Transitions

A Publication of the Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance

From the Commissioner

Dear Fellow Employees,

September has seen its share of challenges. While thankfully Hurricane Rita turned out to be less devastating than originally predicted, her predecessor, Hurricane Katrina, has taken many of us away from our routine tasks. These natural disasters also present an opportunity for us to look back on our Agency's mission and remember how well it has served us during these stressful times.

Over the past few weeks, we have seen how important it is to treat our most vulnerable families and individuals with dignity and respect, while at the same time ensuring accurate eligibility decisions. We've done our best to help those in need access services in a timely fashion as well as promote our clients' independence and self-sufficiency. Easier said than done, yet what became clear to me moments after our Southern guests arrived is how committed we all are to this mission. We all understood the immediacy of the issues these families presented. As always, we marshaled our resources and talent. All of us pulled together, acknowledged our common bonds, rolled up our sleeves and took on the challenge. The best in our human nature prevailed over Mother Nature in what has been considered one of the worst natural disasters in United States history.

For the guests staying at Camp Edwards, we have helped out with their basic needs by providing expedited food stamp benefits and immediate cash payments. For those who intend to make Massachusetts their home, we're beginning to assist families and individuals with job preparations and the housing search process. These same services and benefits have been provided to the approximately 350 evacuees who have applied through our local Transitional

Assistance offices. I realize that this task has demanded special consideration and understanding since many evacuees are unable to meet the usual requirements of our programs. Patience with our Central Office staff as we respond to the changing demands of evacuation planning is also apparent and appreciated.

Over the past few weeks, I've watched clients under extreme conditions confronting their predicament with grace and fellow employees placed in compromised situations responding with unwavering care and concern. Although it sometimes takes an unfortunate event, it is clear that all of us are willing to step back and put this challenge in perspective. For many of us, this tragic event has reaffirmed our belief in the things that matter above all else both at work and in our homes. While the state's Hurricane Katrina follow-up efforts are ongoing, we here at the Department are continuing to do what we do best by seizing every opportunity to determine the needs of our clients and help them on their path to lasting self-sufficiency. It has been a privilege to serve with so many of you in this effort.

Sincerely,

John Wagner, Commissioner

COMMUNICATION is the KEY

From the Hotline

This month's column contains questions concerning fraud and overpayment procedures. For more information on this topic, refer to 106 CMR 706.200 through 706.296 for TAFDC and EAEDC and 106 CMR 367.495 through 367.950 for Food Stamp Program details.

Q. How do I know if I should make a fraud referral or an overpayment referral?

A. A fraud referral is submitted only when the recipient intentionally fails to report a change. If the failure to report a change was either unintentional or our agency's error, then submit the matter as an overpayment referral and calculate the overpayment for each category of assistance. Select either "Unintentional" or "Agency error" for the Overpayment Type on the AR Referral window. Also, remember to complete the Narratives Tab explaining the details of your recipient's circumstances.

Q. When I am completing a fraud referral, should I also complete the overpayment section on the AR Referral window?

A. Yes. Always complete the overpayment section for all affected categories of assistance, even on fraud referrals. If you are unsure of the overpayment amount on a fraud referral, then remember to at least indicate the categories of assistance where you believe the recipient violated program rules and potentially was overpaid.

Q. Once I submit my fraud referral, where will it go?

A. All BEACON referrals (Fraud, Overpayment, Agency Error, and Aid Paid Pending) are received by the Fraud and Overpayment Referral Screening Unit. (FORS). This unit is referred to as "CEO" on the BEACON windows. It is a unit under Fraud Investigations and Recoveries. FORS may send a referral to the Fraud Investigation Unit (formerly known as the Administrative Disqualification Unit - ADU) or the Bureau of Special Investigation (BSI).

The majority of fraud referrals are sent to the Fraud Investigation Unit for an investigation and administrative disqualification hearing.

Q. Whom can I contact if I have a question about a fraud referral or an Intentional Program Violation (IPV)?

A. Call the Fraud and Overpayment Referral Screening Unit (FORS) at 617-348-5669 if you want to correct or complete a rejected referral.

