

T Transitions

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this month in...

Transitions

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From the Commissioner

Dear Fellow Employees,

On March 15 approximately 270 of our colleagues took advantage of the Early Retirement Incentive Program (ERIP). They came from almost every Transitional Assistance Office and Central Office Unit. Their responsibilities ranged from local office director to trainer to administrative support staff to QC worker to TAFDC and Food Stamp worker to central office unit director. Some offices and units were more heavily impacted than others but departures of this magnitude have a ripple effect which eventually impacts all of us. I thought you would be interested in the details of how we have been impacted by the ERIP.

Transitional Assistance Offices saw more than 13% of staff leave. Many offices lost much higher percentages and, of course, some smaller offices were greatly impacted by the departure of one or two staff. For instance, Wareham with two retirees lost 40% of staff. Hyannis lost 33%, Northhampton 25%, Davis Square and Malden 19% each, Pittsfield, Haverhill, Falmouth and Plymouth 18% and Taunton and Framingham 17%. Many other offices lost 9, 10, 11 and 12% of staff.

And these departures were at all levels. Across the Commonwealth, 10 % of direct service staff - - TAFDC workers, Food Stamp workers, EAEDC workers, Teen Parent Specialists - - opted for early retirement. More than 18% of supervisors and 16% of clerical support staff joined them. Davis Square said good-bye to more than 17% of its direct service staff, 9% of its supervisors and 33% of its clerical support staff. Southbridge and Taunton lost 16% of their direct service staff. Springfield Liberty lost 12% of direct service staff, 23%

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Quality Corner

This month we will address two recent errors – one involving the homeless shelter deduction and one involving direct payment of child support.

Food Stamp Homeless Shelter/Utility Deduction

A recipient family living in a shelter was not allowed the homeless shelter/utility deduction because the AU Manager incorrectly entered the AU's address on the address window. As noted in Field Operations Memo 2001-18, any assistance unit that incurs, or is likely to incur, either a shelter-related or utility-related expense is eligible for the deduction of \$143 per month. Expenses that would be eligible include such items as making phone calls (including pay-phone calls), washer/dryer expenses, or contributions toward common expenses, such as gas or electricity. The memo states that "since almost all AUs incur or can expect to incur some shelter or utility-related expense(s), the AU Manager **may assume** that costs are being incurred and is **not required to document** in the AU record why the Homeless Shelter/Utility Deduction is being allowed" (emphasis in original). Based on this memo, almost all AUs in homeless shelters are eligible for this allowance. Field Operations Memo 2001-18 was issued before BEACON was implemented. BEACON automates the homeless shelter deduction calculation provided the AU Manager correctly enters the address and, if applicable, enters the actual shelter expenses.

What can an AU Manager Do?

To enter an address for a homeless AU, the AU Manager must:

- enter the AU's address under Mailing Address and not under Current Address; and
- indicate that the AU is homeless by checking off the Homeless Box at the bottom of the window.

BEACON will then automatically use the homeless shelter deduction of \$143 when calculating the AU's food stamp benefits.

If the AU verifies shelter expenses in excess of the \$143 homeless shelter deduction, the AU Manager must:

- enter the AU's address as described above; and
- enter the actual expense in the Shelter Expense window.

BEACON will then automatically use the actual expense in determining

the shelter deduction amount for this AU.

See a *User's Guide: Transitional Assistance Programs and BEACON*, Chapter IV, Section A, page 4.

Child Support Paid Directly to a Non-Citizen

This AU consisted of two children. One child received SSI benefits while both children received federal food stamp benefits as citizens. Their mother received SSFSP food stamp benefits as a non-citizen. The AU also received child support of \$100 per week directly from the absent father. The AU Manager pro-rated the income between the two food stamp households and reduced the benefit amounts based on the child support. Direct child support payments are made for children only and are considered their income. If there is a related TAFDC AU and if the child support payment goes to DOR, the DEFRA payment (the \$50 pass-through intended to encourage mothers to cooperate with child support enforcement) is countable to the mother and not to the children.

