



Transitions

A Publication of the Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance

this month in...

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From the Commissioner

Dear Fellow Employees,

Last month I talked about some of the things which we as an agency have done and continue to do to help move the families with whom we work into a position to be independent and self-supporting. That continues to be key to everything we do and so I want to continue that theme this month. But I also want to use this opportunity to thank you for your continued superb response to the many things you are asked to do to achieve that goal.

We are a big agency and often in organizations of our size, it is difficult to do things quickly. At the same time, quick action is frequently required to effect needed change. Last spring we were faced by an unacceptable increase in the Food Stamp error rate. As I have repeatedly said, one of the crucial ways we are measured in the outside world is the accuracy of the benefits we provide. Immediate action was needed to address the Food Stamp error rate, and the Food Stamp Desk Review Project was undertaken. This was a huge undertaking, requiring the review of over 73,000 cases. Some were skeptical that it could be completed in a reasonable time frame. As you have done so often, you proved the skeptics wrong. Although the impact on the error rate will not be available for awhile, as of the middle of September, the desk reviews were completed. Your hard work identified 13 percent of those cases as requiring some change. I am optimistic that those changes will result in an improved Food Stamp error rate and more accurate benefits for eligible families.

From the Forms File

New Form

18-145-0900-05

18-146-0900-05 (S)

SSN-Match NFL-2 (9/2000)

SSN Match Notification Letter

This letter is sent to a grantee with a facsimile number (991-998) for whom an Enumeration Verification System (EVS) match identifies an SSN based on a name and date of birth match. It informs the grantee that: 1) a match has been received, and 2) an appointment has been scheduled to discuss match information and review eligibility. See Field Operations Memo 2000-22 for instructions.

Revised Forms

09-181-0900-05

09-182-0900-05 (S)

FSP-RCF (Rev. 9/2000)

Food Stamp Benefits Recertification for Households with Earnings

A change in Food Stamp procedures now requires working household members to provide the last eight consecutive weeks of pay stubs. Previously, they were required to provide only six weeks of pay stubs. This form was revised to reflect the change.

The following forms have been revised as a result of the Smith lawsuit.

02-660-0900-05

02-661-0900-05 (S)

TAFDC-TP (Rev. 9/2000)

Transition Plan

02-728-0800-05

02-729-0900-05 (S)

24-EXAGR (Rev. 8/2000)

Extension Plan

02-737-0800-05

02-738-0900-05 (S)

24-EXP (Rev. 8/2000)

Extension Agreement

02-665-0900-05

02-666-0900-05 (S)

TAFDC-FTP (Rev. 9/2000)

Final Transition Plan

02-725-0900-05

02-726-0900-05 (S)

24-EXR (Rev. 9/2000)

24-Month Extension Request

New Brochure

The following brochure is now available in Spanish.

04-041-0900-05

EAEDC-PB (S) (9/2000)

Emergency Aid to the Elderly,
Disabled and Children Program

Revised Brochures

09-070-1000-05

09-079-1000-05 (S)

FSP-Info (Rev. 10/2000)

How to Get Food Stamp Benefits

The FSP-Info brochure is revised to reflect the increased yearly cost-of-living income limits for food stamp benefits.

The following brochures are now available in Spanish.

02-212-0900-05

YRTK (S) (Rev. 9/2000)

Your Right to Know

09-170-0900-05

FS-PB (S) (Rev. 9/2000)

Food Stamp Program

02-213-0900-05

TAFDC-PB (S) (Rev. 9/2000)

Transitional Aid to Families with
Dependent Children Program

FYI

Transitions Replaces “What’s New” in Policy Online

All issues of year 2000 *Transitions* have been added to Policy Online. Since *Transitions* includes the key points for both the regulations and PACES Appendices, there is no longer a need to reiterate the key points in the “What’s New” sections of the Policy Online. Therefore, the “What’s New” sections will no longer be included in Policy Online.

Smith v. McIntire Lawsuit

TAFDC Field Operations Memos 2000-25 A, 2000-25 B, 2000-25 C

These memos informed TAO Staff about:

- the impact of this lawsuit on all extension cases;
- guidelines for approving or denying extension requests;
- changes to the extension process; and
- new extension procedures.

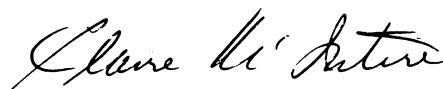
Additionally, posters were distributed to TAOs to tell former and current recipients about these changes.

Continued from Page 1

At the same time that you were asked to undertake this desk review, you were also gaining familiarity with the BEACON system. From working with scenarios provided by the Training Unit, to classroom training, to analyzing how the flow of the new system may affect the day-to-day operations of your office, the reality of the impact of BEACON is something with which each of you is becoming familiar. Despite the magnitude of the changes which will result from the implementation of this system, you have continued to amaze me with your positive response and your enthusiasm. In both personal visits to offices and in feedback from the Training Unit, I hear that you see the system as helping you to do a better job and that, although you recognize the learning curve and the level of change associated with its implementation, you are anxious to move forward. BEACON will help improve the level of service we provide our families, and your support and hard work toward its successful implementation is invaluable.

