Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Executive Office of Health and Human Services
Department of Transitional Assistance

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Operations Memo 2014-43
June 11, 2014

To: **Department of Transitional Assistance Staff**

From: **Lydia Conley, Assistant Commissioner for Policy, Program and External Relations**

Re: **SNAP, TAFDC and EAEDC: BEACON Customer Concern Tracking System**

Overview

The US Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) requires States to maintain records and the dispositions of complaints received from potential applicants, applicants, clients and other concerned individuals or groups. The data collected will be used to analyze patterns of complaints so that action can be taken. Cash program regulations also provide instructions for staff to respond to client complaints. With BEACON Build 46.3, scheduled for June 16, 2014, Customer Concern pages will be added to BEACON for all TAO managers, supervisors, case managers and certain Central Office staff to enter, update and disposition incoming concerns.

Although TAOs and the Central Office Ombudsman already track
Although TAOs and the Central Office Ombudsman already track incoming concerns, the BEACON system will provide a comprehensive database of all concerns statewide. The modifications in BEACON will meet the SNAP and cash program requirements and will aid the Department in documenting and analyzing concerns in order to make customer-focused improvements.

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Purpose of Memo

This Operations Memo introduces the BEACON-based Customer Concern pages and includes details about:

- new BEACON pages – *Customer Concern Search* and *Customer Concern;*
- three new Customer Concern views: Pending Concerns, Pending Concerns Statewide and Closed Concerns;
- DTA staff responsibilities;
- Customer Concern examples; and
- addressing civil rights complaints which will be handled separately in Central Office and may also be handled by the USDA or the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Customer Concern Purpose

The Customer Concern pages will be used by TAO managers, supervisors, and case managers, as well as Central Office staff to enter concerns from clients, government agencies, elected officials, the advocate community and others.

Important: Information requests and questions that are easily answered do not need to be entered on the Customer Concern pages.

The system will provide a comprehensive database from which DTA management will aggregate and analyze concerns communicated to the Department. The data will be used to make decisions about improvements to business processes and customer service.

BEACON Changes

The following BEACON changes were made to support this initiative:

- Customer Concern menu selection was added to the My Office tab in BEACON.
- A new Customer Concern Search page was added. This page is where existing concerns are accessed and queries can be performed on the Customer Concern data.
- A new Customer Concern page was added. This page is used to enter new concerns, add narratives on the Notes tab and disposition concerns.
- Three new Customer Concern views have been added to BEACON:
    - *Pending Concerns* – will display an individual user's pending concerns, including those entered by the user and pending concerns assigned to the user.
    - *Pending Concerns Statewide* – will display all pending concerns in the system for viewing by TAO managers, Regional Directors and for certain Central Office staff.

BEACON Changes (Continued)

- *Closed Concerns* – a user's closed concerns will display here, and for those with statewide access, all Closed Concerns will display.

The fields displayed are the same for all three views: Source, Type, Reason, Filed (date), Filed By, Assigned, Concern (ID number), Client (name), SSN, TAO, and Case Manager.

Establishing a New Concern: Case Manager Responsibilities

If the concern is not already logged, the user must select the Customer Concern menu on the My Office tab to access the Customer Concern Search page to establish a new concern:

- Enter any of the available fields and click on Search to determine if a concern already exists;
- Click on New to initiate a new concern if appropriate.
- The Client Search will be displayed to determine if the concern is for a client.

The Customer Concern page is comprised of two tabs: Concern and Notes. The Concern tab is where the details of an initial concern are entered into fields. The Concern tab containing fields about the initial concern is referred to as the Customer Concern page.

The user must complete the following fields on the top section of the Customer Concern page as details are available:

Source – the type of the individual who contacts the Department, i.e., client, authorized representative, advocate, etc. **Note**: Anonymous is an option.

Reason – identifies a specific *primary* reason for the concern. Examples: Lost verifications, Case closing, Scheduling.

Secondary Reasons - opens a multi-select page listing all reasons. Examples: Lost verifications, Case closing, Scheduling. Secondary reasons are optional.

Program - opens a multi-select page listing all programs.

Status - defaults to "pending" until the concern is dispositioned and closed. Closed concerns will be viewable to those who initiated or were assigned the concerns.

Establishing a New Concern: Case Manager Responsibilities **(Continued)**

Filed By – populates the name of the user who initially entered the concern.

Filed **-** populates the initial date the concern was entered.

Assigned – populates the name of the user currently assigned to the concern. When a concern is first created, the assigned user is the same as the "Filed By" user. The assigned user is responsible for resolving the concern or reassigning it to another user for resolution. This field will control which user will see the concern in the Pending Concerns view.

Reassign – If necessary, a user can enter another DTA staff person's name, and the concern will become the responsibility of the assignee for addressing and dispositioning the concern. There is no limit to the number of times a concern may be reassigned.