Quality Corner

This month we will review two NPA errors. One involves an able-bodied adult (ABAWD), and the other involves household composition in a mixed household.

Unemployed Adult

A client applied for FS benefits on September 1, 2004 and reported that she was receiving Unemployment Compensation (UC) benefits. Receipt of the UC benefits made her exempt from the FS Work Requirements. Shortly after the FS AU was established, she received her last UC check dated September 19th. BEACON received Unearned Income match information in October which confirmed that the UC check of September 19 was the client's last check and the remaining balance of UC benefits was zero.

At initial certification, the AU was put on Universal Semiannual Reporting (USR) with a certification period of August 8, through February 4, 2005. Since the client's UC benefits stopped on September 19, 2004, she was then subject to the FS Work Requirements. The AU Manager did not delete the UC benefits until the client reported the change in December. Consequently, there was an under-issuance for October and November.

What's an AU Manager to Do?

This client should not have been placed on USR since her UC benefits would have been exhausted approximately two weeks after the date of application. Subsequently, the client became an ABAWD and was subject to the FS Work Program as of October 2004.

When processing a new or ongoing AU that reports UC benefits or has UC match information, the AU Manager must follow through by asking the TAO designee to do an online inquiry on the Division of Unemployment Assistance's (DUA) system. Be diligent when reviewing UC information, pay attention to pay dates, the UC benefit amount and the balance left to be paid. This information is critical to accurate case processing.

To avoid an error, the AU Manager should have:

- Performed a *What If* calculation, counting the UC benefits from the date of application through the end of the September 2004 certification month;

- Established the AU beginning the certification month of October and allowed a three-month certification period; and

- Informed the client of her responsibility under the FS Work Program rules, since she would soon become an ABAWD.

Household Composition in a Mixed Household

In the review month, the client was receiving NPA food stamps for herself, one child born in July 2004, and a niece (for whom she was receiving child support).

In June 2004, the client applied as a pregnant woman, and at the time of the review, she was receiving TAFDC and FS benefits for herself. After the child was born, the AU Manager requested verifications for the child so the baby could be added to the TAFDC and FS AUs. On September 16, 2004, the AU Manager submitted a closing because the client failed to provide the requested verifications. On September 24th, the closing was pulled, and the FS AU (which still included the niece and her child support) remained open. Quality Control found a letter in the AU record dated September 10, 2004, which indicated that the niece was no longer in the home and child support was no longer being received.

What's an AU Manager to Do?

Before the AU Manager initiated the closing on the AU, the client had already verified that her niece was no longer in the home and the child support was no longer being received. The AU Manager had recorded the information in the Narratives Tab but failed to establish a transaction to remove the niece and the child support income. Consequently, when the closing was pulled, the AU was in error because the niece and the child support continued to be a part of the FS benefit calculation. If a separate transaction to remove the niece and her income had been initiated before the action to close the AU, the error could have been avoided.

"If you treat an individual as he is, he will stay as he is, but if you treat him as if he were what he...could be, he will become what he...could be."

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

From the Forms File

New Form

25-430-1005-05
VARI (10/2005)
Voluntary Authorization to Release Information

This form has been developed to get applicant/recipient permission for the Department to use collateral contact for the purpose of obtaining program verifications. Refer to Field Operations Memo 2005-49 for more information.

New Poster

Katrina Poster
Help Is On The Line

This poster, issued by the US Department of Health and Human Services, is for Katrina evacuees and is to be displayed in TAO waiting areas.

Revised Forms

09-375-1005-05
09-376-1005-05 (S)
FS-USR-2 (Rev. 10/2005)
Universal Semiannual Reporting (USR) Income Guidelines Form

The Noncategorical Eligibility USR AU Gross Monthly Income Standard has been revised to reflect the increased Maximum Gross Monthly Income Standard.

09-500-1005-05
FS-ACSE (Rev. 10/2005)
Other Agency Certification of Shelter Expenses for Licensed Group Home Residents

This form has been revised to reflect the increase of the (Minus) Maximum Allotment from $149 to $152.

