

# T Transitions



*A Publication of the Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance*

## *this month in...*

### *Transitions*

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## *From the Commissioner*

Dear Fellow Employees,

Change has been the order of the day for the last several months. And frankly, change will continue to be a theme for all of us over the coming months. Some of that change has not been easy and I recognize that. But change is often constructive and positive. There are two initiatives I want to share with you that focus on change in a positive way.

You may remember in the summer of 2001 there was a statewide initiative, the Managing for Results Initiative (MRI), which promoted concrete improvement in state government through the involvement of all employees. Employees were actively encouraged to submit ideas for looking at the work of their agency with a fresh perspective. Since starting this initiative, employees in 83 agencies identified 778 recommendations to improve government operations. These recommendations are in various stages of implementation or, in some instances, the reality of the current fiscal situation has forced a reevaluation of whether the idea can be implemented at this time. But the issue is not whether or not an idea will be implemented; the issue is that 778 people took the time to think about what their agency does or should do and shared their opinion and ideas. You can view the results of the recommendations for DTA and all other state agencies by visiting the MRI web site at <http://www.mass.gov/eoaf/mri/> and clicking on MRI recommendations.

On a smaller scale and much closer to home, I have asked Assistant Commissioner Cescia Derderian to take the lead on developing a plan for redesigning how we do business at the local office level.

## From the Hotline

**Q.** I have read Field Operations Memo 2002-20 regarding disabled noncitizens, and I noticed that PRO decision code 120 is now acceptable to identify a disability for food stamp purposes. Is code 120 acceptable only for disabled **noncitizens** or is the code now an acceptable disability code for other food stamp recipients as well?

**A.** PRO decision code 120 is now acceptable to identify a disability for any food stamp recipient who is otherwise eligible for benefits. For more information on this topic, see ***A User's Guide: Transitional Assistance Programs and BEACON***, section XIII-H, pages 53-54.

**Q.** Last month's Hotline Focus detailed the two exceptions for authorizing an EA benefit more than once in a 12-month period. An exception exists if 1) the AU leaves temporary emergency shelter for permanent housing and loses that housing prior to the expiration of the 12-month period and shows a continued need for emergency shelter by demonstrating that the housing did not meet the definition of safe or permanent housing when the AU moved into it; or 2) the AU needs temporary emergency shelter benefits and the EA benefit received within the past 12 months was an EA rental arrearage payment. Refer to 106 CMR 309.020(K) for details.

I now have an EA AU that has been in a shelter for 12 months. What are the procedures I should be following in this case?

**A.** If EA shelter benefits have been provided for 12 continuous months, you must complete another EA-1 for another authorization number and submit it to SSPS. The EA-1 must be entered on SSPS within seven days of the date entered in block 11 (Authorization Date) on the EA-1. Then, complete another SSPS invoice for continued billing purposes and submit it for SSPS data-entry for another control number. ***This is considered a continuance of EA benefits, not a reapplication.***

Refer to the ***EA User's Guide***, page II-9 for further details.

**Q.** I recently took a TAFDC application on a father who is an eligible legal permanent resident as he arrived in the United States over five years ago. However, his **only** child is an ineligible legal permanent resident (LPR); her LPR status was granted in 2001. Can I approve this TAFDC application?

**A.** Yes. This TAFDC application may be approved as an AU of one consisting of the father. The child in this AU is a dependent child (refer to 106 CMR 203.560) but is ineligible due to her noncitizen status. Refer to 106 CMR 203.675 (A)(2) and the Noncitizen Desk Guide for more details.

## Child Support

TAFDC

State Letter 1240

***A User's Guide: Transitional Assistance Programs and BEACON Update 035***

- A TAFDC applicant keeps all child support payments until the AU or the child is authorized to receive TAFDC benefits.
- The amount of child support received, excluding support for a family cap child and a special manually calculated DEFRA amount, will be deducted from the initial TAFDC benefits.
- Upon authorization of TAFDC benefits for the child, the child support payments must be paid directly to DTA by the TAFDC recipient or the absent parent.



