

Dear Fellow Employees,

“The achievements of an organization are the result of the combined efforts of each individual.”

-Vincent Lombardi

Over the past few months, many of you have been hearing about the *Online Virtual Gateway* to programs offered by the Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS). The initiative is up and running and was publicly launched by Governor Romney at a press conference on September 16. You can look at the details of the *Virtual Gateway* by going to the EOHHS web page at the Commonwealth of Massachusetts' website, www.mass.gov. The *Virtual Gateway* creates connections between social service-related programs across Massachusetts. It is designed to streamline access to the services and benefits in the following programs: Food Stamps, Child Care, MassHealth, Substance Abuse, WIC, the Women's Health Network and Early Intervention. With this new online tool, we intend to further increase food stamp participation by enhancing program information and application availability.



Food Stamp Program eligibility has not been changed by this initiative, but the *Virtual Gateway* will alter the benefit landscape by creating a place where people can access and apply for more than one benefit program at one time. Beyond a common, online intake form, the initiative also features online program description catalogs and general eligibility screening tools. As of this writing, six public sites located in the greater Boston area have been selected for the completion of the online intake form: Massachusetts General Hospital, St. Francis House, Joseph Smith Community Health Center, Community Care for Kids, Pine Street Inn and Boston Medical Center. In the MetroWest region, St. Vincent Hospital and the MetroWest Medical Center have been selected. Catalog and screening functions are available on the Internet to the general public, while the online common intake function is available only at these selected locations. As some of you may already know, once a food stamp online application is taken at one of the designated sites, it is transmitted through the Internet to your local office and processed in a manner similar to Project Bread online applications.

In the coming months, the number of *Virtual Gateway* applications will grow as the common intake process is introduced at additional locations. As we continue adjusting to the new process, I will rely on your professionalism and specialized skills in maintaining the quality standards we have established for the Food Stamp Program. Thank you for your ongoing efforts towards making this new endeavor successful.

In closing, I also want to address any lingering questions you may have concerning my new appointment as Assistant Secretary for Children, Youth and Families (CYF). I want to reassure you all that I intend to approach this opportunity with the understanding that each agency in the CYF cluster shares a common vision to help the neediest in our Commonwealth. While this appointment broadens my scope, it will by no means diminish my commitment to our agency or the clients we serve.

Sincerely,



John Wagner, Commissioner

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New Form

09-360-0904-05
09-361-0904-05(S)
SuppA-1(9/2004)
Supplement A: Questions Regarding Citizenship Status

AU Managers will use this form to capture information about the citizenship status of all applicants and allow the applicant to list the noncitizen(s) not applying for benefits. Please refer to Field Operation Memo 2004-34 for more information.

New Brochures

AU Managers must hand out the following brochures, developed as application tools for noncitizens applying for assistance, to all TAFDC and FS applicants interviewed at the TAO. The brochures provide information that will help noncitizens make more informed decisions when applying for benefits. Please refer to Field Operation Memo 2004-34 for more information.

25-410-0904-05
25-411-0904-05(S)
NCRB (9/2004)
Noncitizen Resource Brochure

25-400-0904-05
25-401-0904-05(S)
NCIB (9/2004)
What Noncitizens Need to Know

Revised Forms

04-012-0904-04
EAEDC-Med Rpt (Rev. 9/2004)
Emergency Aid to the Elderly, Disabled and Children Medical Report

The General Instructions to Medical Providers page has been revised to include updated instructions on how to request copies of the Department's Medical Standards and on where to return the completed Medical Report..

09-375-1004-05
09-376-1004-05 (S)
FS-USR-2 (Rev. 10/2004)
Universal Semiannual Reporting (USR) Income Guidelines Form

The FS-USR-2 now includes revised Noncategorical Eligibility USR AU Gross Monthly Income Guidelines.

02-737-0904-05
02-738-0904-05(S)
24-EXAGR
Extension Agreement

This form has been revised to reflect the change in the TAFDC Work Program hourly requirement.

Revised Brochures

09-070-1004-05
09-079-1004-05 (S)
FSP-INFO (Rev. 10/2004)
How to Get Food Stamp Benefits

The updated FSP-INFO brochure includes revised cost-of-living income limits for food stamp benefits.


The following brochures have been revised to reflect the changes in the Work Program requirement. The Spanish

versions will be available soon.

02-210-0904-05
TAFDC-PB (Rev. 9/2004)
Transitional Aid to Families with Dependent Children


17-150-0904-05
WPIB (Rev. 9/2004)
TAFDC Work Program Requirement

02-740-0904-05
TAFDC-EXTB (Rev. 9/2004)
TAFDC Extensions Beyond the 24-Month Period

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- Q.** A teen parent in our office is planning to take the General Educational Development (GED) test next month. Can I issue a General Educational Development Voucher (ESP-29) to the teen to cover the cost of this test?
- A.** Yes. A TAFDC recipient scheduled to take the GED test, may be issued a GED voucher. You should complete and sign the General Educational Development Voucher (ESP-29) and have your recipient sign and take the form to an official GED test center. At the GED test center, the voucher is given to a GED test administrator who will sign the voucher, schedule the recipient for the test and send an invoice to DTA's Central Office for payment. If the recipient fails this five- part, basic GED test or any part or parts of the test, this voucher also will cover the retest(s).
- Q.** I received a TAFDC application from a man who is working and applying for his stepson only. The TAFDC AU includes only one individual.The stepson's mother is not living with the applicant and his stepson.How is the stepfather's income treated?
- A.** The earned income in this AU is not counted. The stepfather is not the natural or adoptive parent of the dependent child, not the spouse of a parent living in the home and is not requesting to be a part of the AU. If at some point, the stepfather asks to become a member of the AU, his income and assets would be countable. Refer to 106 CMR 204.210(D), 204.305, 204.310 and 204.320 for more information on this topic.