While you have juggled Food Stamp desk reviews and BEACON, you have also been dealing with all of the “usual” issues you face every day — Transition Plans, the impact of the Smith lawsuit, homeless families, new applications, food stamp recertifications, requests for extensions of time-limited benefits. And you have continued to balance these competing priorities. Your job is not easy. No one who works for this agency has an easy job. But our shared focus on the reason we do all these things, to assist the families you see every day to become independent and self-supporting, continues to allow us to achieve success.

Sincerely,



Claire McIntire
Commissioner

FYI

A Healthy Breakfast Helps Kids Do Better in School - Recipient Mailing

The notice shown below was developed by Project Bread. It is being mailed to all active TAFDC, EAEDC and FS recipients with a dependent child. The mailing is scheduled for the first cycle in October. The purpose of the mailing is to promote awareness of the school breakfasts available to children in families receiving cash assistance and/or food stamp benefits.

A Healthy Breakfast Helps Kids Do Better in School

If your family is receiving TAFDC and/or food stamp benefits, all your children are eligible for the School Breakfast Program for **free**.

For information about:

- Free School Breakfast Program
- Food Stamp Benefits
- Free and Low-Cost Food Resources



Call Project Bread's FoodSource Hotline **1-800-645-8333**
(TTY 1-800-377-1292)

FYI

Child Care for TAFDC Recipients

Effective immediately, the Office of Child Care Services (OCCS) is suspending the collection of child care fees for TAFDC recipients. The sliding fee scale has been suspended for active TAFDC recipients only. All other persons, including former TAFDC recipients, who are income-eligible remain subject to the sliding fee scale.

In addition, the Child Care Resource and Referral agencies will accept authorizations for TAFDC recipients for full-time child care in accordance with DTA regulations and procedures. AU Managers should refer to Field Operations Memo 97-27 for definitions of full-time and part-time child care.



Food Stamp Program - 10/1/2000 Cost-Of-Living Increases

FS, SSFSP
State Letter 1194
Field Operations Memo
2000-27

State Letter 1194 and Field Operations Memo 2000-27 implement the following cost-of-living changes in the Food Stamp Program effective 10/1/2000.

Maximum Benefit Allotments - The maximum benefit allotment levels for all assistance unit sizes have increased.

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

Shelter Deductions - The Shelter Deduction increases to \$300.

Standard Utility Allowances - The heating standard utility allowance increases to \$349. The nonheating standard utility allowance increases to \$211. The telephone standard utility allowance increases to \$25.

Standard Deduction - The Standard Deduction remains at \$134.

Vehicle Fair Market Value Limit - The Vehicle Fair Market Value Limit remains at \$4,650.

From the Hotline

Q. A teen parent under age 18 is living with her dependent child, her mother and her sisters. The teen parent and her sisters receive TAFDC in the mother's case. The teen does not want her baby included in her mother's grant because she receives child support from the baby's father. Can this baby be excluded from the grant?

A. Yes. The teen parent's mother's assistance unit must include the dependent child (teen parent), the natural or adoptive parent of the dependent child (the mother) and all siblings of the dependent child (the teen parent's sisters). However, the teen parent's child is not required to be in the TAFDC assistant unit, but must be included in the food stamp assistance unit and all income considered. See 106 CMR 204.305 and 361.200.

Q. A food stamp recipient's mortgage payment is \$250.00 per month. He is paying an additional \$250.00 per month on the principal amount. What is the allowed food stamp shelter cost?

- A. Only the \$250.00 billed for the monthly mortgage expense is allowed. The household is under no obligation to pay the additional amount on the principal.
- Q. A TAFDC recipient lives in a development which received a mortgage subsidy referred to as 236 housing. Is the recipient entitled to the rent allowance?
- A. Yes. An assistance unit gets a rent allowance when living in private housing in a complex that received a federal subsidy (236 or 221(D)(3)) or a Massachusetts subsidy (section 13A) and neither the AU or someone it shares cost with uses a Section 8 certificate or has an MRVP lease or occupancy agreement. See 106 CMR 705.910.
- Q. I have a case that consists of a mom who is an undocumented noncitizen with no income and her two children. One child is receiving TAFDC and the other child is a family cap child. The children are receiving food stamp benefits. Do I prorate the household shelter expense because the bills are in the mother's name?
- A. No, because the mother has no income. Shelter cost must be prorated only if the person who is paying or being billed for household expenses has income, either earned or unearned. See Field Operations Memo 2000-20.
- Q. Does noncitizen deeming apply to any state-funded benefits programs?
- A. No. Noncitizen deeming does not apply to any state-funded benefits program, including SSFSP or STAFDC. See 106 CMR 360.030(G) and 203.680(C).