What Can an AU Manager Do?

It is important to remember that child support is just that – for the children. In cases where the children are citizens and the

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mother is not, remember that the income counts for the children, not for the mother. For this case, the AU Manager should have divided the income evenly between the two children and entered the amount for each child on the "Other Income Window" in BEACON. Failing to do this will likely result in a Quality Control error.

Changes Regarding Family Cap, Vendor Payments and Closing/Denial Chart AU Composition Results (Appendix B)

**All
A User's Guide:
Transitional Assistance Programs and BEACON Update 024**

This update transmits the following changes:

- Chapter XIII, Section J: adds procedures for reopening an AU with a Family Cap child not approved for a waiver or exception;
- Chapter XIV, Section I: adds reference to SSPS in the vendor process; and
- Appendix B: adds whether a closing action is an immediate release or a pending release.

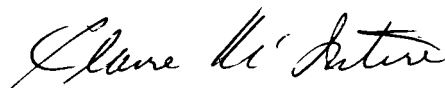
of supervisors and 8% of its clerical support staff. And on top of this, 23% of local office managers retired. Malden, Framingham, Roslindale and North Shore all lost two managers.

Central Office departures were equally across the board. Ten percent of central office managers and more than 8% of central office non-managerial staff retired. These included seven retirees in the Employment Services Unit, five in Policy and Procedure and seven in central Field Operations and Centralized Eligibility. The directors of two Central Office Units, Program Assessment and Employment Services, joined the retirees.

The impact of these departures has already been felt. Field Operations has reassigned managers to ensure appropriate coverage in every office. Reviews of staffing levels for all the offices is ongoing. In Central Office, remaining staff are assuming duties of departed colleagues. In addition to the departure of 270 people, we have lost a tremendous amount of institutional memory. Every local office and central office unit has certain people who you just know you can go to and they will remember how something needs to be done, how a difficult case was handled five years ago, where to find the federal regulation that was issued eight years ago but would help with today's problem. Many of these people have retired.

I told you last month that meeting the challenge of continuing to do our job would not be easy. That has not changed. But I also remain confident that we will find a way and that the people we serve will continue to receive the highest level of service.

Sincerely,



Claire McIntire
Commissioner

"Everyone thinks of changing the world, but no one thinks of changing himself."

Leo Tolstoy
(Russian novelist)

FYI

Policy Online

Beginning in April, you will see significant changes to the Policy Online Application.

- ✓ New windows have been developed that provide access to data previously not available through online.
- ✓ Windows no longer relevant have been deleted.
- ✓ Data have been moved and grouped by subject.
- ✓ The display of information has been standardized.

Policy Online Window

- The list of options has been reordered to group similar product types together.
- Systems Procedures and Products Sent To Print have been deleted.

Note: Information previously accessed from Systems Procedures is now accessed from other windows.

- Related Systems Information has been added.

Related Systems Information Window

- AU Processing - displays the following:
 - ✓ *NPA Food Stamp Benefits and Pure SSI Food Stamp Benefits Processing Chart*
 - ✓ *Expedited Food Stamp Processing Chart*
 - ✓ *Current and Previous Three AU Processing Schedules*
- BB Options - displays the following:
 - ✓ *BB Screens Description* - provides text information for accessing the BB screens and the type of information contained on each of the screens.
 - ✓ *Eligibility Action Reasons* - lists FMCS eligibility action reasons.
 - ✓ *Ineligibility Action Reasons* - lists FMCS ineligibility action reasons.

Note: The FMCS Eligibility and Ineligibility Action Reasons are for reference purpose only and are displayed on the Case Data and Recipient Data screens.

