

Transitions

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this month in...

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From the Commissioner

Dear Fellow Employees,

Each month I try to write to you about an issue of concern to me, a new program or undertaking for which I am seeking your support, or to give you an update on progress we have made in a critical area. My message to you this month is somewhat different. This month I want to recognize the career and accomplishments of Joyce Sampson.

As you know, Joyce has announced her retirement after over 30 years of dedicated service. Joyce, like me, was a social worker in a Boston area office and served in a number of local and central office positions, including Director of Program Assessment and Director of Child Support, as well as being an Operations Manager in Field Operations. But it is her 11 years as Assistant Commissioner for Field Operations on which I want to focus.

Joyce was named Assistant Commissioner for Field Operations in 1990 under Commissioner Gallant. When I became Commissioner in 1996, I was extremely pleased to have Joyce continue in this critically important role. During her tenure Joyce has overseen the implementation of a wide range of major initiatives—implementation of the new EAEDC program, a variety of changes and modifications to Emergency Assistance, the introduction of EBT, a tremendous expansion of matching with state agencies, prisons and other states to ensure program integrity, the consolidation of offices to provide more efficient services to recipients, the overhaul of “welfare as we knew it” in 1995 with Chapter 5 and the TAFDC program, time limits and extensions in 1996 and 1998, the piloting of extended office hours and the myriad of planning and pilot activities which have us moving toward implementation of BEACON.

Continued on Page 3

From the Forms File

Revised Form

Reminder: Discard the old version of any revised form and use the new revised form.

16-020-0401-05

Image-10 (Rev. 4/2001)

Request for Authorized Representative - Authorized Payee

This form has been revised to remind recipients that they must call to stop person(s) from being their Authorized Representative and/or Payee. Failure to do so will continue to give those person(s) access to benefits even if the AU closes and reopens at a later date.

Systems User's Guide Update 149

TAFDC, EAEDC, EA

Volume 3: *SSPS User's Guide*

- Recent changes to the EA program are being reflected in the *SSPS User's Guide*. Several SSPS screens have been modified to accommodate these changes. Procedural changes have also been incorporated into this documentation.
- Other changes include the incorporation of BEACON terminology into the *SSPS User's Guide*.

Changes to the Extension Process - TAFDC

TAFDC

State Letter 1205

This State Letter transmitted the following changes to the Extension Process as a result of the *Smith v. McIntire* lawsuit:

- Eliminating the 35-hour-per-week participation rule; and
- Standardizing the TAFDC financial test of eligibility for extensions.

FYI

A-16 and A-17 Forms

The *Assignment of Third-Party Recovery: A-16* and the *Assignment Information Sheet: A-17* are being revised. The revised forms will have the new address for the Division of Medical Assistance Accident/Trauma Recovery Unit and will be available shortly.

Although the revised forms are not yet available, AU Managers must send any current A-16 and A-17 forms to the new address:

**Division of Medical Assistance
Accident/Trauma Recovery Unit
P.O. Box 15205
Worcester, MA 01615-9906**

Additionally, the local telephone number for the Accident/Trauma Recovery Unit has changed to (508) 856-6381. The toll-free number remains the same: 1-800-754-6381.

A supply of the revised forms will be sent to each Transitional Assistance Office. The forms may be reordered from Document Production in the usual manner. When the revised forms are received, any obsolete forms with the incorrect address should be destroyed.

Systems User's Guide Update 148

FS Volume 1: PACES User's Guide Chapter III: PACES Input Document

- A new Utility Code 9 must be entered in Block 56 (Cd) of the PID to enable PACES to include the homeless shelter/utility deduction in the calculation for food stamp benefits.
- When Utility Code 9 is entered in Block 56 (Cd), a zero (0) entry must be made in Block 54 (Shelter) and Block 55 (Utilities).

