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From the Commissioner

Dear Colleagues:

We have been advised by the Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development (EOLWD) Division of Unemployment Assistance (DUA) that approximately 90,000 Massachusetts residents could lose unemployment insurance (UI) benefits by the end of July if Congress fails to approve an extension. These unemployment benefits may begin to be exhausted beginning on June 4th. We understand that regardless of action by Congress, approximately 8,000 Massachusetts residents are likely to lose UI benefits throughout the summer. This issue was reported in the *Boston Globe* on 5/27/2010. (http://www.boston.com/business/articles/2010/05/27/thousands_in_mass_may Lose_jobless_benefits/)

Governor Patrick has asked EOLWD and the Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS) to develop a coordinated response to assist these residents with obtaining other benefits for which they may be eligible, including the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly Food Stamps) and cash assistance. This response may include expanded DTA office hours, particularly for TAO, Centralized Web Unit, and hotline staff, and expanded BEACON availability.

In anticipation of a significant increase in the numbers of individuals and families seeking assistance from DTA, we are prepared to offer overtime to all DTA SEIU Local 509 and NAGE staff members beginning next week. DTA has identified sufficient funding to support some overtime for next week (June 1st to June 4th), and we are working to secure additional monies to ensure continued resource support during this challenging time. **If you are interested in volunteering for overtime, please let your manager how many additional hours you are willing to work.** Overtime will be approved on an equitable basis. If there are limitations due to available funding, seniority will be the determining factor.

(Continued on page 2)

From the Commissioner (Continued from page 1)

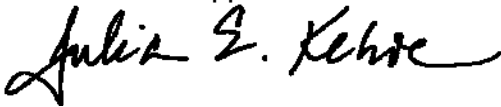
Next week (June 1st – June 4th), overtime hours should be utilized to catch up on existing cases in preparation for the thousands of people who may seek DTA assistance after June 4th. Volunteers for overtime will work within the normal bandwidth hours of each office. For subsequent weeks (June 7th – July 30th), we anticipate that BEACON will be available until 7p.m., and will provide you with a specific availability schedule. TAO Directors should advise their Regional Directors of the feasibility of extending office hours beyond your regular closing time, and to identify other issues that may need to be addressed.

We are working with EOLWD to:

- Conduct conference calls or webinars to offer guidance to stakeholders who are likely to engage with affected UI claimants;
- Develop a letter to affected UI claimants that can serve as verification that their benefits have been exhausted, which will reduce the need for access to UI screens;
- Expedite expanded access to UI screens for as many staff members as appropriate; and
- Consider co-location of DUA and/or Division of Career Services staff with TAO staff to assist with increased traffic from UI claimants.

We will keep you updated as our plans develop. Thank you for your assistance during this critical time.

With much appreciation,



Julia E. Kehoe
Commissioner

Quality Corner

This month, we will review two errors. The first error was caused by the misapplication of the household composition rules while the second error was caused by countable income that was disregarded in the SNAP benefit calculation.

Household Composition

This was an Non Public Assistance (NPA) case that included a 21-year-old client, his 21-year-old spouse and their newborn child. The client applied for assistance in March 2009 and declared earnings of \$1040 per month. On the application, the client also stated that he and his family lived with his mother-in-law. The case was certified as a change reporting case with a one-year certification period from March 2009 through March 2010. The household received \$318 per month in SNAP benefits.

QC determined that the client's mother-in-law, with whom he, his wife and child resided, was the grantee (case head) of another SNAP household, and received monthly SNAP benefits of \$526. This caused an overissuance of \$42 in the review month.

What's a Case Manager to Do?

Case managers must remember that children under 22 years old, including adult children, who may be 18 years or older but who are under 22 years old, must be included in the same SNAP household as their parents, when living with them, even if the child is married. In this case, the applicant, his wife and their child should have been added to his mother-in-law's SNAP household. For more information on the household concept in SNAP, see 106 CMR 361.200 (A)(3).

In addition, although the case with the client, his wife and his child was incorrect based on household composition rules, the case should have been established as Universal Semiannual Reporting and not Change Reporting since the client reported that he had earnings.

