Explain Vocational Rehabilitation to the Recipient (“How To”)
- Vocational Rehabilitation/VR (Pop-up)

Assets

- Fields & Buttons
- Assets Questions
- Complete an Assets Question (“How To”)

AU Composition Results - Sanction Tab

- Remove a Sanction for an AP (“How To”)

ESP Activity Disposition

- Fields & Buttons
- Update the EDP on BEACON for a Successfully Completed VR Activity (“How To”)

ESP Component Eligibility

- Fields & Buttons
- Non-EDP Window for FS/WP-required (Button)
- Warnings, Edits & Messages

Income & Expenses

- Fields & Buttons
- Income & Expenses Questions
- Complete an Income & Expenses Question (“How To”)

Learning Disability

- Fields & Buttons
- Learning Disability Referral Tab
- Learning Disability Summary Tab
- Learning Disability Test Tab
- Learning Disability Test Tab Questions
- Complete AU Manager Responsibilities after DES Assessment Results Returned (“How To”)
- Complete the Learning Disability Screening (“How To”)
- Disposition of a New “Yes” Learning Disability Screening Record (“How To”)
- Warnings, Edits & Messages

Member List

- Fields & Buttons

Narratives Tab

- Modify a Sanction for an AP (“How To”)
- Riverside Rule (Pop-up)

Nonfinancials

- Fields & Buttons
- Nonfinancial Questions
- Complete a Nonfinancial Question (“How To”)
- Warnings, Edits & Messages

Program Administration

Question Member Pop-Up

- Warnings, Edits & Messages

Secondary Reasons

- Fields & Buttons
- Warnings, Edits & Messages

Special Situations

- Fields & Buttons
- Warnings, Edits & Messages

Work Requirements

- Administer Meets Compliance (“How To”)

Glossary Terms

Applicant

BPAO

DES

EEC

EITC

LD

MIS

MRC

Narrative

NPA

OCR

PA

Provider/Resource Provider

Recipient

Resource

RFA

FYI

Changes to DTA Online

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

- Administration and Finance

A link entitled *Employee Assistance Program (EAP)* has been added to the list of available options. When selected, the Human Resources Employee Assistance Program website will be displayed.

- Diversity - Events

March has been designated as National Women's History Month. A summary about National Women's History Month can be accessed from the Diversity-Events option.

- Resource Inventories – Employment Resources

A link entitled *Regional Workforce Development* has been added to the list of available options.



FYI

Changes to Policy Online

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

- Online Forms

An updated version of the *Interpreter Request Form* can be accessed from the Online Forms option. Refer to the *From the Forms File* for information about the changes made to the form.

- Online Guides

The *DTA Online Navigation Guide* has been updated to include this month's revisions to DTA Online.

FYI

Meeting the Work Program Requirement through Education or Training Activities

AU Managers are reminded that the following Education or Training activities meet the Work Program requirement for 12 months:

- Skills Training;
- Basic Education (GED, ESL, ABE);
- a Department-approved, non-degree education or training program at a two-year college;
- post secondary education (two-year college degree program); and
- the Young Parent Program (YPP).

FYI

Referrals to Domestic Violence Unit Specialist

AU Managers are reminded that **all** TAFDC, EAEDC and food stamp applicants/recipients are eligible for assistance from a DTA Domestic Violence Specialist, who provides consultation and safety assessments. When an applicant/recipient identifies himself or herself as battered or a dependent child as battered, AU Managers must immediately contact the Domestic Violence Specialist assigned to the TAO.

FYI

Updates to the EOHHS mass.gov DTA Homepage

This month you will see the following changes to the EOHHS mass.gov DTA Homepage.

- Key Resources

A new option entitled *Apply for Food Stamps Online* has been added to the Key Resources section of the DTA Homepage. When selected, the Food Stamp Benefits Summary page is displayed.

Beginning on March 4, 2006, individuals living in the following towns can now apply for food stamp benefits online: Assonet, East Freetown, Fall River, Somerset, Westport and Westport Point. This information and a link to the Virtual Gateway Screening page appear beneath the header *Food Stamp Benefits*.

- News and Updates

A new link entitled *Statewide Homeless Operations Research Environment (SHORE)* has been added to the list of available options. When selected, the SHORE newsletter will be displayed.

- Food Stamps Benefits Summary Page

The English and Spanish versions of the *Request for Authorized Representative-Authorized Agency-Authorized Payee Form* have been added to the Food Stamp Benefits summary page.

FYI

USDA Food Stamp Outreach Radio Campaign

To help increase food stamp participation in Massachusetts, USDA is running outreach messages on a number of radio stations in the Boston, New Bedford, Worcester and Springfield areas. The ads encourage people who are in need to apply for this important nutrition benefit. The ads include the telephone number for the Centralized Eligibility Operations Unit at Central Office to call for information or an application. The number is 1-866-950-FOOD. The ads will run during March and April.

March 2006

Virtual Gateway/ Consumer Face Food Stamp Application

New Initiative Memo

This memo transmits information about the introduction of a consumer version of the Virtual Gateway Food Stamp Application. Launched on March 4, 2006, the application allows residents of the Fall River area to apply for FS benefits on the Internet without the help of a provider agency. The Department plans to work closely with Fall River TAO staff to evaluate the results of this project before expanding it beyond the Fall River area.



Page 10