



Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Executive Office of Health and Human Services
Department of Transitional Assistance
600 Washington Street • Boston, MA 02111


DEVAL L. PATRICK
Governor

JUDYANN BIGBY, M.D.
Secretary

TIMOTHY P. MURRAY
Lieutenant Governor

JULIA E. KEHOE
Commissioner

July 13, 2007

To: Transitional Assistance Office Staff
From:  John Augeri, Assistant Commissioner for Field Operations
Re: New Initiative Memo: Brockton Food Stamp Call Center

Overview

To promote increased participation in the Food Stamp Program, the FY 2007 General Appropriations Act (GAA) mandated that the Department “establish a unit staffed by department employees to respond to Food Stamp inquiries, and arrange for and conduct telephone interviews for initial Food Stamp applications.” To comply with this mandate, the Department has established a pilot program, to be known as the “Brockton Food Stamp Call Center.” This initiative is expected to:

- provide applicants and recipients easy access to information regarding the status of their Food Stamp application or case;
- reduce the high volume of phone calls received daily by AU Managers to allow them more time for case processing; and
- streamline application processing, by having one unit enter RFAs (Requests for Assistance) for all mailed, faxed, dropped off and electronically transmitted applications.

Note: The Call Center currently serves the Brockton TAO service area only. Until further notice, clients not living in the Brockton TAO service area should not be referred to the Call Center.

Purpose of Memo

This memo provides an overview of the Call Center’s functions including:

- answering general Food Stamp questions regarding:
 - eligibility and the application process; and
 - the status of ongoing AUs and applications.
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Purpose of Memo (continued)

- initiating RFAs on mailed, faxed, dropped off and web applications received in the TAO. The Call Center Worker (CCW) will:
 - conduct an initial interview over the telephone to screen for waiver of face-to-face interview and expedited food stamps; and
 - assign and forward completed RFAs to appropriate AU Managers;
- advising applicants/recipients on the importance of reporting changes; and
- advising applicants/recipients of verification requirements.

Access To The Call Center

A toll-free number (1-866-813-1444) with direct access to the Call Center has been established. The Brockton TAO's phone system has been upgraded and will employ Automated Call Distribution (ACD) technology. ACD will allow callers (applicants/recipients) access to an automated menu of choices to direct them to the appropriate AU Manager or the Call Center.

Answering Questions

A phone queue will direct the call to each Call Center Worker (CCW) based on the order of the call received and CCW availability. During the call the CCW will begin writing a narrative in the BEACON AU and in Unicenter – a notification and reporting software designed for the Call Center. This information will include:

- caller's name;
- the reason for the call;
- disposition of the call or
- resolution of the problem.

When the call is terminated, the CCW will disconnect from the Call Center's "queue" and complete the narrative in the BEACON and Unicenter systems during the "after call" time. The CCW will use the Unicenter system to manually e-mail a message to the AU Manager informing them of the contact and the content of the conversation. At this point the CCW will re-enter the "queue" to receive incoming calls.

Completing RFAs

All new applications that have been mailed, faxed and dropped off will be entered into BEACON by the CCW. Electronically transmitted web applications will be entered by the Call Center supervisor and assigned to a CCW. Once the RFA has been completed, all pertinent brochures will be mailed from Central Print and an EBT card will be issued if the applicant's identity has been verified.

Initial Contact After Completion of RFA Once the RFA has been completed, and if a phone number has been provided by the applicant, the CCW will attempt to contact the applicant within two days of the receipt of the application in accordance with established application processing guidelines in Field Operations Memo 2006-30.

The CCW will be required to make the initial contact with the applicant to determine if the applicant qualifies for a waiver of the face-to-face interview, and to screen for eligibility of expedited benefits.

Phone Number Provided and Contact Made:

If contact with the applicant is made by the CCW by Day Two, the CCW will:

- screen for expedited issuance and the waiver of the face-to-face interview;
- discuss interview availability of applicant;
- complete the AU Manager assignment, based on established Brockton TAO protocols, in BEACON;
- inform the applicant of their assigned AU Manager; and
- input the type of call into Unicenter.

Phone Number Not Provided:

If the applicant fails to supply a phone number on the application, the CCW will:

- create the RFA in BEACON;
- complete a narrative in BEACON and Unicenter explaining what actions have been taken;
- complete the AU Manager assignment, based on established Brockton TAO assignment protocols;
- transmit the RFA to the assigned AU Manager before the end of Day One; and
- use Unicenter e-mail to notify the assigned AU Manager that the RFA has been completed and assigned. The AU Manager must send an appointment letter to the applicant by the end of Day Two.

Phone Number Provided But No Contact:

If the CCW is unable to contact the applicant by the second day, the CCW will:

**Initial Contact
After
Completion of
RFA
(continued)**

- complete the AU Manager assignment, based on established Brockton TAO protocols; and
- notify the assigned AU Manager that they have been assigned a new applicant and contact with that applicant could not be established. The RFA will be transmitted to the assigned AU Manager, who must send an appointment letter to the applicant by the end of the second day.

Once the call is terminated, the CCW will:

- exit the “queue” and complete the BEACON and Unicenter narrative, during the “after call” time;
- notify the assigned AU Manager via Unicenter e-mail; and
- transmit the RFA, application and any verifications supplied by the applicant, with a Call Center Transmittal Page indicating, if applicable, the waiver of face-to-face, expedited eligibility and/or any special needs.

Once these actions have been completed the CCW will re-enter the queue. The AU Manager must send an appointment letter by the end of Day Two.

**Reported
Changes**

When an applicant /recipient reports a change, the CCW will:

- inform the applicant/recipient of the verifications required to process the change;
- create a narrative in BEACON describing the specifics of the call and what required verifications the CCW suggested to the applicant; and
- notify the AU Manager of the reported change and content of the conversation via Unicenter e-mail.

The AU Manager will be responsible for sending the BEACON-generated verification checklist to the applicant/recipient.

**AU Manager
Responsibilities**

AU Managers are responsible for ensuring that the electronic case record in BEACON is accurate and complete. As the Department moves toward Call Centers, BEACON enhancements, and other initiatives such as document imaging, it becomes essential that the contents of the physical case record be reflected in the electronic record of BEACON. This means that the verifications received **must** be recorded in the Verifications tab in BEACON. Additionally, the Narratives tab must contain sufficient text to explain AU specifics, thereby allowing staff to understand the status of the case.

Questions

If you have any questions, please have your Hotline designee call the Policy Hotline at 617-348-8478.