RSDI Income Not Counted in the SNAP Benefit Calculation

This was a Public Assistance (PA) case that included the client, her 18-year-old daughter and her 7-year-old niece. The household income included TAFDC for the niece, and both SSI and RSDI income for the client. The case was certified as a change reporting case from December 2009 through May 2010.

QC determined that, when entering the RSDI income into BEACON, the case manager had erroneously indicated 'No' in the Exists field on the Other Income window. Consequently the RSDI income was not used in the SNAP benefit calculation, causing an overissuance for the review month.

What's a Case Manager to Do?

Case managers are reminded to review the financial details of a case by going to the Results /Financial tab before submitting a case for approval. This review would have shown that the RSDI income was not being used in the SNAP benefit calculation. Supervisors are also reminded to check cases carefully for accuracy. For more information on preventing errors, see Quality Corner of February 2008: *Keys to Preventing Errors*.

Note: In accordance with Field Operations Memo 2008-14, change reporting cases should be assigned a one-year certification period.

From the Hotline

If you have any questions on this column or other policy and procedural material, please have your Hotline designee call the **Policy Hotline at 617-348-8478**.

- Q.** Is a birth certificate a required document for SNAP eligibility?
- A.** A birth certificate is only one of many types of verification sources that can be used to document SNAP eligibility requirements. For example, when establishing identity, remember that any document that reasonably establishes identity must be accepted, and no requirement for a specific type of document may be imposed. See 106 CMR 361.610 for more information on verifying identity in SNAP. In addition, see 106 CMR 361.640 for more general information on the different types of acceptable verification sources in SNAP and 106 CMR 361.650 on responsibilities for obtaining verifications, including offering assistance to households in obtaining verifications.
- Q.** Is a birth certificate a required document for EAEDC and TAFDC eligibility?
- A.** While the birth certificate is a preferred method for verifying relationship in TAFDC, it is only one of many other acceptable forms of verification. See 106 CMR 203.585 for more information. In addition, see 106 CMR 702.340 for more general information on the different methods of verifying required eligibility factors in the TAFDC and EAEDC programs; these include original documents, collateral contacts and self-declarations. Also, see 106 CMR 702.310 for responsibilities for obtaining verifications, including offering assistance when an applicant or client is unable to obtain the required verifications.

Diversity Quote

“ The price of the democratic way of life is a growing appreciation of people's differences, not merely as tolerable, but as the essence of a rich and rewarding human experience.”

Jerome Nathanson



From the Forms File

New Forms

Community College Enrollment Verification Form

09-440-0510-05

CCE-1 Form (5/2010)

The Community College Verification Enrollment Form (CCE-1) is to be used by TAO staff to verify the eligibility of certain community college students for SNAP benefits. The CCE-1 is available in the *Online Forms* section of *Policy Online*. Refer to Field Operations Memo 2010-28 for more information.

The following two forms are now available for use by Teen Parent Specialists and Liaisons. Forms are available in the *Online Forms* section of *Policy Online*.

TLP Admission Checklist for Emergency Placements

02-829-0610-05

TLPAC – Checklist (6/2010)

Teen Parent Referral

02-825-0610-05

TP Referral (6/2010)

New Brochure

The *Community Information - How may we help you?* brochure is now available in the following languages:

25-672-0510-05 (Haitian Creole)

25-673-0510-05 (Russian)

25-674-0510-05 (Cambodian –Khmer)

25-675-0510-05 (Portuguese)

25-676-0510-05 (Chinese)

CI_DTA (3/2010)

Cultural Communication

Each month, the Diversity Council offers tips about communicating with people of different cultures.

This month's tip:

In Vietnamese culture, it is considered rude to speak loudly or use too many gestures when conversing.

Field Operations Memos

Changes to the Community Service Program

TAFDC

Field Operations Memo 2010-26

Field Operations Memo 2010-15 advised TAO staff about additional changes to the community service program. This Field Operations Memo 2010-26 advises TAO staff about a change to the Employment Services Coordinator.

