

# Transitions



A Publication of the Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance

## this month in...

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## From the Commissioner

Dear Colleagues,

As you know, encouraging clients to achieve economic self-sufficiency is one of our Department's overarching goals. Through a variety of dynamic new initiatives and the efforts of DTA employees and community partners, we're finding ways to be more effective in meeting this goal.

Many of you have valuable experience working with clients and are all too familiar with the roadblocks that emerge for individuals on their paths to financial independence; thankfully, these obstacles are more often outnumbered by our clients' countless triumphs and successes.

Staying focused on these triumphs is critically important and finding the right formula for each individual in our caseload is no simple task. It's not easy to reach every client while continually expanding the pool of resources to meet the changing demands of our state's economy. Although we are a major player in this effort, we are not alone. We've marshaled the talents of many across our cities and towns to create better options for our clients. Many of you are helping your clients to take advantage of these exciting programs. Over the past several months, we have:

- Expanded opportunities at several Community Colleges (Middlesex, Holyoke, Roxbury and Bristol);
- Customized a supported work program to help twelve pre-selected families living in the Crittendon-Hastings House find jobs and permanent housing through Project Hope;
- Teamed up with Jewish Vocational Services to provide clients with the training and necessary support to obtain and sustain employment in the hospitality, health care and retail fields;

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- Collaborated with Cambridge College to create a new program which focuses on transitioning homeless and teen parents to housing and employment;
- Bridged the transportation gap in Southbridge and surrounding communities;
- Implemented the expansion of the Family Self-Sufficiency Program in collaboration with nonprofit housing agencies across the Commonwealth;
- Improved access to services for those with behavioral health challenges through the Massachusetts Behavioral Health Partnership;
- Facilitated additional training, job readiness, job placement and post placement support opportunities through the Franklin/Hampshire Employment Training Consortium; and
- Assigned vocational specialists into certain TAOs including Brockton, Dudley Square, Fall River, Holyoke, Lawrence, Lowell, Malden, New Bedford, North Shore, Revere and Springfield State.

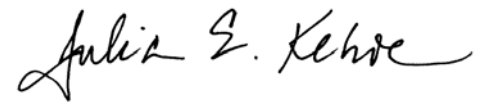
In addition, we have also had the opportunity to recognize the importance of setting an example by serving as a supported work employer. I am especially proud of the launch of our DTA Internship Program, in conjunction with the Corporation for Public Management and the One Family Scholars Program. This initiative fosters client job training and career goals on-site within certain TAOs: Dudley Square, Boston Family Housing, Malden, Newmarket Square and Revere. The reviews about the participants in this program have been resoundingly positive: "His cooperation is stellar," "She's an integral part of our staff," and "She's doing great things for us." One colleague responded simply by stating his intern is "Outstanding!"

Central Office staff will have the opportunity to meet the DTA interns during their orientation training later this month.

Through all of these new initiatives, I am confident our clients will be better served. In the future, we intend to build on the best practices of these new programs based on their successful outcomes and continue to provide our clients with the best possible programs and services. I will appreciate any recommendations you

may have. As always, thank you for your patience, feedback and hard work.

Sincerely,



Julia E. Kehoe, Commissioner

## Quality Corner

This month we will look at two errors, one related to income and the other to shelter expenses.

### Income Error

This NPA household consisted of two adults. At the time of the application, the client reported that she had just been laid off. She applied for food stamp benefits the same day she received her last paystub. The other adult, her boyfriend, was employed, and he provided his last four consecutive pay stubs at this time. The household was approved for a two-month certification period because the client was expected to receive unemployment compensation benefits.

When QC reviewed the case (in the second month of the certification period), the client had already received five unemployment checks. She received three unemployment checks in the first month of the certification period, but failed to report this change to the AU Manager.

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QC also determined that the AU Manager had incorrectly entered the boyfriend's wages by adding a zero income week. The boyfriend had, in fact, received income for that week as indicated by the paystubs in the case record. The combined errors made the case ineligible.

### **What's an AU Manager to Do?**

The client received her first unemployment compensation check within two weeks of the approval of her case. It was her responsibility to report that she had started to receive unemployment compensation. Unfortunately an income match did not appear on BEACON until after the review month. However, since the client had indicated that she expected to receive unemployment compensation, the AU Manager should have asked the TAO designee to check DUA Online to see if the client had started to receive unemployment compensation before processing the case. It is also a good practice to check DUA Online for all

cases with a recent history of earnings.