## ***Direct Deposit***

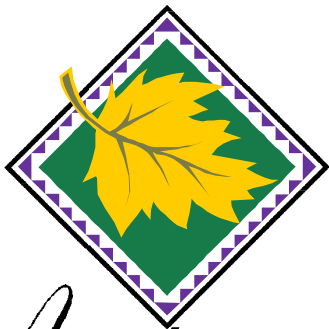
### **TAFDC, EAEDC *A User's Guide: Transitional Assistance Programs and BEACON* Update 034**

Direct Deposit is now mandatory for any grantee who has a bank account, unless he or she has an exemption. Failure to meet this requirement will result in the grantee being sanctioned. This update highlights procedures for placing the grantee on Direct Deposit as well as sanctioning the grantee for failure to meet this requirement.

Additional sections are being updated to reflect how the Notice of Multiple Reasons for Ineligibility (NMRI) is generated for a person with two or more sanctions.

"The work goes on, the cause endures, the hope still lives and the dreams shall never die."

Edward Kennedy



*Autumn*

Continued from Page 1

This effort is prompted by the recent loss of staff and closing of offices but more importantly by a recognition that we need to step back and really reevaluate how business is done and what supports may be required from central office to ensure that we are being efficient, practical and accurate while delivering needed services to our recipients.

The review will focus on three areas. The first, service delivery and staffing, will look at how to best utilize staff skills to deliver services. Our offices are different places than they were two or three years ago and we have to figure out how to best operate them. The second area is policy and procedural issues but deals with a much broader spectrum than we normally associate with "policy and procedure." It includes such things as how we issue EBT cards and how we report time and attendance, as well as the more traditional areas. The third area is MIS supports. We are now more than a year into BEACON implementation and are well beyond the implementation issues which concerned us a year ago. It is time to look at how MIS supports can simplify and streamline the day-to-day operation of offices.

While the initial focus is on local office activities, I plan to expand this review to include central office activities. The ideas generated at the local level will impact and inform the central office activities. I need all employees to think about this review and to be involved. As ideas are developed they will be shared. But you do not need to wait. If you have an idea for an improvement, share it with your manager. Each and everyone of you needs to be aware of what is happening and to be involved. The MRI and the review initiative will succeed because they are your initiatives. Thank you for your support.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John Wagner".

John Wagner  
Commissioner

## Quality Corner

This month we have a highly unusual situation – three errors in the same case. Combined, they added up to \$288 in food stamps overpaid to the household. The errors in this one case result in an increase of about one-quarter point in the annual statewide error rate.

### ***The Circumstances:***

The AU initially certified in December 2000 with a mother and her five children. Their rent was \$550 including utilities and they received both TAFDC and food stamps. The recertification process started in March 2002, at which time the father of the children was in the home and working. Verifications were requested for the father's employment, the rent/SUA, and other items as appropriate.

### ***The Errors:***

1. While the AU Manager began the certification in March, it was never completed. Verifications were requested but never returned. No new certification dates were established, no changes were made to include the father in the eligibility determination for either TAFDC or food stamps. The rent and all benefit payments remained unchanged. Since the recertification was overdue, QC rules do not allow certain unreported changes to be ignored. Consequently, several errors that would not have counted if the recertification had been completed must be included in the error rate.
2. The AU Manager was aware that the father was back in the household and asked for verification of his income. The AU Manager did not, however, track that the verification was received. Because he was working full-time, his income was large enough to cause a substantial error.
3. The rent increased and the household was required to pay some utilities. The mother, therefore, was entitled to the non-heating SUA. This was never changed, even though the recertification form indicated the new amount.

### ***What Can an AU Manager Do?***

Clearly, this is an extraordinary situation. It is highly unusual that a certification began but was never completed. At the same time,

however, this case illustrates the point that circumstances change, especially when the AU is given a twelve-month certification. Few, if any, AUs go that long without at least some change in their circumstances. It also illustrates the point that requesting verifications and acting upon them can be effective in reducing error. In this case, the head of the household provided the requested verifications to the QC reviewer willingly. Completing this loop – requesting information that is required or questionable and then acting upon the reported information – is probably the most effective way to eliminate recipient-caused errors. In this case, not completing the work resulted in a significant error finding.

