

Transitions



A Publication of the Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance

this month in...

Transitions

From the Hotline	2
From the Forms File	3
Revised SORB Request Form	4
FS (NPA or PA) Application Processing Guidelines	4
TAFDC - Work Program Participation Review - Phase 3: <i>Age School through Eight, Authorizing Batch Sanctions and Removing Interrupted Sanctions - Phase 3 and TAFDC Recipients</i>	5
Receiving SSI	5
Revision to the Notice of Termination of Temporary Emergency Shelter (NFL-ST) Form	5
FYI - BEACON Online Help	5
FYI - Changes to DTA Online	6
FYI - Changes to the EOHHS mass.gov DTA Homepage	6
FYI - Changes to Policy Online	6

From the Commissioner

Dear Fellow Employees,

It's easy to forget that just two years ago, our hotel population consisted of nearly 600 homeless families. In approaching our second anniversary of finding shelter for homeless clients without relying on hotels, I'd like to take a look at the kinds of programs that are currently doing a better job of helping our homeless clients. This past year, in particular, we've been trying to find ways to match homeless clients with jobs and other benefits that can boost household incomes. While we continue to work with several programs offering job training and job-related services, we're now involved with two new programs that are well suited to meeting this challenge.

In a new initiative developed by our Food Stamp Unit to provide Training and Employment as a Means to end homelessness, Project T.E.A.M. is aiming to eliminate the high costs of a nutritious meal, increase incomes and stem the financial pressures that lead to homelessness in the first place. In this Project, a number of organizations in Boston have been working together to identify homeless individuals eligible for our Food Stamp Program while at the same time enrolling these individuals in employment and training. To do this, we've been collaborating with the Economic Development and Industrial Corporation (EDIC) in Boston, and IMPACT Employment Services of the Friends of the Shattuck Shelter and Community Work Service.

This collaboration started only one year ago, but the results are already encouraging. A recent progress review of Project T.E.A.M.'s employment outcomes reveals that the average length of time between enrollment in the program and a job placement is about seven weeks and the average wage rate is about \$9.42 per hour. Even more importantly, almost 90% of Project T.E.A.M. clients have retained their jobs for at least 30 days.

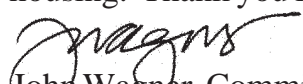
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These numbers prove what many of us already know: making monthly and even weekly outreach visits to shelters, transitional programs, treatment facilities and day programs; providing walk-in hours to enroll clients that have been referred to the Project by other Project participants; and responding quickly to our clients' expressed interests are key factors in increasing an individual's income and in stabilizing lives.

As Project T.E.A.M. continues to take root, our Housing and Homeless Services Unit has been involved in another recent initiative called Project SAFE (Safe Assistance to Further Economic Empowerment). This is a new initiative for homeless TAFDC families that have a history of violence or trauma, unsafe home situations, substance abuse or mental health issues. The Project gives these clients the opportunity to develop the confidence and skills necessary to get and keep a job. Voluntary participation in Project SAFE will be included as an activity in the client's EA self-sufficiency plan. Upon completing the activity, it is the AU Manager's responsibility to meet with the client and then enroll him or her in one of our ESP components to prepare for a job and economic self-sufficiency.

Project SAFE is supported by our Department's Domestic Violence Unit, our Housing and Homeless Services Unit as well as ESP. The new initiative is currently helping TAFDC families residing in the David Jon Louison Shelter in Brockton, Millennium House in Boston and the House of Hope in Lowell. Other nonprofit partners include the IMPACT Program and HarborCOV Personal Economic Planning (PEP). The Institute for Community Inclusion will be evaluating the initiative via interviews with all participants and will check participation at three- and six-month intervals. The training and support services offered through Project SAFE will provide practical skills such as safety planning, self-defense and economic literacy training. In the near future, TAOs will receive a "New Initiative Memo" which will provide more detailed information.

Both of these new collaborations recognize the connections between maintaining stable housing and keeping pace with the rising costs of good nutrition, as well as the imperatives of being safe and prepared before starting a job. In providing food and nutritional assistance, housing services and job training referrals, our Department continues to eliminate barriers between homelessness and permanent housing. Thank you for all of your help in this effort.


John Wagner, Commissioner

From the Hotline

Q. A mother and her daughter were receiving Emergency Assistance (EA) benefits until four months ago when they were able to relocate to their current apartment. Today, they came into the office again to apply for EA benefits because there was a fire at their apartment last night, and as of this morning, the apartment is uninhabitable. Is this family eligible for EA due to this fire even though they have received EA benefits within the past 12 months?

A. Although our current regulations do not provide for exceptions to the 12-month rule in the event of a fire or natural disaster, there may be other exceptions that could apply to this family. Refer to 106 CMR 309.040(A) to review the 12-month rule exceptions.