02-123-1005-05
A-16 (Rev. 10/2005)
Assignment of Third-Party Recovery

References to the Division of Medical Assistance have been changed to MassHealth (Office of Medicaid) on this form.

09-150-0905-05
SSI-FSP-1 (Rev. 9/2005)
SSI Food Stamp Benefits Reapplication Form

The SSI-FSP-1 form has been revised to reflect the centralization of SSI Offices to one SSI Regional Office in Malden.

16-020-0905-05
16-022-0905-05(S)
AR-P-1 (9/2005)
Request for Authorized Representative – Authorized Agency – Authorized Payee

This form replaces the Image-10.

18-052-0905-05
Multilingual Card (Rev. 9/2005)

The text of the multilingual card has been revised and languages have been added to the card.

13-220-0805-05
TES-EPR-1(Rev.8/2005)
Emergency Placement Request

New tracking information has been added to this form. Refer to Field Operations Memo 2005-40 for more information.

Revised Brochures

09-070-1005-05
09-079-1005-05 (S)
FSP-INFO (Rev. 10/2005)

How to Get Food Stamp Benefits

The Income Standard for households without children under 19 or without elderly or disabled household members has been revised to reflect the increased Maximum Gross Monthly Income Standard.

The forms listed below are now available in Spanish.

13-251-0905-05
App-St (S) (9/2005)
Applicant's Statement for Emergency Assistance Shelter

13-261-0905-05
NPP-2 (S) (9/2005)
Notice of Placement Pending EA Eligibility Determination

13-211-0905-05
TES-IC (S) (Rev. 9/2005)
Informational Contacts

02-157-0905-05
NFL-9 (S) (Rev. 9/2005)
Notice of Approval, Denial or Termination for Emergency Assistance or Other Financial Services

Obsolete Form

09-181-1103-05
09-182-1103-05(S)
FSP-RCF (Rev. 11/2003)
Food Stamp Benefits Recertification for Universal Semiannual Reporting Households

This form is now obsolete and has been replaced by the BEACON-generated prefilled Universal Semiannual Report form. Refer to BEACON User's Guide Update No. 061 for more information.

16-020-0904-05
16-022-0904-05 (S)
Image-10 (Rev. 9/2004)
Request for Authorized Representative – Authorized Agency – Authorized Payee

This form has been replaced by the AR-P-1.

LHATHP II - BEACON Procedures Update

EA
Field Operations Memo
2005-25A

The local housing authorities that are participating in the *Local Housing Authority Transitional Housing Program II* (LHATHP) were added to BEACON with Increment 2.1.16 on August 22. When an EA AU is transferred into an LHATHP unit, the information on the Residential Facility window must be updated with the new shelter information. The residence type on the Address window must be "shelter" and the new current address must be entered.

Revision to the TES-EPR-1 Form

EA
Field Operations Memo
2005-40

The EA Eligibility Status data in the Family Demographics section of the TES-EPR-1 form has been amended to include Presumptive EA Eligibility. This information must be entered on the form before submitting the form to H&HS. The information is used for tracking purposes.

A revised TES-EPR-1 (Rev. 8/2005) form has been issued.

Eliminating Parental Family Special Project

EAEDC
Field Operations Memo
2005-41

This Memo informs TAO Staff about the special project for reviewing and correcting, if necessary, all EAEDC Family AUs. Any EAEDC *Parental* Family currently receiving EAEDC must have their AU closed and must have their eligibility for TAFDC determined. When speaking to the members of the AU affected by the policy change, the AU Manager must stress the additional benefits the family will be eligible for once receiving TAFDC. Current Caretaker Family EAEDC AUs are not affected by this policy change, but must be reviewed for accuracy. AUs must be reviewed by TAO staff to determine current eligibility for EAEDC/TAFDC.

Proper Use of "Alternative" SSN Identifiers

All
Field Operations Memo
2005-42

A recent State Audit found that some AUs have "Alternative" SSNs that may need to be changed to a valid SSN. This Memo reminds AU Managers about:

- the three types of "Alternative" SSNs: "TAO Issued Numbers," "Systems Generated Numbers" and "998 Duplicative Numbers";

- tools to track "Alternative" SSN changes; and

- processing AUs where "Alternative" SSNs change to valid SSNs.