***Happy  
Thanksgiving  
from the staff  
of Policy, Procedure and  
Program Management***



## ***FYI***

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

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

#### ***FMCS Codes Window***

The following FMCS data element options have been added to the FMCS Codes window:

- Deduct Codes
- Group Codes - EAEDC
- Group Codes - TAFDC
- Program Codes.

When an option is selected, the corresponding definitions will be displayed. Additional FMCS data element options will continue to be added in the following months.

#### ***AU Processing - Fourth Quarter-Case Closing and Reduction Schedule***

The benefit date for Social Security Numbers ending in seven for the second cycle in December 2002 has changed from 12/26 to 12/24.

#### ***BEACON Todays Issued in October 2002***

BT 97 Food Stamp Program Accuracy Issues (10/16/02)

BT 98 Work Program Related Reminders (10/29/02)

## ***Disability***

TAFDC, EAEDC FS

### ***A User's Guide: Transitional Assistance Programs and BEACON Update 033***

The section on Disability has been revised and updated. The changes and additions include:

- a new section containing the revised functionality of the Disability window;
- references to the functionality of the Disability window throughout the section as it relates to TAFDC, EAEDC and the Food Stamp Program;
- how to track the client's progress through the disability process using the four tabs on the Disability window;
- removal of references to the PRO Disability Coordinators;
- the appropriate usage of the TAFDC Good Cause Medical Statement (TAFDC-GCMS) for applicants and recipients;
- added language that a PRO decision about an individual's disability that meets or equals SSI standards using vocational standards (Decision Code 120) is acceptable for food stamp disability criteria; and
- at the end of each Program section common scenarios relating to the specific program to assist AU Managers with processing the disability claim.

The TAFDC Work Requirements section is also being updated with revised Good Cause Policy Citations.

#### ***Department Obligations Under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)***

All

State Letter 1238, State Letter 1238 A

- This State Letter transmits revisions to Department regulations outlining how the Department interprets and implements the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) in the cash assistance programs, food stamp program and fair hearing rules.
- State Letter 1238 A issued a technical correction.



# ***FYI***

## ***Child Care Authorizations***

Reminder: Per State Letter 1225, ESP policy no longer provides child-care services for:

- a grandparent who is an ineligible TAFDC grantee and requests child-care services for the TAFDC grandchild because the grandparent is working or in training; or
- a nonrecipient teen parent who is in high school or a GED program living with his or her parent and requests child-care services for his or her child.

The grandparent or the teen parent may not be given a child-care authorization by DTA.

If child-care services are requested, give the grandparent or teen parent a referral to the CCR&R where the person may request child care services.

## ***Elimination of the Supplemental Transitional Aid to Families with Dependent Children (STAFDC) Program: Ongoing Noncitizens***

STAFDC  
Field Operations Memo 2002-18 A

The FY 03 budget required the elimination of the STAFDC Program. This program was eliminated for new applicants as of August 5, 2002.

Field Operations Memo 2002-18 (issued August 5, 2002) gave initial procedures for processing assistance units (AUs) and assessed persons (APs) who were applicants (noncitizens) impacted by the elimination of this program.

Field Operations Memo 2002-18A gives instructions for processing ongoing AUs and APs impacted by the elimination of the STAFDC Program.



## ***Noncitizen Changes in the TAFDC Program***

TAFDC  
State Letter 1239

A noncitizen is eligible for TAFDC if he or she:

- has a current noncitizen status of Legal Permanent Resident, Parolee or Conditional Entrant and that status was granted on or after 8/22/96; and
- entered the U.S. before 8/22/96. This includes someone who was in the U.S. lawfully or unlawfully; and
- has been continuously present in the U.S. from the date of the latest entry prior to 8/22/96 until the status was granted.