BEACON Stress Test: BEACON Release 2.0

All Field Operations Memo 2001-20

This Field Operations Memo informed TAO Staff about the BEACON Stress Test scheduled for April 25, 2001. Results of the Stress Test are used to evaluate response time, user capacity and time needed to complete various activities on BEACON.


Continued from Page 1

These 11 years have seen tremendous change in the Department and the world. Eleven years ago few of us knew what the "Internet" was, and fewer still had knowledge of how to use a PC, never mind having our own at home or at work. The year 2000 seemed distant and somewhat strange. Today almost every employee in the Department has a PC on their desk, we have Internet and Intranet sites and we sailed through the possible pitfalls of Y2K. A DTA (actually a DPW!) office in 1990 would look and operate very differently from a DTA office in 2001. Joyce has managed this sometimes tumultuous change with hard work, dedication and vision.

And no matter what the initiative, Joyce's theme was consistent. First, excellence and high standards in every area for which she was responsible—and demanding the same from her colleagues. Second, tirelessly advocating for local office staff and the challenges faced each and every day. Joyce has always seen the big picture but has never lost sight of the details. She has never hesitated to say "that would be impossible for them to do"; nor has she been reluctant to say "it will be very difficult, but we will figure out how to do it." She has done all of this with grace and humor, never losing sight of the fact that while work is a huge and very important part of all our lives, the private pressures we deal with must also be recognized and acknowledged.

Joyce has set a hard-to-match standard of excellence for her fellow employees. I wish her the very best in this next phase of her life and sincerely thank her for her many contributions and for a job truly well done.

Sincerely,



Claire McIntire
Commissioner

Quality Corner

This month we will review two errors that occurred recently. Even though the dollar error amounts are not always high, the problems continue to occur and can be prevented.

Categorical Eligibility:

An EAEDC AU with categorical eligibility was closed for cash based on receipt of unemployment compensation. The food stamp AU was incorrectly “Devered” to NPA food stamps and continued at \$10 per month, the minimum amount a single person receives when categorically eligible.

Since the food stamp AU was no longer categorically eligible, once the unemployment compensation income was properly entered AND the categorical eligibility indicator (CAT ELG - BLOCK 59) changed to “N” both the EAEDC and food stamp AUs would have closed due to excess income.

What can an AU Manager do? Always ensure that the categorical eligibility indicator is properly coded.

In addition, AUs that receive unemployment compensation are likely to begin a new job, often without notifying the AU Manager in a timely manner. Be aware of a possible new job in these circumstances. That was true in this case, although the job began after the Quality Control review month and did not result in any error. Under other circumstances, however, it could have been an error.

Direct Child Support:

A mother was receiving TAFDC for herself and two children, with SSI for a third child. The father of two of the children (the SSI child and one of the TAFDC children) was paying DOR \$50 per week in child support. She was receiving \$50 per month in DEFRA payments.

As seen on ViewDirect, the mother was receiving \$25 per week directly from DOR for her SSI child, as well as the \$50 monthly DEFRA payment for her TAFDC child. This resulted in a food stamp overissuance since the SSI child’s child support was not properly included in the food stamp case.

What can an AU Manager do? Be sure to check the ViewDirect screen at each certification or recertification. This is especially true for children that are in the family but not included in the grant, such as SSI or

family cap children. In this case, the ViewDirect showed the amount received each week and the amount paid for each child. By properly including this income, errors can be avoided or minimized.

Food Stamp Program - Implementation of the Homeless Shelter/Utility Deduction

FS
State Letter 1204
Field Operations Memo
2001-18

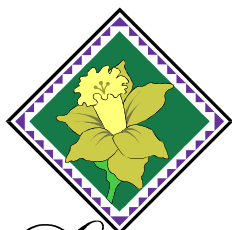
- Food stamp AUs in which all members are homeless (see 106 CMR 360.030 (C)) that incur or can reasonably be expected to incur any shelter and/or utility expenses during a month, no matter how small, are eligible for a \$143 per month Homeless Shelter/Utility Deduction.
- Food stamp AUs receiving the \$143 Homeless Shelter/Utility Deduction are not entitled to use of the food stamp Excess Shelter Deduction (uncapped or currently capped at \$340 per month).