Change in Procedure for Warrant Match Unit Returned Mail

TAFDC, EAEDC, EA
Field Operations Memo 2005-44

Beginning in October, the Warrant Match Unit at Centralized Eligibility Operations will process all Warrant Match mail returned to Central Office by closing the AU for "Whereabouts Unknown – Mail Returned" and will note the closing on the BEACON Narratives Tab.

Previously, the Warrant Match Unit would process returned Warrant Match mail by sending a copy of the returned mail envelope via FAX to all appropriate managers in each TAO who would then take appropriate action.

If a closing is subsequently "pulled" by the AU Manager, or the closing took effect and the AU Manager reopened the AU because of updated information, the change should be entered on the BEACON Narratives Tab by the AU Manager for the warrant information to be re-mailed to the recipient.

DTA Obligations Under the ADA

All
Field Operations Memo 2005-45

This memo reissues ADA procedures the following change: Copies of the completed ADA-1form, Request for an ADA Accommodation, must now be faxed to the Assistant Commissioner for Field Operations at (617) 348-5659. Previously, the form was faxed to the Director of Equal Opportunity. This memo obsoletes Field Operations Memo 2003-19.

TAFDC, EAEDC, FS – Hurricane Katrina Evacuees

EAEDC
State Letter 1304 (EAEDC only)
Field Operations Memo 2005-46
Field Operations Memo 2005-46 A
Field Operations Memo 2005-46 B
Field Operations Memo 2005-46 C
Hurricane Katrina Poster

State Letter 1304 established the policy for providing benefits to Hurricane Katrina evacuees.

Field Operations Memo 2005-46 gave procedures for processing evacuees from areas devastated by Hurricane Katrina, including counties in the Gulf Coast region in Alabama, Louisiana, and Mississippi.

Field Operations Memo 2005-46 A gave revised procedures for processing these evacuees. It also listed contact information for important service agencies. It obsoleted Field Operations Memo 2005-46.

Field Operations Memo 2005-46 B gave TAO staff further instructions for processing requests from Hurricane Katrina evacuees for TAFDC, EAEDC and Food Stamp Program assistance. These procedures apply to evacuees at Otis Air National Guard Base (ANGB) as well as evacuees who appear at TAOs requesting assistance.

Field Operations Memo 2005-46 C gave TAO staff instructions for processing shelter applications for Hurricane Katrina evacuees.

RAFT – Residential Assistance for Families in Transition

EA
Field Operations Memo 2005-47

The *Residential Assistance for Families in Transition Program* (RAFT) is again available for expenses such as, but not limited to, security deposits, first and/or last month's rent, moving expenses, and utility, rent or mortgage arrearages. Eligibility is based on income guidelines, that exceed the EA Eligibility Standard. Families who are denied EA benefits may be eligible for RAFT benefits. The RAFT benefit is limited to $3,000 per year. RAFT applications are completed at one of the nine Housing Consumer Education Centers.

Food Stamp Program: October 1, 2005 Cost-of-Living Increase

State Letter 1303
Field Operations Memo 2005-48

State Letter 1303 and Field Operations Memo 2005-48 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) has increased to $400.

Standard Utility Allowance

The Heating Standard Utility Allowance has increased to $474. The Nonheating Standard Utility Allowance has increased to $287. The Telephone Standard Utility allowance has increased to $33.

Homeless Shelter/Utility Deduction

The Homeless Shelter/Utility Deduction remains at $143.

Standard Deduction

The Standard Deduction for AU size 5 and greater has increased.

Voluntary Authorization to Release Information Form

All
Field Operations Memo 2005-49

A new form has been developed to get applicant/recipient permission for the Department to use collateral contact for verifications.

The *Voluntary Authorization to Release Information* form is to be used by TAO staff when verification must be made through collateral contact because documentary evidence is unavailable. It is to be used only when the applicant/recipient agrees to collateral contact. The new release form is available in the Online Forms option in Policy Online.