AU Managers must be careful when entering earned income. It is important to check the dates on the paystubs and the corresponding amounts before entering the income onto BEACON.

### **Incorrect Shelter Deduction in a PA Household**

At the time of the last certification, this Public Assistance food stamp household consisted of a mother who was receiving EAEDC and her daughter and grandchild who were receiving TAFDC. The subsidized rent for the apartment was \$117. The rent was equally divided between the EAEDC household and the TAFDC household. The mother and daughter should each have been allowed \$58.50 monthly rent.

QC reviewed the food stamp case and determined that the daughter's rent had been entered correctly but the mother's had been entered incorrectly as \$58.50 weekly instead of monthly. Entering the mother's rent as weekly caused her rent to amount to \$253.48 per month. This amount, when added to the daughter's rent of \$58.50, caused the total rent used in the food stamp benefit calculation to be \$311.98 rather than \$117 per month. This caused a significant overissuance.

### **What's an AU Manager to Do?**

AU Managers must be careful when selecting the *frequency* of payments or expenses from the dropdown list. An incorrect selection will cause an inaccurate expense and, therefore, an inaccurate deduction and benefit amount. It is also good practice to look at the *Results* window and review the transaction that was just processed to see if the deductions are consistent with the entries made on the window. An inaccuracy, such as an incorrect shelter deduction, would be more readily identified at the time of processing rather than months later after this incorrect entry is already integrated into the record.

### **Reminder about Negative Errors**

QC has recently found a number of cases where the application was denied without an interview being scheduled or a Notice of Missed Interview (NOMI) being sent. AU Managers must schedule appointments for all applications. If the client does not appear for the first appointment, a NOMI must be sent as soon as possible but no later than two days after the missed interview. For more information on sending a NOMI, see Field Operations Memo 2007-16.

## From the Forms File

### Revised Forms

02-559-0508-05

*DVWR (Rev. 3/2008)*

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

This form has been shortened, reformatted and revised. Please discard old versions and use the revised version of this form. The Spanish version will soon be available.

18-440-0408-05

*RMN-1 (Rev. 4/2008)*

*Notice of Returned Mail*

This form has been revised. This form is also available in the *Online Forms* section of *Policy Online - Cross Program*. The Spanish version will soon be available. Please refer to Field Operations Memo 2008-22.

## From the Hotline

- Q.** Are the legally obligated child support payments my food stamp client is making on behalf of his children living apart from the food stamp household excluded from his countable income, or are they considered a deductible expense?
- A.** Once verified, any legally obligated child support payments made by your food stamp client are excluded from his countable income when performing the gross income test of eligibility. For more information on this topic, refer to 106 CMR 363.230(O).

Also, once verified, any legally obligated child support payments made by your client are deducted as an expense from the gross income when determining the food stamp benefit amount. These legally obligated child support payments can include:

- arrearage amounts,
- health insurance, or
- third party obligations (e.g., landlord or utility company).

Refer to 106 CMR 364.400(E) for more information.

For information on how to enter child support payment information in BEA-CON, refer to *A User's Guide: Transitional Assistance Programs and BEA-CON*, Chapter XIV-G.

- Q.** How does my client's child support payment information get verified?
- A.** Documentation of your client's legal obligation to pay child support, the amount of the obligation and the actual amount of his payments is a food stamp requirement. Below are some examples of acceptable verifications.
- Your client's obligation to pay child support and the legally obligated amount of the payments can be verified by court or administrative order, or other legally enforceable agreement.
  - His actual payment(s) can be verified through DOR, or by canceled checks, wage withholding statements, verification of withholding from unemployment

compensation or statements from the custodial parent regarding direct payments or third party payments.

**Note:** Documents verifying your client's legal obligation cannot be used as proof of your client's actual monthly child support payments.

Refer to 106 CMR 361.610(J) for more details.

**Q.** The most recent version of the Landlord Verification Form (LL/VER Rev. 1/2008) no longer includes questions regarding household member information. Must my food stamp client verify household composition?

**A.** No. As long as the household member information reported by your client is not questionable, verification is unnecessary.

If verifying food stamp household composition becomes necessary, refer to 106 CMR 361.610(K) and 106 CMR 366.320(C) for more details.

To be considered questionable, information must be inconsistent with previous statements made by the client, inconsistent with other information on the application or inconsistent with information known or reported to the Department.