Note: Only a manager or supervisor may reassign a concern from one user to another.

<u>Origination Section</u>
The Origination section is used to capture contact information about the source of the concern. In this section, the user enters the name of the person raising the concern, their phone number, and an email address, if available.

This section also includes an Office field to be completed if the concern comes from a legislator's office. When the Source is a legislator, the phone number will be automatically populated with the legislator's phone number.

It is also possible to log concerns that are made anonymously, as none of the fields in the Origination section are mandatory. However, the user should attempt to get contact information from the individual raising the concern to ensure that the resolution can be communicated.

<u>Client Section</u>
If the user has already entered client information on the Customer Concern Search Page, and the client is known to BEACON, the client information will prepopulate this section. The client search/detail pages will be available to select a client not previously chosen.

Name– Last Name followed by First Name.

SSN – Individual's SSN or temporarily-assigned identification number.

Phone – Individual's phone number.

AP ID – Individual's Assessed Person's identification number.

Authorized Rep – Individual's authorized representative or payee.

Establishing a New Concern: Case Manager Responsibilities (Continued)

Phone - Authorized representative or payee's phone number.

Office – TAO to which the case is assigned.

Case manager – case manager to which case is assigned.

When the user clicks Save, BEACON will assign a unique number to the Customer Concern. The number is located at the top of the Customer Concern page above the Concern and Notes tabs.

<u>Notes tab</u>
The Notes tab, similar to the Narrative Tab, is used to enter narrative updates and to attach documents related to the concern. In the case of a concern with more than one reason selected, additional disposition information can be entered on the Notes tab.

Any staff person who is assigned or reassigned the concern can enter notes on this page. All entered notes are permanent and become part of the Customer Concern historical information.

Locating a Concern: Case Manager Responsibilities

The Customer Concern Search page is used to search for an existing Customer Concern. It is important to search for pending concerns before establishing a new one for the same concern in order to avoid duplicate entries. When users click on the Customer Concern Search page link, a blank Customer Concern Search page opens, similar to the existing Client Search page.

- The Search page defaults to the Social Security Number field. The user may enter the SSN or temporarily-assigned identification number in the SSN field, **or**
- Select one of the other search criteria radio buttons (i.e., Concern Details, Personal, AP ID) and enter the relevant data.
- Click the Search button.
- From the result field, click on the blue box next to a Customer Concern record, then click the *c*? icon.

The results returned by the Search function will depend on the user's access rights. Most users will be able to view only the concerns they have entered into the system and concerns to which they have been assigned. TAO managers, Regional Directors and certain Central Office staff will have a statewide view, allowing them to see all concerns matching the given criteria.

Dispositioning a Client Concern: Case Manager Responsibilities

The Resolution section is where a disposition reason must be selected to close the concern. Once a reason is selected, the *Status* field will change to Closed. Disposition reasons are limited to:

- Case closed or denied correctly;
- Error corrected;
- Existing policy/regulation;
- Manager addressed issue;
- Provided requested update; and
- Referred to appropriate agency.

Although a Primary and Secondary concern reason can be entered for a concern, the disposition reason chosen relates to the primary concern reason only.

Timeframes for resolution

Any concerns that cannot be dispositioned within 24 hours of the initial entry require an initial written update in the Notes tab, such as *confirmed in BEACON and DTA sent Recertification form on 6/4/2014*. Most concerns should be dispositioned and closed within three business days. TAO and certain Central Office managers will have full access to view, update and disposition all concerns. If concerns are not resolved within three business days, the manager for the office in which the concern is assigned should follow-up on concerns and close them.

If a DTA staff person enters a concern and is then scheduled to be out of the office, the concern should be reassigned to another staff person who can disposition and close the concern.

Note: Any time action is taken on a concern, the user must annotate the Notes tab accordingly.

TAO Staff Responsibilities

The Department must maintain records and the dispositions of complaints received from potential applicants, applicants, clients and other concerned individuals or groups. The data collected will be used to analyze patterns of complaints so that action can be taken.

Important: Information requests and questions that are easily answered do not need to be entered.

TAO Staff Responsibilities:
Case Manager Responsibilities

Case managers must enter concerns into BEACON whenever clients:

- say they want to file a complaint;
- raise concerns about DTA services, programs or about how they have been treated; and
- express displeasure about DTA policies and procedures.

Supervisor Responsibilities

Supervisors must enter concerns into BEACON whenever the same concern reported by the same person is not already Pending or when:

- issues are brought to a supervisor's attention, and the issue is not an information request but a concern;
- a supervisor's intervention is needed because there is a concern about DTA services, programs, policies or procedures; and
- advocates or other external stakeholders contact the agency on behalf of a client or to express a concern.

