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## From the Commissioner

Dear Colleagues:

I wanted to take this opportunity to thank you for all you have accomplished in 2010. It has been a challenging year, but a rewarding one as well. More than ever, the residents of the Commonwealth are relying on our benefits and services to meet their basic needs – which would not be possible without your hard work and dedication.

DTA currently serves about 800,000 people – or one in eight residents of Massachusetts. The total number of households enrolled in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) has increased by 308% since the beginning of FY02 while total Department staffing levels decreased by more than 32% in that same time period. Within the last year alone, the SNAP caseload has increased by more than 81,000 individuals (more than 48,000 households), or nearly 13%, and is projected to continue to grow.

Our cash assistance caseloads have also increased. As of November 2010, there were 52,182 households on TAFDC and 22,424 households on EAEDC. TAFDC has increased by 3% since November 2009, and EAEDC has increased by 8%.

Despite the rising demand for our services and our limited resources, we have reached many milestones and received many accolades this year:

- In February, along with the Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS) and MassHealth, we launched My Account Page (MAP). MAP allows heads of household to view information about their DTA benefits online.
- In May, Massachusetts was one of six states chosen to participate in a U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) research study about SNAP modernization initiatives. The study will identify lessons that can be learned from states that have implemented the most advanced updating of systems to support SNAP participation.

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## From the Commissioner *(Continued from page 1)*

- Also in May, we began a four-day supervisory skills training for all DTA supervisors.
- In August, after years of development and months of testing, we launched BEACON 3.0. As with any new system, there were some significant issues that had to be addressed, and your patience and perseverance is greatly appreciated. We are confident that as we continue to implement enhancements the system will increase our capabilities and allow us to better serve our clients.
- Also in August, Massachusetts was the only state chosen to administer USDA's Healthy Incentives Pilot (HIP), a first-ever initiative to test whether incentives to buy fresh produce will increase the purchase of healthy foods by SNAP clients. We will receive approximately \$6 million to administer the pilot in Hampden County.
- In September, USDA awarded Massachusetts a \$1.6 million High Performance Bonus Award for our high percentage of timely processed SNAP applications during Fiscal Year 2009. This was the seventh consecutive year we were awarded for this outstanding performance.
- Also in September, we launched our Interactive Voice Recognition (IVR) hotline for clients. The number 1-877-382-2363 is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and provides clients with answers to many of their questions and information about their case (similar to that available on MAP).
- In September and October, we held kickoff meetings for our first eight DTA Advisory Boards, in Boston, Cape & Islands, Greenfield, Lowell, Revere, Springfield, Taunton and Worcester.
- In December, we learned that USDA ranked Massachusetts 8<sup>th</sup> in the nation for our SNAP Program Access Index (PAI). The PAI compares the number of SNAP participants over the course of a calendar year to the number of residents in the state below 125% of poverty. This means that more people who are eligible for SNAP are participating in the program.

At the same time, we have had to make some difficult choices in order to live within our budget. This year, we reduced our Employment Services Program by \$8 million, limiting our ability to help our clients to achieve self-sufficiency. In November, we changed to an outstationing model in our North Adams office, and we will be making a similar transition in Milford this spring. I know these changes have not been easy, and I thank the staff of all affected offices and units for their patience and adaptability.

Recently, there have also been changes to SEIU Local 509 leadership. I would like to thank Ken Ramsay for his service as the DTA Chapter President. Ken, your drive and commitment are truly admirable and I appreciate your candor over the years. I would also like to congratulate Arthur Casey on his role as DTA Chapter President and Susan Tousignant, the recently elected President of Local 509. Arthur and Susan, we look forward to working with you.

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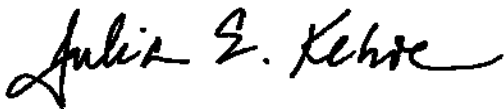
**From the Commissioner** *(Continued from page 2)*

We also extend our thanks and appreciation to the representatives of NAGE Units 1 and 6, particularly, Unit 1 President Jack Donegan and Unit 6 President, Greg Sorozan. We look forward to continuing our productive relationships with both of you.

