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From the Commissioner

Dear Colleagues,

This month, I will complete my third round of visits to local offices. It is a pleasure to see all of you, to celebrate your accomplishments, and to hear your candid feedback. Your ideas and suggestions set the foundation for the future of our Department. I have taken your recommendations back to Central Office, and several are already being implemented or addressed.

SNAP Waivers

Many of you have made recommendations for ways to speed the processing of SNAP applications and re-certifications, and to minimize the impact on DTA clients and staff. In response, we requested and received several waivers from USDA based on your ideas.

USDA recently approved our request to modify the current waiver of the requirement to document hardship when conducting a telephone interview in lieu of a face-to-face interview for both new applications and re-certifications. We will soon be able to conduct telephone interviews instead of face-to-face interviews without documenting a hardship.

Our request was also approved to waive the interview entirely at re-certification for certain elderly and/or disabled households if:

- The re-certification is returned on time;
- The required verifications are provided to the local office by the established deadline date; and
- The household's continued eligibility for SNAP is confirmed.

Households who fail to provide the required verifications, or who appear to no longer be eligible, will still be required to participate in an interview as part of the certification process. This waiver is truly groundbreaking, as it is the first of its kind granted by USDA.

I realize there are some concerns about reducing the in-person aspect of our work. Please know that clients who prefer to meet in-person with DTA staff members have every right to do so and must not be discouraged.

(Continued on page 2)

From the Commissioner *(Continued from page 1)*

Many clients prefer the convenience of communication via telephone, mail, and fax – particularly those who work during the day. These waivers minimize the demands on our clients while continuing to provide a high level of access and assistance.

You will receive implementation dates and procedural details about these waivers in an upcoming Field Operations Memo.

Streamlined SNAP Recertification Process

In addition to the waivers, we are pursuing the development of a pre-filled recertification form for SNAP households who are not on Universal Semiannual Reporting. This will make the recertification process simpler and faster for both clients and staff. We will share additional details about this change shortly.

Boston/Springfield Leases and SNAP Processing Centers

At our meetings in Springfield, I have been asked whether we could explore developing Liberty and State Street into one large office rather than separate SNAP and cash offices. As a first step, I have followed up with the leasing unit at EOHHS and have asked that they extend the State Street lease so it expires at the same time as Liberty. We have also requested that EOHHS seek the same arrangement in Boston by aligning the leases for the Newmarket Square and Dudley Squares offices. Once this occurs, and the leases expire, we can put bids out for one large office in each city. We still may not be able to obtain space large enough to accommodate everyone, but we will have the opportunity to look for it.

Since new procurements for office space in Springfield and Boston won't take place for several years, we look forward to continuing to work together to serve clients as effectively as possible and reduce the workloads as caseloads continue to grow. We are moving forward with our plans to transform the Springfield-State and Newmarket Square (Boston) local offices into SNAP Processing Centers.

UI Screens Expansion

I have been hearing consistently that increased access to Unemployment Insurance (UI) screens would be a tremendous help in processing applications for SNAP and cash assistance for UI claimants. Currently access to UI screens is limited to supervisors only. We are working closely with the Division of Unemployment Assistance (DUA) to expand access and to make the screens easier to use. Testing of the reformatted screens will soon be underway by volunteers in TAOs and Central Office. I will keep you updated as more information becomes available.

(Continued on page 3)

From the Commissioner (Continued from page 2)

SNAP Bonus Award

In addition to recent initiatives based on your suggestions, DTA has been honored with an award based on your excellent work. For the sixth consecutive year, Massachusetts is the recipient of a bonus award from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) for exceptional administration of SNAP.

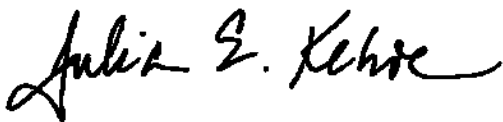
An award ceremony was held at our Revere Transitional Assistance Office. Kevin Concannon, USDA Undersecretary for Food, Nutrition and Consumer Services, presented us with a certificate to honor Massachusetts for being among the six states with the highest percentage of timely processed SNAP applications during Fiscal Year 2008. We will receive \$1,548,018, which the Legislature has directed to be used to assist our clients to achieve self-sufficiency through employment and training.

I am so proud of this achievement, and I thank all of you for everything you do to help our clients to apply for and receive benefits as quickly as possible. With caseloads on the rise and demand for assistance at an all-time high, this accomplishment is particularly meaningful.

Please know that I am doing all I can to advocate for the continued support of our staff and programs during these uncertain fiscal times. I welcome your feedback and ideas, and hope to see you as I continue visiting local offices in the coming months.

Thank you as always for your dedication and commitment to low-income individuals and families in the Commonwealth.

Sincerely and with much appreciation,



Julia E. Kehoe
Commissioner

Quality Corner

This month we will review an error that occurred in an NPA case. The error was caused by the use of an income verification that was outdated.