- ✓ *Financial History Report Codes* - lists codes needed to request a Financial History Report.
- ✓ *SSA Claim Number* - explains the alpha and numeric structure of an SSA Claim Number and lists the various beneficiary identification codes associated with the SSA Claim Number
- Closing/Denial Chart AU Composition Results - displays Appendix B of *A User's Guide: Transitional Assistance Programs and BEACON*. In addition, the immediate release and pending information previously contained in the Action Reason Release Chart has been incorporated.
- Reference Documentation - displays the following:
 - ✓ *Service Area Listing - City/Town* - lists by cities and towns those that each Transitional Assistance Office services.
 - ✓ *Service Area Listing - Transitional Assistance Office* - lists by Transitional Assistance Office the office that services specific cities and towns.

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- ✓ *SSI Regional Office Listing-City/Town* - lists by cities and towns those that each regional office services.
- ✓ *SSI Regional Office Listing* - lists by regional office the cities and towns that each regional office services.

Medex Premium Rate Changes

NPA FS
Field Operations Memo
2002-4

Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Massachusetts has announced Medex premium rate changes to six non-group plans, Basic, Bronze, Gold, Standard, Core and Silver, effective March 2002.

This memo:

- identifies the plans that have changed and the corresponding rate changes;
- identifies the date of the changes and the effect these changes will have on the amount of food stamp benefits;
- transmits information for the Medex Premium Rate - Update Report; and
- provides information of updates to food stamp benefits and the Medex premium amounts on BEACON.

FYI

Vendor Payments

AU Managers are reminded when starting, increasing, decreasing or stopping vendor payments on BEACON, appropriate action must be taken on SSPS, by using an SSPS Invoice for Special Services to impact those payments. If the AU Manager does not authorize the payment on SSPS, the vendor amount will be deducted from BEACON, but not paid to the vendor. If the AU Manager does not increase, decrease or stop payments on both systems, SSPS will continue to pay the **old** amount.

When filling out an SSPS invoice to start, increase or decrease vendor payments, make sure the assessed person data, amount of the payment, the vendor name, vendor number and the account number (if any) are correct. This will prevent payments being credited to the wrong assessed person, account and/or vendor.

Reminder. Voluntary vendor payments may be established for 12 months. Mandatory vendor payments (e.g., money mismanagement) must be established for six months. See 106 CMR 706.600 through 706.690.

When starting or stopping vendor payments on BEACON, make sure payments are started or stopped on SSPS and that the vendor and assessed person are notified of this action using the *VP/NFL-2*.

For further instructions on SSPS, including instructions for filling out an SSPS invoice, please see the *Systems User's Guide, Volume 3: SSPS User's Guide*.

Eligibility of Drug Felons

TAFDC, FS
State Letter 1216

State Letter 1216 transmits the following:

- Drug felons convicted for conduct which occurred after August 22, 1996 and who are otherwise eligible, are now eligible for TAFDC if they are exempt from the Time Limited Benefits and Reduced Need and Payment Standards or have a Domestic Violence waiver or their incarceration for their conviction ended at least 12 months prior to applying for assistance. If no incarceration occurred, there is no period of ineligibility.
- Drug felons who are otherwise eligible may receive food stamp benefits.

From the Hotline

- Q.** I have worked only with TAFDC and PA food stamp AUs. Beginning in April, I will also be handling the associated NPA AU on each cash AU in my caseload. Some of my TAFDC AUs are on Monthly Reporting and the TAFDC reevaluation is conducted once a year. How frequently should I recertify the associated NPA food stamp AUs as they are no longer on Quarterly Reporting?
- A.** Since there is an associated cash AU in this example, the recertification period for the NPA food stamp AU is once every 12 months. Remember, however, that if any change reflected on the TAFDC Monthly Report effects the food stamp benefits for this AU, you must also enter the required changes in BEACON.
- Q.** I have a client who is recently unemployed and receiving Unemployment Compensation (U.C.). His U.C. weekly benefit rate is \$110.00. However, \$11.00 is taken out for Federal tax purposes. This leaves my client with an actual, net payment of \$99.00. In entering his income onto BEACON, should I use the gross or net amount?
- A.** When determining eligibility for food stamp benefits, the full amount (gross or pretax) must be used. The same is true for TAFDC, EAEDC and EA.