For continuity purposes, Field Operations Memo 2010-15 is being replaced with this memo with the change to the Employment Services Coordinator incorporated.

Monthly Reporting Changes

TAFDC

Field Operations Memo 2010-27

State Letter 1358

The Department requires employed TAFDC clients to report their earnings on a monthly basis, a process known as “Monthly Reporting.” In addition to employed clients, unemployed clients with a recent history of earned income (those who received earnings during the previous two months) are required to be on Monthly Reporting, and clients who lose their jobs while receiving TAFDC are required to be on Monthly Reporting for three months after the job loss.

State Letter 1358, effective June 1, 2010, eliminates the Monthly Reporting requirement for unemployed clients with a recent history of earned income and reduces the reporting requirement to one month for clients who lose their jobs or have no reported earned income.

The purpose of the memo is to advise TAO staff about changes to the Monthly Reporting process.

SNAP Eligibility for Certain Community College Students

SNAP

Field Operations Memo 2010-28

Certain community college students who are enrolled in a career or technical program under Perkins IV or students whom the community college otherwise certifies as enrolled in a career or technical education program that will lead directly to employment may be eligible for SNAP benefits. This memo informs TAO staff about the requirements for eligibility, explains case manager responsibilities in the processing of these cases and introduces the new Community College Enrollment Verification Form (CCE-I) to be used as verification of eligibility.

FYI

Getting Ready for BEACON 3

BEACON 3.0 is currently scheduled for deployment on June 28, 2010. User Acceptance Testing (UAT) is in the final stage and there are only a few open defects remaining. Thank you again to all who continue to help out with the UAT process. Your time and effort will ensure a successful deployment.

BEACON 3.0 training is completed. BEACON Flashes continue to be available for review. Field staff are expected to complete all BEACON 3.0 practice exercises prior to June 24, 2010.

In accordance with the BEACON 3.0 implementation plan, the last day users will have access to BEACON 2.0 is Thursday, June 24, 2010. On Friday, June 25, 2010, BEACON 2.0 will be shut down and will be unavailable to staff. Detailed instructions for working with applicants and clients on that day will be made available prior to the shutdown. TAOs will also be provided with posters and flyers informing clients of potential delays during the conversion.

On Monday, June 28, 2010, BEACON 3.0 is scheduled to be operating for all users. To access BEACON 3.0 for the first time after conversion, all users will be required to sign-in using their WEL ID as the User Name and enter their Employee ID as the Password. After sign-in, they will be prompted to change their password.

Each new BEACON 3.0 password must contain:

- at least 8 characters;
- a minimum of one upper and lower case character;
- a minimum of one number; and
- a minimum of one special character.

Note: BEACON users who need a password reset should contact the Systems Help Desk.

The Department will notify users as soon as possible in advance if any of the implementation dates change.

Included in BEACON 3.0 is a comprehensive online Help function designed to assist staff when questions arise. With an overview of each BEACON page in a workflow, there are also step-by-step instructions on how to complete the page. BEACON 3.0 Help will also have an improved glossary. There is also an index with search capability, as well as information on: utilizing calendar functionality for all appointments, text messaging and setting up “My Office.”

Also, the Department is nearing completion of a new and updated *Online Guide* that will offer a centralized resource for policy, program and procedure information. The *Online Guide* will replace much of the content of the Department’s primary procedural manual, *A Users Guide: Transitional Assistance Programs and BEACON*, which has not been updated in some time.

The *Online Guide* is web-based, organized by topic and consists of TAFDC, EAEDC and SNAP information, as well as some BEACON 3.0 procedures. (BEACON 3.0 Help is available for more system-specific instructions). In addition to updated program and procedural content, the web pages of the *Online Guide* will contain electronic links to bring users to regulations, Field Operation Memos, Online Forms and TAO-Emails—Special Procedures, as well as “From the Hotline” columns and FYIs in *Transitions*. The *Online Guide* is scheduled to be released to staff in the Fall of 2010. Thank you for your help during the transition.

TAO Meeting Notes