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As you may know Quality Control reviews not only active food stamp AU cases but also closings and denials to ensure that AU Managers provide food stamp benefits to households entitled to them and to ensure that AU Managers use correct procedures. In September 2003, *Transitions* discussed two types of incorrect denial found by QC. These involved AUs being denied prior to 30 days under the following circumstances: 1) when the applicant has not appeared for an appointment or 2) when the applicant has failed to provide a requested verification. This month we will review two recent incorrect denials and four incorrect closings.

Denials

There has been considerable improvement in both of these areas. Among cash AUs, however, there is a problem with AUs being incorrectly denied before the 30th day for failure to keep appointments. FS AUs cannot be denied until the 30th day for failure to keep appointments.

Here are two examples of incorrect denials:

1. What happens if the AU Manager requests verification of shelter costs, but the applicant does not return them? After I assist the applicant to obtain any verifications, can I deny the AU for failure to provide verification of shelter costs.

No. When the AU fails to verify shelter expenses, the AU must be certified without the specific deduction, assuming they meet all eligibility criteria.


2. I denied a PA-FS AU for excess money in the bank and Quality Control found the action invalid. Why?

AUs that are categorically eligible (SSI, EAEDC and TAFDC, see 106 CMR 365.180) cannot be ineligible based on assets. Remember, any AU that includes a child under 19 is categorically eligible. Assets are not countable for a categorically eligible AU.

Closings:

Here are some examples of incorrect closing when a PA AU is being terminated.

1. An EAEDC AU has started to receive SSI income. The AU Manager records the SSI income in addition to the EAEDC income and the FS AU incorrectly closes. A similar situation occurred recently when the client started receiving OASDI: both the SSI which the client was no longer receiving and OASDI were added together, making the AU ineligible when it was in fact still eligible. Remember, when new income is received, the terminated income must be 'zeroed' out.
2. In several recently reviewed AUs the reason for the termination was not documented and QC was unable to find a valid closing reason. Without documentation, QC cannot determine the accuracy of the closing.
3. Mail was returned as undeliverable, but included a new forwarding address on the envelope. The AU Manager should send a letter to the new address requesting verification. If none is received, the AU could be closed for failure to verify. If this letter is returned, the AU should be closed for whereabouts unknown.
4. An AU Manager closed the FS AU when the applicant did not provide the requested verification that was only needed for TAFDC, such as a birth record. Since this verification is not required for food stamp benefits, the AU Manager cannot close the FS AU for that reason. Unless the household is also ineligible for a food stamp-related reason, the AU Manager cannot close the food stamp AU.

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[BEACON Help Revisions](#)

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BEACON Help Revisions

BEACON Help Revisions

The following is a list of Help windows that have been added or revised.

Added:

Verification Tab Popup

Revised:

Verification

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DTA Intranet Site

The DTA intranet site has been updated with the following changes

- The first page has been redesigned and lists links to additional information on the right side of the page. Outdated information has been removed from the site.
- The “Latest News” option on the first page displays current information that is of interest and importance to Department staff. Check this option for updated information.
- The “News” link displays memos previously issued in 2004. Prior years’ memos were deleted.

Changes and enhancements to the DTA intranet site continue as information and recommendations become available.

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[EA Six-Month Continued Benefits and EA Noncountable Assets](#)

[Food Stamp Program: October 1, 2004 Cost-of-Living Increases](#)

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Citizenship Outreach Project for Noncitizen EAEDC Applicants and Recipient Updated Provider's List

EAEDC

[Field Operations Memo 2004-35](#)

The purpose of this memo is to provide an updated list of community-based providers throughout Massachusetts who will assist EAEDC noncitizens with the naturalization process. The Department and the Office for Refugees and Immigrants (ORI) continue working together to address the issue of assisting current noncitizen EAEDC applicants and recipients with the citizenship process for becoming U.S. naturalized citizens.

The Citizenship Outreach Project listing is included in the memo and a supply will be provided to the TAOs.

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EA Six-Month Continued Benefits and EA Noncountable Assets

EA

[State Letter 1285](#)

The FY'05 budget authorizes the continuation of shelter benefits for a period of six months from the date the family's income exceeds the EA Eligibility Standard. The family may become ineligible for these continued EA shelter benefits during this six-month period for another reason. Shelter benefits may be extended beyond the six-month period on a case-by-case basis with Department approval. During the six-month period, the family must escrow that portion of the income that exceeds the EA Eligibility Standard. The escrowed money is a noncountable asset.