Mislabeled DEFRA Reports

TAFDC Field Operations Memo 2001-19

This Field Operations Memo advises staff that the reports described in Field Operations Memo 2001-14 were mislabeled. Instructions were included on how to correct the names.

- Change the report titled *DEFRA February Food Stamp Underpayments* to OVERPAYMENTS and the column called V payment to overpaid food stamp benefits; and
- Change the report titled *DEFRA February Food Stamp Overpayments* to UNDERPAYMENTS and the column called the overpayment to underpaid food stamp benefits. The AU Manager must issue the underpaid benefits to the recipient.



Spring

A User's Guide: Transitional Assistance Programs and BEACON Update 003

All

This update provides procedures for Address Validation and Household/Person Merge. It also contains a number of changes, additions and corrections.

- In Chapter VIII, Section A, a reference to the number of babies expected was added to the Pregnancy window;
- In Chapter XI, Section A, a reference to the TAFDC Disability procedures in Chapter XIII, Section H was added and a correction regarding the use of the TAFDC-4 was made.
- In Chapter XIII, Section C, the reference to an outdated fax number was eliminated and in Section I, the address for forwarding the A-16 to DMA was changed and references to some data elements on two of the tabs were corrected.
- In Chapter XIV, Section E, a typo was corrected.
- In Chapter XVI, Section C, references to data elements on the Benefit Issuance Mechanism window were corrected.
- Chapter XIX: Case Maintenance was introduced. This chapter covers procedures for specific case maintenance activities. This update introduces Section A: Address Validation and Household/Person Merge and Section C: Adding and Changing Data. Other sections will follow.

BEACON Release 2.0 Pilot Activities - Phase IV

All

Field Operations Memo 2001-21

This memo provides procedures for the following BEACON Release 2.0 Pilot Activities - Phase IV:

- continuing BEACON Pilot Activities in accordance with instructions in 2001-16; and
- performing interactive interviews.

These activities are scheduled for April 30, 2001 through June 14, 2001.

From the Hotline

Q. Some of my recipients have begun to receive income tax refunds. How are the income tax refunds treated for each program?

A. For TAFDC and EAEDC, income tax refunds, exclusive of the Earned Income Credit (EIC) are not counted as income, but are considered a countable asset. However, any portion of a tax refund received as EIC is noncountable as an asset or as income in the month received or the following month, but any remaining portion of the EIC is countable as an asset in the third month. See 106 CMR 204.120(I) and 106 CMR 321.120(I).

For food stamp benefit purposes, income tax refunds are treated as nonrecurring lump sum payments. These payments are counted as an asset in the month received. If the refund includes an EIC portion, the EIC portion is noncountable in the month of receipt and the following month. Any federal, state or local EIC received by an AU member is excluded for 12 months provided the AU member was participating in the Food Stamp Program at the time of receiving the EIC and provided the AU member participates continuously during that 12-month period. See 106 CMR 363.130(E) and 106 CMR 363.140(H).

Q. An 18-year-old dependent child included in his mother's TAFDC assistance unit until his graduation date in June works part time. Do we count any of his income toward food stamp eligibility?

A. Earned income of a student age 18 who attends secondary school or attends GED classes is countable when determining a household's eligibility and benefit level for food stamp benefits. See 106 CMR 363.230 (H).

Q. I have a TAFDC recipient sanctioned for failure to comply with the TAFDC work requirements. Since her TAFDC grant was reduced, does she receive an increase in her food stamp benefits?

A. No. A TAFDC recipient does not receive an increase in food stamp benefits when sanctioned for failure to comply with the TAFDC work requirements. See 106 CMR 365.130 and Field Operations Memo 96-32.

Every

Job

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Good

Job