Although difficult economic times are likely to continue in the coming year, I am confident that through creativity, teamwork, and dedication, we will persevere. I cannot thank you enough for all you do every day to assist the low-income individuals and families of our state.

Best wishes for a happy and healthy new year.

With much appreciation,



Julia E. Kehoe  
Commissioner

## Quality Corner

This month, we will review two errors. The first error was caused by the assignment of an incorrect certification type, while the second error was caused by the failure to use the appropriate standard utility allowance (SUA) in the SNAP benefit calculation.

### Self-Employment Income and Universal Semiannual Reporting

The first case included a 26-year-old client, her spouse, their one-year-old child and a 16-year-old nephew. The case was certified as Universal Semiannual Reporting (USR) from March 2010 through September 2010. The Quality Control (QC) review month of September was the first month of the expired certification.

During the review month, the household received \$633 in SNAP benefits. The only income reported at application was earned from self-employment. The client's husband was a taxi driver who reported income of \$909 for the review month. The household paid rent of \$324 per month and was responsible for heating/cooling. On May 14, 2010, the case manager removed the client's nephew from the SNAP household due to a DYS match. However, because this was a USR case, the SNAP benefit did not decrease.

The case was subsequently initiated on August 13, 2010 when the client submitted her recertification form. During this time, the nephew returned to the household; there were only four days left in the certification period when the nephew returned. Since the certification period was expired, QC determined that the household was overpaid for the review month based on the nephew having been calculated as part of the household for the entire review month.

### What's a Case Manager to Do?

The nephew was not entitled to the entire month's benefits and would have been appropriately closed out of the case if the correct certification type had been assigned at certification. Based on the circumstances of this case, the correct certification type was Change Reporting. Current SNAP regulations identify self-employment households as an exception to the USR certification type. For more information on USR, see 106 CMR 366.110 (C).

### Shelter Expenses for Residents of Licensed Group Homes

The second case included a 55-year-old client who was a resident of a licensed group home. The case was certified as a Change Reporting case with a 24-month certification period. At certification, the case manager used the following income and expenses in the calculation of the household's SNAP benefits: SSI income of \$704, rent of \$259 and no allowance for utility expenses.

QC determined from the contents of the case record that the group home had indicated that the resident paid for both heating and cooling expenses. The case record contained a completed copy of the *Other Agency Certification of Shelter Expenses for Licensed Group Home Residents* (FS-ACSE) form. The case manager had overlooked this detail and therefore had not used the heating/cooling SUA in the SNAP benefit calculation. This caused an underissuance of \$162 for the review month.

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## Quality Corner (Continued from page 3)

### What's a Case Manager to Do?

In some offices, SNAP cases for residents of licensed group homes are handled by one or two designated case managers. In such instances, other case managers in the TAO may be unfamiliar with the *Other Agency Certification of Shelter Expenses for Licensed Group Home Residents* (FS-ACSE) form. When processing cases from licensed group homes, case managers and supervisors should refer to Field Operations Memos 2004-41 and 2009-10 for details and instruction.

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### From the Forms File

#### Revised Form

*Child Care Fact Sheet*

25-642-1210-05

25-643-1210-05(S)

CCFS (Rev. 12/2010)

The *Child Care Fact Sheet* has been revised. Refer to Operations Memo 2010-58 for more information. Please discard old versions of this Fact Sheet and use the revised version.

#### Revised Brochure

*Earned Income Tax Credit*

25-650-1210-05

25-651-1210-05(S)

EITC-B (Rev. 12/2010)

The *Earned Income Tax Credit* brochure has been revised. Refer to Operations Memo 2010-58 for more information on the use of this brochure. Please discard old versions of this brochure and use the revised version.

#### Obsolete Form

*Child Care Fact Sheet*

25-642-1209-05

25-643-1209-05(S)

CCFS (Rev. 12/2009)

#### Obsolete Brochure

*Earned Income Tax Credit*

25-650-1209-05

25-651-1209-05(S)

EITC-B (Rev. 12/2009)

This form and brochure are now obsolete. Please discard all old versions of the CCFS and the EITC brochure and use the revised versions. Refer to Operations Memo 2010-58 for more information.