The EA asset limit will not apply to a family participating in the Local Housing Authority Placement Program.

Field Operation Memo with instructions to follow.

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Food Stamp Program: October 1, 2004 Cost-of-Living Increases

FS

[State Letter 1286](#)

[Field Operations Memo 2004-38](#)

State Letter 1286 and Field Operations Memo 2004-38 implement the annual cost-of-living changes in the Food Stamp Program.

Maximum Food Stamp Benefit

The maximum food stamp benefit levels for all assistance unit sizes have increased.

Income Eligibility Standards

The Gross, Net and 165 percent Income Eligibility Standards have increased.

Shelter Deduction

The Maximum Shelter Deduction (for assistance units not containing an elderly or disabled member) increased to \$388.

Standard Utility Allowance

The Heating Standard Utility Allowance increased to \$442. The Nonheating Standard Utility Allowance increased to \$268. The Telephone Standard Utility allowance increased to \$31.

Homeless Shelter/Utility Deduction

The Homeless Shelter/Utility Deduction remains at \$143.

Standard Deduction

The Standard Deduction for an AU size of five and greater increased.

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Medicare Prescription Drug Discount Program and *Nguyen v. McIntire* Lawsuit

FS

[State Letter 1287](#)

State Letter 1287 introduce the Medicare Prescription Drug Discount Program designed to help Medicare recipients pay for their prescription drugs. The program has two features:

1. The Medicare Prescription Drug Discount Program which is available to all Medicare recipients; and
2. The Medicare Prescription Drug Discount Program Subsidy which is available to Medicare recipients whose incomes fall at 135% of poverty or below.

The value of the ***discount and subsidy*** will be treated as allowable medical expenses for food stamp purposes so that participants in the Medicare Prescription Drug Discount Program will realize no decrease in food stamp benefits due to participation in the program. **Field Operations Memo with instructions to follow.**

As part of the settlement of the *Nguyen v. McIntire* lawsuit, a regulation is being revised to more clearly describe how the income/assets and deductions of a legal noncitizen disqualified from the Food Stamp Program are treated in calculating food stamp benefits for the FS-eligible members.

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[System User's Guide Update 159](#)

EA

[Volume 3: SSPS User's Guide](#)

The mouse-based functionality which allows users to navigate in a "drill-down" manner on certain informational fields in SSPS has been expanded to include more fields.

The SSPS Invoice Inquiry screen has been revised.

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TAFDC and Food Stamp Processing Guidelines for Noncitizen Applications

FS

[Field Operations Memo 2004-34](#)

This Field Operations Memo provides guidelines for processing TAFDC and/or FS applications that include a noncitizen (s) who is not applying for benefits in accordance with State Letter 1278. State Letter 1278 requires that TAO staff not ask questions related to:

- **Immigration status** , if an applicant indicates a reluctance to disclose immigration status information for any household member(s); and/or
- **Social Security Number (SSN)** , if an applicant indicates a reluctance to disclose SSN due to the immigration status for any household member(s).

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Work Program Requirement and Good Cause Changes - TAFDC

TAFDC

[Field Operations Memo 2004-37](#)

[Field Operations Memo 2004-37A](#)

[Field Operations Memo 2004-37B](#)

[State Letter 1284](#)

State Letter 1284 transmits the following changes:

1. A three tier hourly requirement for Work Program required applicants or recipients as follows:
 - a) 20 hours, if the youngest child in the Assistance Unit (or who is not in the Assistance Unit in accordance with 106 CMR 204.305(E)(1), (2) or (3)) is between the ages of two and mandatory full-time school age;
 - b) 24 hours, if the youngest child in the Assistance Unit (or who is not in the Assistance Unit in accordance with 106 CMR 204.305(E)(1), (2) or (3)) is between the ages of mandatory full-time school age and nine; and
 - c) 30 hours, if the youngest child in the Assistance Unit (or who is not in the Assistance Unit in accordance with 106 CMR 204.305(E)(1), (2) or (3)) is age nine or older.

In a two-parent household each parent must meet the Work Program requirement based on the age of their youngest child as noted above.

2. All Work Program required applicants or recipients may meet the Work Program requirement by participating in an education or training activity for the required hours per week.
3. Those homeless recipients residing in an emergency shelter may meet the Work Program requirement by meeting their housing search activities.
4. Good Cause reasons for not meeting EDP or Work Program requirements have been expanded.

Field Operations Memo 2004-37 informed TAO Staff about a follow-up mailing to nonexempt recipients, about the Work Program requirement changes, how to process nonexempt recipients impacted by these changes and how to process new applications as of September 27, 2004.

Field Operations Memo 2004-37 A informed TAO Staff about the revised Sanction process and the good cause reasons, removing sanctions with "good cause" and preventing sanctions with "Meets Compliance."

Field Operations Memo 2004-37 B informed TAOs about the "Meets Compliance" clean-up project and provided TAO Staff procedures for entering the appropriate "Meets Compliance" Reason.


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New Initiatives

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Currently there are no New Initiative Memos.

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