Disability Pension from a Foreign Country

This NPA case included one adult. At the time of application (February 2009), the client reported and verified with a bank statement that her only income was a disability pension of \$659.27 per month from the UK. The case manager entered the amount in BEACON as derived from the verification. This amount was used in the SNAP benefit calculation. QC later determined, however, that the income verification provided by the client was outdated. The amount of \$659.27 from the bank statement was for the period 7/28/08 through 8/25/08. QC determined that the correct pension amount was \$981 per month. Using the incorrect amount caused an overpayment error of \$89 for the review month.

What's a Case Manager to Do?

Case managers must exercise care when extracting information from bank statements or other verifications used to verify income. In this case, the bank statement used to verify the income was dated August 2008 and therefore was an inadequate source to verify current income because it was six months old.

One of the first rules when reviewing a document is to look for the date on the document and for the period of time the information represents. In this situation, for example, there could have been a cost-of-living increase in the pension amount in January of 2009. In addition, as this was a pension from a foreign country, the value of the pension could fluctuate based on the exchange rate at any particular time.

Therefore, it is crucial to make sure that the income verification being used is current. For more information on the verification of income at recertification, see 106 CMR 363.210(B).

Cultural Communication

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

This month's tip:

The American sign for OK (making a circle with finger and thumb), which is often used to show that someone has done something correctly or perfectly, means "nothing" in France and means "money" in Japan.

From the Forms File

Revised Forms

The *Food Stamp Benefits Application* has been revised to include the name change to SNAP. Please discard old versions and use the revised version of this form.

SNAP Benefits Application

25-170-0909-05

25-171-0909-05(S)

25-172-0909-05(P)

SNAPA-1 (Rev. 9/2009)

Assignment of Support Cooperation with Child Support Enforcement Division of the Massachusetts Department of Revenue (DOR) Good Cause Claim

02-201-1009-05

02-260-1009-05(S)

T-A34/36 (Rev. 10/2009)

This form has been revised to remove references to child support arrears that accrue before a client receives TAFDC. Please discard old versions and use the revised version of this form.

Universal Semiannual Reporting (USR) Income Guidelines Form

09-375-1009-05

09-376-1009-05(S)

SNAP-USR-2 (Rev. 10/2009)

The Categorical Eligibility USR AU Gross Monthly Income Standards have been updated on this form. In addition, references to the Food Stamp Program name have been changed to Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). Please discard old versions and use the revised version of this form.

Diversity Quote

“Ultimately, America's answer to the intolerant man is diversity, the very diversity which our heritage of religious freedom has inspired.”

Robert F. Kennedy

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. My TAFDC applicant was released from prison two months ago. She came in to apply with her 13-month-old son. Because she was convicted of a felony for the use of a controlled substance, must she wait an additional ten consecutive months before becoming eligible for TAFDC?

A. No. Although clients convicted of a felony for the possession, use or distribution of a controlled substance may be ineligible for TAFDC for 12 consecutive months following their release from prison, as the single parent of a child under two, your client is exempt from this rule and therefore she is not subject to this waiting period. An exception to this 12-month waiting period also applies to individuals who are granted a domestic violence waiver. For more information on this topic, refer to 106 CMR 701.110(D).

For more information on TAFDC exemptions, refer to 106 CMR 203.100, and for more information on domestic violence waivers, refer to 106 CMR 203.110.

Q. Are certain recouped monies counted as income in SNAP?

A. Yes. Certain recouped monies are treated as countable income when a household intentionally fails to comply with the requirements of another federal or state means-tested program. (For a listing of state and federal means-tested programs, refer to 106 CMR 360.030.)

For example, if you have a SNAP client who has been overpaid in the TAFDC Program, continue to count the full gross TAFDC payment amount for SNAP purposes if it has been determined that the overpayment was caused by the household's intentional failure to comply with a TAFDC program requirement. See 106 CMR 363.220 for more information.

For more information on Intentional Program Violations in the TAFDC and EAEDC Programs, refer to 106 CMR 706.300.

Field Operations Memos

Notification of Rest Home Per Diem Rate Changes and Recalculating Client Benefits

EAEDC

Field Operations Memo 2009-50

The Division of Health Care Finance and Policy (DHCFP) directly notifies DTA Central Office when DHCFP approves a rate change for an individual rest home. Central Office is responsible for notifying the appropriate TAO. If contacted by a rest home to adjust EAEDC client benefits due to a rate change, the TAO must not change the rate or adjust the benefits, unless approved by Central Office.

This Field Operations Memo:

- outlines a new centralized notification procedure for when a rest home is approved for a per diem rate change by DHCFP;
- provides instructions for the TAO Resource Coordinator for changing per diem rates in BEACON; and
- provides instructions for recalculating EAEDC benefits as a result of a per diem rate change.

Competitive Integrated Employment Services (CIES) Procurement: Vendors

TAFDC

Field Operations Memo 2009-51

Online Update

This Field Operations Memo informs TAO staff about the vendors who were awarded contracts through the CIES procurement process and the number of available slots for each vendor in the specific component/activity. Vendors for the following activities and programs have not changed: high school and GED programs (including the Young Parents Program), community colleges, community service, child care and transportation.