## From the Hotline

A “From the Hotline” index of the questions and answers published in Transitions during 2010 has been compiled below. The index is intended to provide quick access to policy and procedural information. Please remember that this index explains policy and procedure as of the month/year in which the question and answer were issued.

<b>Emergency Aid to the Elderly, Disabled and Children</b>		
<b>Topic</b>	<b>Month</b>	<b>Related Procedure/Policy, 106 CMR:</b>
Application Requirements	April	702.710(B)
Asset, Real Estate	February	321.140(O)
Asset, Inaccessible	February	321.125
Eligibility Factors	June	702.340
Funeral Expenses	December	705.700
Funeral and Final Disposition	December	Field Operations Memo 2010-54
Income, Lump Sum Definition	May	321.240(A)
Income, Lump Sum Exclusions	May	321.240(B)
Living Arrangements	February	321.410
SSI	April	702.710(B)
Verification	March	701.410
Verification, Frequency	August	702.330
Verification, Responsibilities	June	702.310

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**From the Hotline** *(Continued from page 6)***Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program**

<b>Topic</b>	<b>Month</b>	<b>Related Procedure/Policy, 106 CMR:</b>
Certification, Initial	March	364.450
Disabled Permanently and Age 60 or Over	October	361.200(B)
Expense, Dependent Care	March	364.400(D)
Expense, Shelter	February	364.400(G), 364.500(K)
Expense, Verification	March	364.450
Identity	June	361.610
Income, Anticipated	November	365.970(B)
Income, Earnings	April	363.230(K)
Income, Earnings Averaging	September	365.430
Income, Earnings of Self Employed	November	363.210(G), 365.960(D), 365.970(B)
Income, Exclusions	September	363.230
Nonhousehold Members, Students	July	Field Operations Memo 2010-28
Parent/Child Rule	October	361.200(A)
Responsibilities for Verifying	June	361.650
Standards for Special Circumstances, Elderly and Disabled	October	364.975
Standard Utility Allowance, Telephone	September	364.400(G)
Students	July	Field Operations Memo 2010-28
USR, exceptions	November	366.110(C)
Verifications, Identity	June	361.610
Verification, Responsibilities	June	361.650

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**From the Hotline** *(Continued from page 7)***Transitional Aid to Families with Dependent Children**

<b>Topic</b>	<b>Month</b>	<b>Related Procedure/Policy, 106 CMR:</b>
Asset, Fair Market and Equity Values	August	204.120(G)
Asset, Limit	August	204.110
Asset, Verification	August	702.330
Eligibility Factors	August	702.330
Eligibility, Initial Determination	March	702.920
Funeral, Expenses	December	705.700
Funeral, Final Disposition	December	Field Operations Memo 2010-54
Income, Earnings	September	204.290
Income, Lump Sum Definition	May	204.240(A)
Income, Lump Sum Exclusions	May	204.240(B)
Relationship	June	203.585
Rent Allowance	February	705.910
Verification	March	701.410
Verification, Assets	August	702.330
Verification, Eligibility	June	702.340
Verification, Responsibilities	June	702.310



## Operations Memos

### **Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), Massachusetts Earned Income Credit (EIC) and Child Care Assistance Annual Mailing**

All

Operations Memo 2010-58

This Operations Memo informs staff about the annual federal Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), Massachusetts Earned Income Credit (EIC) and Child Care Assistance informational mailing scheduled to take place during the first two weeks of January 2011. The mailing will be sent to all active TAFDC clients, all former TAFDC clients whose cases closed on or after January 1, 2010, and all active SNAP cases, excluding SNAP cases in the Malden Centralized SSI Office and SNAP cases receiving TAFDC.

### **Standard Utility Allowance Increase for Bay State CAP Food Assistance Households**

SNAP

Operations Memo 2010-59

Effective close of business Friday, December 17, 2010, active Bay State CAP households were automatically recalculated using the new Bay State CAP SUA amount of \$575. The newly calculated benefit amount is displayed on the Active by Grantee Name view, under Assistance Unit Lists. No case manager action is required on these cases. An informational report was emailed to TAOs impacted by this change.

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### **Diversity Quote**

**“I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character. I have a dream today.”**

*Martin Luther King, Jr.*

## TAO Meeting Notes