School Attendance for Children While in EA Shelters

EA
State Letter 1305

The Department shall make every effort to ensure that a child receiving temporary emergency shelter will continue attending school in the community in which he or she lived prior to receiving EA unless the EA assistance unit requests otherwise.

EA Forms

EA
A User's Guide: Emergency Assistance, SSI Benefits and BEACON - Update 022

The Forms chapter has been update by adding the new forms associated with presumptive eligibility for EA shelters and transportation.

BEACON Universal Semiannual Report Form

FS
A User's Guide: Transitional Assistance Programs and BEACON - Update 061

This Update issues procedures for processing recertifications using the new BEACON-generated Universal Semiannual Report (USR) form which is prefilled with information known to the Department. This form, along with the RR/FSP-1B, replaces the FSP-RCF currently mailed to USR AUs.

A completed USR form, along with a signed RR/FSP-1B and any necessary verification(s), is required to recertify for FS benefits.

The new USR form also serves as recertification notice. The cover page informs the recipient of the apply-by date and the consequences for failing to recertify timely.

For USR recertifications, AU Managers need only collect verification(s) of reported change(s) or information which is questionable.

Assessed Person Income and Expenses Statement, EBT Vendor Conversion and Letter Requests

All

A User's Guide: Transitional Assistance Programs and BEACON - Update 062

This Update transmits the following changes:

1) Chapter XIV:Assessed Person Income and Expenses Statement: Food Stamp regulations prohibit an increase in FS benefits due to a cash grant decrease resulting from the failure to comply with a cash program requirement. This update restores *Failure to Cooperate with Child Support Enforcement Requirements* as a closing/reduction reason that is subject to the FS Attributed Amount.

2) Chapter XVI: Benefit Issuance Mechanism: In August 2005, conversion from the EBT vendor, J P Morgan to Affiliated Computer Services, Inc. State and Local Solutions (ACS) took place. This update provides minor revisions to pages previously issued.

3) Chapter XVIII, Notices and Letter Requests: This chapter now includes separate sections documenting Notices (Section A) and Letter Requests (Section B).

4) Chapter XVIII, Section B: Letter Requests: This section includes documentation on the five letter request types (Globe Santa, Financial History, Holiday Gift Verification, Income Verification and Termination Verification) avail able in BEACON. The documentation differentiates between central and local processing, giving detailed instructions for requesting pre-BEACON, BEACON and combined pre-BEACON and BEACON recipient Financial History. "How To" instructions were developed for each letter request type and are available either in the chapter or via BEACON Help.

FYI

BEACON Help Revisions

The following is a list of Help windows that have been created and/or updated. The list reflects updates made to both the primary and secondary windows.

Document Direct and View Direct
Document Preview Window
  Domestic Violence or
  Heightened Level of Security
Double Click

Letter Request
- Fields & Buttons
- Letter Request Required Fields by Letter Type
- Letter Request Types and Available Languages
- Letter Request - Authorization to Submit
- Warnings, Edits and Messages

Letter Request - Financial History
- BEACON Financial History
- Request BEACON Financial History Centrally (''How To'')
- Request BEACON Financial History Locally (''How To'')
- Pre-BEACON Financial History
- Request Pre-BEACON Financial History Centrally (''How To'')
- Combined BEACON and Pre-BEACON Financial History
- Request Combined BEACON and Pre-BEACON Financial History

Centrally (''How To'')
- Warnings, Edits and Messages

Letter Request - Globe Santa
- Request a Globe Santa Letter (''How To'')
- Warnings, Edits and Messages

Letter Request - Holiday Gift Verification
- Request a Holiday Gift Verification Letter (''How To'')
- Warnings, Edits and Messages

Letter Request - Income Verification
- Request an Income Verification Letter (''How To'')
- Warnings, Edits and Messages

Letter Request - Termination Verification
- Request a Termination Verification Letter (''How To'')
- Warnings, Edits and Messages

Name Search Using Wildcard(s)
- Warnings, Edits and Messages

Search for Client
- Search for Client Fields and Buttons
- Resize List Columns

(''How To'')
- Search for Client by Personal Information (''How To'')
- Search for Client by SSN (''How To'')
- Sort Search Results (''How To'')
- Warnings, Edits and Messages

FYI

Changes to DTA Online

DTA Online has been updated with the following changes:

Latest News/Photo Gallery

• Two links have been added to Latest News/Photo Gallery: *Memo from Commissioner Wagner: Performance Recognition Award Winners*; and *Memo from Commissioner Wagner: Hurricane Katrina Evacuees.*

• The *DMH/DMR Food Stamp Application Summary* Job Aid has been added to the list of available job aids accessed from BEACON Training Online.