Online Update for the CIES change include:

- “Employment Services Program” on the Resources Inventory option has been updated with current component/activity descriptions; and
- a CIES Components Online Guide has been added to Policy Online.

Field Operations Memos *(Continued from page 6)*

Employment Services Program (ESP) Activity Descriptions

TAFDC

Field Operations Memo 2009-52

Field Operations Memo 2009-52 A

The Department offers a variety of ESP activities to our clients. To assist TAO staff in matching clients with activities, a description of current ESP activities as well as of which clients may be best served by the particular activity has been compiled in Field Operations Memo 2009-52.

Field Operations Memo 2009-52 A obsoletes Field Operations Memo 2009-52 which had an incorrect listing of Community Colleges and courses offered at the colleges.

Action for Boston Community Development (ABCD) Employment Supports Activity

TAFDC

Field Operations Memo 2009-53

DTA has partnered with Action for Boston Community Development (ABCD) to provide Employment Supports services to 60 clients receiving TAFDC and living in Boston. The purpose of this memo is to inform TAO staff about:

- the ABCD Employment Supports services;
- client eligibility criteria; and
- case manager responsibilities.

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Field Operations Memos (Continued from page 7)

DTA Youth Works/Summer Employment Follow-up Procedures

TAFDC and SNAP

Field Operations Memo 2009-54

Field Operations Memo 2009-27 informed DTA staff that the Department had developed the DTA Youth Works Program to help clients (both dependents and grantees) ages 14 through 24 obtain summer jobs. The income from the DTA Youth Works Program is noncountable. For SNAP purposes only, income from ARRA-funded jobs is also noncountable. Additionally, all income from summer jobs (taking place from May 1 through September 30) is noncountable for cash assistance for clients age 14 through 24. Field Operations Memo 2009-54 provides TAO staff with:

- information about a mailing to clients regarding how summer-job income will be treated after September 30th; and
- follow-up procedures for processing cases when the summer job continues beyond September 30th.

DTA Client Survey

All

Field Operations Memo 2009-55

In June 2007, a memo entitled *New Initiative: Client Survey* informed TAO staff about a client survey which asked clients for feedback about DTA service delivery. Field Operations Memo 2009-55 informs TAO staff about a subsequent client survey to identify areas where DTA has made improvements to our service since the initial survey.

Field Operations Memos

10/1/2009 Cost-of-Living Changes for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program

SNAP

Field Operations Memo 2009-56

Field Operations Memo 2009-56 implements the annual SNAP COLA effective 10/1/2009.

The following is a summary of the cost-of-living changes:

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

Shelter Deduction - The maximum shelter deduction (for households with no elderly or disabled member) has increased to **\$459**.

Standard Deduction: The standard deduction for all household sizes has changed:

- The standard deduction for household sizes 1 to 3 **has decreased**.
- The standard deduction for household sizes 4 and above has increased.

Heating/Cooling SUA - The Heating/Cooling SUA **has decreased to \$611**.

There are no changes in the COLA elements below:

Standard Utility Allowances (SUAs)

- The Nonheating SUA remains \$375.
- The Phone SUA remains \$44.
- The Bay State CAP SUA remains \$375.

Maximum Benefit Levels - The maximum SNAP benefit levels for all household sizes remain at the amounts issued with the April 2009 ARRA changes.

Minimum Benefit Level - The minimum benefit level for eligible one- and two-person households remains at **\$16**.

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

Impact of COLA on SNAP Cases - A special phone bank was established to address COLA-related calls because of an anticipated high call volume resulting from the number of SNAP households who received change notices that negatively impacted their SNAP benefits.

Included in the COLA notices this year is fuel assistance information. Households who did not receive a COLA notice will receive fuel assistance information through a separate mailing in October.

The COLA State Letter is in process.

State Letter

Rescinding 106 CMR 150.00 – Criminal Offender Record Checks

All

State Letter 1354

State Letter 1354 eliminates Department regulations 106 CMR 150.00 - Criminal Offender Record Checks. These regulations have been superseded by EOHHS Criminal Offender Record Information (CORI) regulations that became effective May 1, 2009.

EOHHS CORI regulations apply to EOHHS agencies and vendors providing services to those agencies for use in the hiring process. The EOHHS CORI regulations can be found online at: <http://www.mass.gov/hhs/cori>

FYI

Holiday Gift Verification - Globe Santa Mailing

In October, active TAFDC, EAEDC, and SNAP clients who live in the Globe Santa geographical area received the “Boston Globe Santa – Holiday Gift Verification Notice.” Clients may send this notice with their own letter to Globe Santa requesting to participate in the Boston Globe Santa Program.

This verification notice lists the name, date of birth and gender of all children age 12 years or younger. *

A second mailing will occur in the middle of November for new client families approved for benefits after the first mailing.

Families who did not receive the notice or need another Boston Globe Santa – Holiday Verification Notice, may contact either the Central Office Income Verification Unit at 1-800-632-8095 or their case manager.

This notice is available from the Letter Request window in BEACON.

* Please note that, on the generic notice there is no age limit - different organizations may have different age requirements.

TAO Meeting Notes