COMMUNICATION is the KEY

Enumeration Verification System (EVS) Match Report

TAFDC, EAEDC, FS
Field Operations Memo 2000-22

- The Enumeration Verification System matches client demographic information with Social Security Administration's database to see if a social security number can be located for clients with dummy (999-) or facsimile (991-998-) numbers. Match results appear on a report generated on or about the 15th of the month.
- Match results include three possible responses:
 - No SSN found on SSA database;
 - SSN located using name and DOB (SSN will be provided); and
 - Match inconclusive; meaning either an SSN was found based on a name-only match, or multiple SSNs were found. "Match inconclusive" results will also be forwarded to Centralized Eligibility Operations for review.
- AU Managers must follow up as described in the memo and take action as required. Supervisors must sign off as appropriate on all case actions.
- The EVS Match Report replaces the report titled, "Active EAEDC/FS/TAFDC AUs with Client(s) Active on Cash/FS/MA with a Client ID Beginning with '99' on PACES."

Expansion of Food Stamp Earnings Waiver

FS, SSFSP
Field Operations Memo 2000-26

USDA has approved the Department's request to expand the Food Stamp Earnings Waiver process. AUs subject to the Food Stamp Earnings Waiver process may now report changes on their recertification by mail form or at their annual face-to-face recertification instead of within 10 days. These cases are no longer subject to the mandatory change-reporting rules at 106 CMR 366.110.

Note: Despite this waiver, if a recipient reports a change or if the Department becomes aware of a change during the certification period, the AU Manager must act on the change in a timely manner.

Expansion of the Food Stamp Earnings Waiver will:

- exempt AUs participating in the Food Stamp Earnings Waiver process from mandatory change-reporting rules;
- reduce error in the third month of the certification period if the AU Manager correctly acts on information/changes reported on the FSP-RCF form or at the face-to-face recertification; and
- eliminate the need for NPA Monthly Reporting systems for earnings cases currently used in some TAOs.



FYI

Access to Jobs (AtJ) and Demand Response

Demand Response service guidelines for new AtJ customers have changed. Beginning on September 15, 2000, Demand Response services for current TAFDC recipients were limited to those recipients who are working full time. This limitation does not apply to former recipients who may require Demand Response services to find and maintain employment.

Every
Job
is
a
Good
Job

FYI

Countable Asset Value of Vehicles

The FY2001 state budget authorized a revision to the Department's regulations regarding the amount of a vehicle's value that is countable toward the asset limit. The TAFDC and EA regulations are in the process of being revised. Until the revised regulations are promulgated, AU Managers should use the following guidelines to determine the countable value of vehicles.

The first \$10,000 of the fair market value and the first \$5,000 of equity value of one vehicle owned by the filing unit are noncountable.

- Any fair market value in excess of \$10,000 is a countable asset.
- Any equity value in excess of \$5,000 is a countable asset.
- If there is an excess in both the fair market value and the equity value, only the excess which is the greater amount shall be counted.
- If the filing unit owns more than one vehicle, the full fair market value or the full equity value, whichever is greater, of each additional vehicle shall be a countable asset.

Until the revised regulations are issued, cases which appear to meet these guidelines should be brought to the attention of the Hotline designee. The Hotline designee should call the Policy Hotline to discuss the specifics of the case.



Quality Corner

One of our biggest food stamp error problems involves recipients not reporting their income promptly. Several recent errors resulted from information from a new hire match not being acted upon immediately by the AU Manager. In addition, two other errors resulted from a new job that was not reported to the AU Manager, but that could have been anticipated.

Recent Quality Control Errors

1. In several recent cases a recipient began a new job without reporting it to the AU Manager. A new hire alert was issued about six weeks later. By the time the AU Manager responded, several months had passed, and an error resulted. If the AU Manager responded and reduced the benefits promptly, none of these errors would have resulted.
2. A recipient failed to report returning to work with a school department. The school department did not view it as a new hire and did not report it. In fact, the TAO was aware of the impending change and had given a three-month certification period in August. Clearly, the recipient had an obligation to report that she returned to work. The AU Manager, however, had anticipated that return, but failed to follow up with the recipient when the school year began to get the start date and amount of the earnings.
3. A recipient graduated from an OJT (on-the-job training) program to paid employment at the same company. Even though the AU Manager knew the job was becoming a paid position, she gave the recipient a twelve-month certification period. During that time the recipient began receiving countable income but no change was made in the determination of food stamp benefits.

What Can an AU Manager Do?

Unreported income is one of the hardest errors to control, but we do have several good tools available.

- First, AU Managers are responsible for all components of a case. By being aware of ESP components and other work history, the AU Manager is in a better position to anticipate future earnings and possible future employment. When you know someone is not working for the summer but expects to return in the fall, establish a certification period that coincides with the expected return or

set up a reminder.

- While not perfect, the new hire matches generally provide some of the best information on one of the hardest errors to control. They are far less effective, however, if they are not responded to in a timely way.
- Carefully review all wage matches against information in the case record, and DO NOT assume you already knew about the job. Several other errors have occurred when the AU Manager reported no change was necessary even though the match was for a second job or a return to a previous job.
- Finally, it is important to note that new hire matches do not include income amounts. As with all matches, timely AU Manager follow-up verification from the recipient is required as quickly as possible.

By looking at the case as a whole, rather than responding to a small piece of information, AU Managers can take control of this error-prone area.