FYI

Teens In Shelter

Placement into a Teen Structured Living Program (TLP) should be the first option pursued for a homeless pregnant or parenting teen eligible for TAFDC and TLP placement. Homeless pregnant or parenting teens who are TAFDC-eligible must be referred, business-as-usual, to the Central Office Teen Parent Liaison. In the event that TLPs are full, the homeless pregnant or parenting teen 18 or older must be placed in an EA shelter until a TLP opening becomes available or the teen is no longer homeless.

If the homeless pregnant or parenting TAFDC-eligible teen refuses placement in a TLP, a refusal of feasible alternative housing will have occurred. As a result, the AU becomes ineligible for placement into an EA shelter.

If the homeless pregnant or parenting teen 18 or older is not receiving TAFDC and is therefore also ineligible for TLP placement, EA eligibility must be determined. If the pregnant or parenting teen is EA-eligible, placement into an EA shelter must be initiated. These AUs are handled as regular EA-only AUs and do not have to be referred to the Central Office Teen Parent Liaison. If the homeless pregnant or parenting teen is under 18 years old, and is not receiving TAFDC, the TAO should contact the Central Office Teen Parent Liaison for further instruction.

If at any time the pregnant or parenting teen becomes eligible for TAFDC and for TLP placement, the teen would be referred to the Central Office Teen Parent Liaison for assessment and placement in a TLP. The EA shelter placement would be terminated when the teen is placed in the TLP.

BEACON Todays Issued in March 2002

BT 75 Additional February Food Stamp Closings Without Recertification Notices (3/8/02)

BT 76 TAO Reorganization/AU Reassignment (3/14/02)

BT 77 Recoupment of NPA FS Benefits Issued January 2002 (3/21/02)

From the Forms File

New Form

The TAFDC-GCMS will be used for recipients who request a second disability exemption within a 60-month period. Refer to *A User's Guide: Transitional Assistance Programs and BEACON*, Chapter XVI for more information.

02-720-0402-05

TAFDC-GCMS (4/2002)

Good Cause Medical Statement

Revised Forms

Reminder: AU Managers are reminded to discard the old version of any revised form and use the new revised form.

The following form was revised to delete references to drug felons.

The Spanish version is on the reverse side.

09-153-0302-05

FSP-1B (Rev. 3/2002)

Food Stamp Penalty Warning

The following forms are now available in Spanish.

02-603-0302-05

EX/WVREQ-1 (Rev. 3/2002)

Family Cap Exception/Waiver Request

04-009-0302-05

AP-SSI-1(S) (Rev. 3/2002)

Authorization for Interim Assistance Reimbursement (IAR) (Initial SSI)

04-301-0302-05

AP-SSI-1A(S) (3/2002)

Authorization for Interim Assistance Reimbursement (IAR) (Reinstated SSI)

Revised Brochures

The TAFDC-PB now includes revised language regarding the eligibility of drug felons.

02-210-0402-05

TAFDC-PB (Rev. 4/2002)

Transitional Aid to Families with Dependent Children Program

The following brochure was revised to remove ineligibility of drug felons language and to update the categorical eligibility section.

09-169-0402-05

FS-PB (Rev. 4/2002)

Food Stamp Program

Good Cause Regulations

TAFDC, EAEDC

State Letter 1217

State Letter 1217 implements the following changes to TAFDC and EAEDC effective 04/01/2002:

- TAFDC Good Cause Criteria are relocated from 106 CMR 207.190 to 701.380 and EAEDC Good Cause Criteria (106 CMR 320.430) are rescinded. EAEDC now utilizes the same good cause criteria as TAFDC.
- A TAFDC applicant or recipient making a first time claim of disability within a continuous 60-month period is considered to be presumptively disabled; and
- A TAFDC applicant or recipient making another claim of disability within a continuous 60-month period and whose first claim of disability was denied must establish eligibility using the Good Cause Medical Statement (TAFDC-GCMS).