FYI

Changes to Policy Online

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

Job Aids

• The *DMH/DMR Food Stamp Application Summary* Job Aid has been added to the list of available job aids. It provides AU Managers with a checklist to use as a guide for processing DMH or DMR food stamp applications.

Online Forms

The following forms have been added to Online Forms:

Notice to Individuals Requesting Emergency Assistance Temporary Emergency Shelter Services (NFL-16) (English)(Spanish)

Voluntary Authorization to Release Information (VARI)

Related Systems Information

- BB Options
  FMCS Codes
  For reference purposes, Category Type - EAEDC
  Eligibility Reason – Family and the Category Type –
  TAFDC -
  Deprivation Reasons now include the entry
  (eliminated 8/05).

- Document Direct/View Direct Printing Procedures

  A new option entitled Document Direct/View Direct
  Printing Procedures has been added to the list of available
  options on the Related Systems Information window. When
  selected, the procedures for viewing and printing reports
  will be displayed.

FYI

EA Six-Month Extension

When a family whose income exceeds the EA Eligibility Standard
for their AU size, receives shelter benefits for an additional six
months, the reminder notice that the six-month shelter period is
scheduled to end will be sent to the EA AU 30 days (instead of 10
days) prior to the end of the six-month shelter period.

FYI

EAEDC/SSI Timely Case Closing

Currently, when an EAEDC recipient is approved for and begins
to receive SSI, staff from Centralized Eligibility Operations
(CEO) manually close the AU. Effective **September 23, 2005,**
EAEDC recipients who receive SSI will be automatically closed
by a BEACON Batch Job. No additional AU Manager action is
needed.

Once a recipient is in receipt of SSI, the SDX batch job will close
the EAEDC portion of the AU and recalculate the food stamp
benefits, if applicable, using current recertification rules.

The Results Tab of the Eligibility Explorer window on BEACON
will display the actual closing action. A message about this clos-
ing action will also be added automatically on the Narratives Tab.

FYI

Processing Unverified Food Stamp Deductible Expenses

At the June 2005 Food for
Thought Conference, there was
some confusion over when a FS
deductible expense amount,
that is not verified, may be
zeroed out.

USDA has clarified that it is
**only at initial application,
reapplication or recertifica-
tion** that an unverified expense
amount must be zeroed out.
The FS benefit would be calcu-
lated without the expense
deduction in accordance with
the following statement on the
Rights and Responsibilities
form (RR/FSP-1B): *"I under-
stand that, for food stamp
benefits, to receive a deduction
for child care expenses, rent or
mortgage payments, utility or
shelter expenses, child support
paid to a non-household mem-
ber, or medical expenses, I
must report and provide verifi-
cation to the Department.
Failure to report or verify the
above-listed expense(s), could
mean that I will receive less
food stamp benefits each
month, and will be seen as my
statement that the household
does not want to receive a
deduction for the unreported or
unverified expense."*

When an ongoing AU reports a change in an expense amount during the certification period, the policy at 106 CMR 366.120 applies. This area of policy will be modified in the future to reflect the recent USDA clarification.

Remember: TBA and USR AUs are subject to limited reporting requirements. Changes reported during the certification period must be acted on in accordance with food stamp regulations at 106 CMR 366.110.

Correct P.O. Box Address for Child Support Checks

TAFDC
Field Operations Memo
2005-32A

This Field Operations Memo gave TAO Staff the corrected address for AU Managers to send child support payments received by the recipient directly from the absent parent or child support checks incorrectly sent to the recipient by DOR.