Manager Responsibilities

Managers must enter all concerns that have not already been entered.

Customer Concern Examples

Example 1: A case manager is talking to Mrs. Holland who complains about feeling unsafe in the office's loud and busy waiting area. The client insists that she should not be required to wait to be seen by a case manager and asks to speak to a manager. The case manager has entered the initial concern with a reason of "Physical Plant/Location," annotates the Notes tab and she reassigns it to her manager. The manager resolves the issue by having another conversation with the client and enters a disposition reason of "Manager addressed issue" on the Customer Concern page. The manager then makes an entry on the Notes tab.

Example 2: Mrs. O'Leary is a SNAP-only client who has requested a DTA child care referral. The case manager explains that this benefit is not available to her as a SNAP-only client, although she may be eligible for income-eligible child care through her local Child Care Resource & Referral agency. Mrs. O'Leary insists that she is entitled to this benefit as a working, taxpaying mother struggling to make ends meet and demands to speak to the case manager's "boss." The case manager logs the complaint as "Policy/Regulation – Program", annotates the Notes tab and reassigns it to her supervisor. The manager resolves the issue by explaining the policy to the client, offering fair hearing information, and entering a disposition reason of "Existing policy/regulation." The supervisor then makes an entry on the Notes tab.

Civil Rights Complaints

The Customer Concern page records and stores general concerns. Civil Rights concerns are tracked and addressed separately. Civil Rights is a selectable reason on the Reason drop-down list on the Customer Concern page. **Any time a user selects Civil Rights, the concern will be automatically reassigned to the DTA Legal Unit and will be handled by that unit.**

DTA is required by law to record all complaints related to civil rights. Whenever a DTA staff person receives information that clients are alleged to be mistreated on the basis of a protected class (e.g., race, religion, national origin, disability, etc.), the staff person **must select Civil Rights as the Primary reason for the concern**. BEACON, in turn, will automatically re-assign the concern to the DTA Legal Unit with the attached concern details.

Staff must inform SNAP clients and/or their representative that they may also choose to contact the USDA/FNS directly with civil rights concerns. Clients may:

- complete the USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form, found online or at any USDA office;
- call (866) 632-9992 to request a complaint form;
- write a letter containing all of the information requested in the form to USDA, Director, Office of Adjudication, 1400 Independence Avenue, S.W., Washington, D.C. 20250-9410;
- send a fax to (202) 690-7442; or
- email a complaint to program.intake@usda.gov.

TAFDC clients should also be informed about their right to file a complaint of discrimination to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) by writing to the HHS Director, Office for Civil Rights, Room 515-F, 200 Independence Avenue, S.W., Washington, D.C. 20201; or by calling (202) 619-0403 (voice) or (800) 537-7697 (TTY).

Civil Rights Complaints (Continued)

Violations of civil rights include discrimination based on: all or part of an individual's income being derived from any public assistance program; age; color; disability; familial or parental status; gender identity; marital status; national origin; political beliefs; protected genetic information; race; religion; reprisal; sex; or sexual orientation. Massachusetts also prohibits discrimination based on ancestry.

Civil Rights Example: A Central Office Ombudsman is speaking with Ms. Rodrigues, a SNAP client, about her benefit amount. Ms. Rodrigues states that her belief that the Department intentionally lowered her benefits because she is a single mother. The staff person realizes the client is making a civil rights complaint. The staff person informs the client of her right to make a civil rights complaint directly to USDA/FNS, the Department or both agencies. When the client says she want to make it directly to the Department, the staff person establishes "Civil Rights" as the Primary reason.

An attorney in the Legal Division reviews the concern, contacts the client, and determines that there was no civil rights violation. The attorney enters a note about the client conversation on the Customer Concern page Notes tab. The complaint is dispositioned "Existing policy/regulation" on the Customer Concern page and the Notes tab is amended.

If staff is unsure if a complaint is related to civil rights, they are advised to err on the side of caution and select Civil Rights as a primary or secondary concern reason. Consulting with a TAO manager for guidance is also recommended.

Central Office Staff Responsibilities

Central Office staff will enter concerns and notes on the Customer Concern pages in the same manner that TAO staff do. This data will be combined with the concerns received locally into one comprehensive database.

Office Posters

All TAOs have posters in their waiting rooms with DTA's *To File Complaint* instructions. Additional copies may be ordered through Document Production.

Job Aid

A BEACON Customer Concern Tracking System Procedural Job Aid will be available on DTA Online under Training in the near future.

Policy References

SNAP: 106 CMR 360.220; 7 CFR 246.8, 271.6(a)(3) and 272.6
TCAP: 106 CMR 706.100; 706.130; 706.140; 706.150

Questions

If you have any questions, please have your Hotline designee call the Policy Hotline.