For more details on what constitutes questionable information in the Food Stamp Program, refer to 106 CMR 361.620.

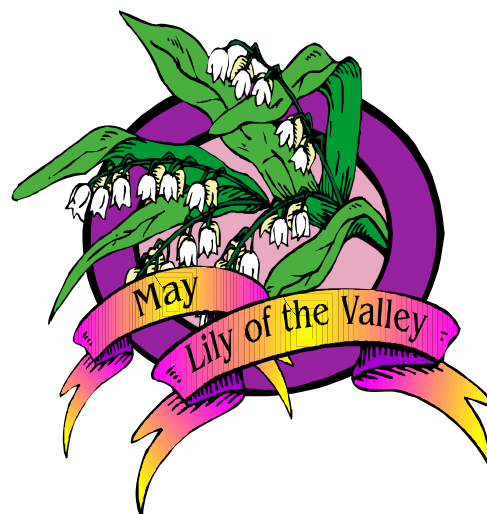
## Treatment of the Federal Economic Stimulus Payment

All  
Field Operations Memo 2008-18

Starting in May, the federal government began issuing an Economic Stimulus payment to many taxpayers pursuant to the Economic Stimulus Act of 2008. Some people who are not normally required to file taxes, including low-income workers, recipients of Social Security benefits, recipients of certain Veterans benefits and recipients of certain Railroad Retirement benefits may be eligible as well, if they file a federal tax return.

Some TAFDC, EAEDC, EA and food stamp applicants and clients may qualify for and receive the stimulus payment.

This memo issues instructions on how to treat the economic stimulus payment for DTA program purposes.



## **Restoration of Monthly Migration Process for SSI/FS Households**

FS

Field Operations Memo 2008-19

Prior to the implementation of the Bay State CAP waiver, SSI/FS cases migrated each month into and out of the former Regional SSI/FS offices. The migration process was stopped as part of the Bay State CAP implementation. To enable the staff of the Malden Centralized SSI Office to handle the increased number of cases due to conversion and outreach efforts as well as enhancement of Bay State CAP processing, migration has not occurred since July 2005.

On April 4, 2008 the migration process was reinstated. This memo discusses both the initial and monthly migration process.

## **CEO Special Match Unit: Case Closings Due to Failure to Verify for the IRS Match**

All

Field Operations Memo 2008-21

This Field Operations Memo:

- informs AU Managers about case closings initiated by the Special Match Unit due to clients' failure to verify information for the IRS Match; and
- provides instructions to AU Managers for responding to clients as a result of the case closings.

## **Returned Mail Procedural Changes**

All

Field Operations Memo 2008-22

This memo explains changes to how AU Managers process client mail returned to the TAOs. These revisions are designed to minimize confusion for clients, avoid unnecessary termination of benefits to clients residing in Massachusetts, and eliminate unnecessary work for AU Managers. The procedures outlined in this memo do not apply to TBA and USR cases. This memo obsoletes Field Operations Memo 2007-57.

## **Spring 2008 Food Stamp Heat and Eat (H-EAT) Program Update**

All

Field Operations Memo 2008-24

This memo announces the issuance of the Heat and Eat (H-EAT) fuel assistance benefit for April 2008. It reviews the H-EAT Program criteria, explains the responsibilities of DTA and the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD), discusses ongoing H-EAT clients and describes the revised DHCD client brochure.

## **Supplemental Nutrition Assistance (SNA)**

FS

State Letter 1334  
Field Operations Memo 2008-25

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program provides a work incentive benefit to certain Non-Public Assistance (NPA) food stamp households in addition to their regular NPA food stamp benefit. These households will remain eligible for this benefit as long as they continue to meet the criteria of the program or until the SNA Program is terminated.

State Letter 1334 transmits the regulations for establishing a

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance benefit for certain households receiving NPA food stamp benefits.

This memo describes the eligibility criteria for the SNA benefits and provides guidance to AU Managers on answering client questions about the program.

### **Eligibility of Iraqi and Afghan Noncitizens with Special Immigration Status for TAFDC and Food Stamps**

TAFDC, FS  
Field Operations Memo  
2008-26

Due to recent legislative changes, certain Iraqi and Afghan special immigrants are eligible for public assistance programs such as TAFDC and food stamps.

This memo:

- describes which households are eligible for benefits;
- explains the duration of eligibility for benefits;
- identifies acceptable verifications of special immigrant status; and
- transmits procedures for processing applications for these households.

## **FYI**

### **Intercepts Due to Outstanding Arrearages**

AU Managers are reminded that the federal government regularly intercepts certain federal payments made to clients and former clients - such as income tax refunds - to offset outstanding client food stamp debts. The federal Economic Stimulus payment described in Field Operations Memo 2008-18 is also subject to intercept for these debts. If a client calls inquiring about a reduction or loss of an Economic Stimulus payment, refer the client to the Fraud Investigations and Recoveries Unit at 1-800-462-2607 for information regarding the intercept.

## **FYI**

### **NEWMMIS**

The Medicaid Management Information System (MMIS) will be replaced with a new application entitled NewMMIS. NewMMIS is scheduled for deployment on September 29, 2008.

Features include:

- NEWMMIS will be web-based rather than a mainframe application;
- Each individual in a household will have his or her own MassHealth Card;
- The Recipient Eligibility Verifications System (REVS) will be integrated as part of NewMMIS; and
- The MassHealth Card replacement process will change but responsibility for replacing MassHealth Cards and temporary MassHealth Cards will not change.

As information becomes available, you will receive monthly updates on the development of NEWMMIS, training and the mailing of the new MassHealth Cards.

“I have learned over the years that when one’s mind is made up, this diminishes fear; knowing what must be done does away with fear.”

Rosa Parks

## FYI

### Relocation Benefits Qualifications

Please remember that TAFDC or EAEDC families, as well as teen parents, may be eligible for up to \$1,000 in Relocation Benefits for securing permanent housing if the family has been in temporary shelter for 60 days or more.

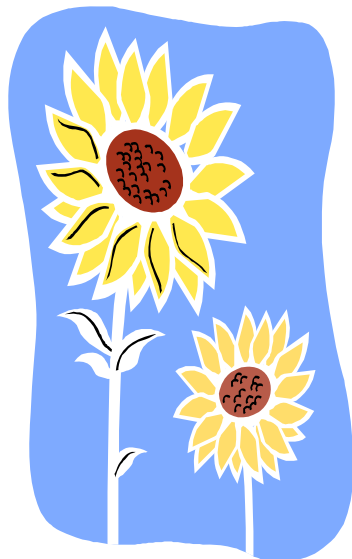
Examples of clients who meet the requirements specified in 106 CMR 705.350 and who may be eligible for this benefit, include, but are not limited to, those moving out of:

- transitional shelter;
- teen structured living programs;
- domestic violence shelters;
- EA funded shelters;
- non-EA funded shelters; and
- domestic violence transitional living programs.

The Relocation Benefit is considered an excluded vendor payment for Food Stamp Program purposes in accordance with 106 CMR 363.230.

For more information on how to issue the Relocation Benefit, refer to the *EA User's Guide*, pages VI-8 and VI-9.

If you have any questions, please have your Hotline designee call the Policy Hotline at 617-348-8478.



# M

# A

# Y



## **FYI**

### **Reminder: Helping Applicants and Clients Experiencing Domestic Violence Verify Eligibility**

AU Managers must remember to help applicants and clients obtain required verifications, if they are unable to obtain verifications for reasons beyond their control. AU Managers must also remember to allow additional time and to give additional help to applicants and clients who have identified themselves as having trouble providing verifications due to Domestic Violence (DV), if specific documentation, such as a birth record to prove relationship, is taking more time than normally required (10 days) or would put the applicant or client at risk.

AU Managers should consult with the DV Specialist who will work with the AU Manager to help the applicant/client obtain verifications, including alternative methods of verifications and self-declarations.

The AU Manager may refer to the complete list of preferred and alternate verification methods displayed on the BEACON Verification tab for verifying a particular eligibility requirement.

Refer to 106 CMR 702.310 and 106 CMR 702.311 for more information on verification responsibilities for TAFDC and EAEDC, and 106 CMR 361.650 on verification responsibilities for the Food Stamp Program.

## **FYI**

### **Voter Registration Timely Return of Enrollment Forms**

AU Managers are reminded that any person who comes to the TAO, is a U.S. citizen, is age 18 or older or will be age 18 on or before the next election and wants to register to vote must be given the Voter Registration Form to complete. Once completed by the client, the white portion of the form must be returned by the TAO within five days to the local election official in the city or town where the applicant lives. This will ensure timely processing by the Election Commission in that city or town.