Also, remember that if there is an SSI member in the EA Assistance Unit, then SSI disaster benefits may apply. For more information on this topic, refer to the *EA User's Guide: Emergency Assistance, SSI Benefits and BEACON*, Chapter XII.

- Q.** If a family applies for EA benefits due to a fire or other natural disaster and they have previously received EA benefits in the past 12 months, other than considering the 12-month rule exceptions, is there anything else I can do for this family?
- A.** Yes. In addition to referrals to local nonprofits that provide shelter services in your area, remember that if an individual was involved with the Housing Assistance Program (HAP) while living in temporary emergency shelter and HAP helped get his or her most recent apartment, then HAP may be able to offer up to one year of stabilization services, including finding another apartment for this family.
- For more information on HAP services, refer to 106 CMR 309.039.
- Q.** A father and his two sons are currently applying for EA benefits and are requesting temporary emergency shelter. The father is unemployed and refuses to apply for TAFDC benefits. Does this family remain eligible for EA benefits

despite the fact that the father is refusing to apply for TAFDC?

- A.** You cannot deny an otherwise eligible EA applicant for refusing to apply for TAFDC. You can, however, take action if an EA recipient is not complying with his/her self-sufficiency plan. The father, in this situation, should be making all reasonable efforts that can directly contribute to his ability to find, obtain or retain housing. This means pursuing any potential earned or unearned income, which may include TAFDC.

For more information on self-sufficiency plans, refer to 106 CMR 309.040(D) and 106 CMR 309.040(E) as well as the *EA User's Guide: Emergency Assistance, SSI Benefits and BEA-CON*, Chapter V.

From the Forms File

New Forms

09-410-0706-05

FSAppt-I (7/2006)

Food Stamp Application Appointment Letter for an In-Office Interview

09-412-0706-05

FSAppt-T (7/2006)

Food Stamp Appointment Letter Telephone Interview

The above forms are used when the AU Manager is unable to complete the food stamp application interview at the **time of first contact**. The Spanish version is on the reverse side. Refer to Field Operations Memo 2006-30 for more information on the use of these forms.

Revised Forms

13-300-0806-05

DTA-SORB (Rev. 8/2006)

Sex Offender Registry Information Request

This form is used to request information from the Sex Offender Registry Board (SORB). This form has been revised. Refer to Field Operations Memo 2006-9B for more information.

13-039-0806-05

13-042-0806-05 (S)

NFL-ST (Rev. 8/2006)

Notice of Termination of Temporary Emergency Shelter

This form was revised to inform the EA AU member about the criminal activities which caused the shelter termination. Refer to Field Operations Memo 2006-32 for more information.

Revised Brochure

18-825-0706-05

EBT-TB (Rev. 7/2006)

Electronic Benefit Transfer

Surcharge language and additional instructions on how to use the Personal Identification Number (PIN) have been added to the *EBT-TB*. The Spanish version of the brochure will be available soon.

Revised SORB Request Form

EA

Field Operations Memo 2006-9B

This memo:

- describes the process for obtaining SORB information on active EA AUs;
- advises staff of the changes to the DTA-SORB form, that include:
 - instructions to clearly print information on the form;
 - the deletion of the SORB Liaison's D.O.B. from the form; and
 - instructions to maintain a supply of prefilled forms, except for the SORB Liaison's signature and date, for future use;
- clarifies that the SORB response is to be filed in the EA AU record; and
- clarifies the procedures for notifying the H&HS Unit and the shelter when an EA AU member is a registered sex offender.

“If your number one goal is to make sure that everyone likes and approves of you, then you risk sacrificing your uniqueness and, therefore, your excellence.”

Anonymous

FS (NPA or PA)

Application Processing Guidelines

FS

Field Operations Memo
2006-30

In recent years, the Department has successfully completed a number of initiatives to increase food stamp (FS) participation, primarily among them, the expansion of application methods and a broader interpretation of the waiver of the face-to-face interview. As a result, the FS caseload has increased significantly. To help AU Managers meet the challenge of maintaining program accuracy and timeliness, the Department streamlined application procedures through Field Operations Memo 2004-12.

The Department continues to experience an increase in the number of FS applications; however, applications received through methods other than walk-in, followed by an in-person interview, continue to challenge the Department's ability to preserve program accuracy while simultaneously improving access. This situation, combined with continuing application processing issues, has caused the Department to update application procedures and time frames through this Field Operations Memo.

TAFDC – Work Program Participation Review - Phase 3: *Age School through Eight*, Authorizing Batch Sanctions and Removing Interrupted Sanctions - Phase 3 and TAFDC Recipients Receiving SSI

TAFDC
Field Operations Memo
2006-31

The Department is in the process of making changes to the TAFDC program to comply with federal reauthorization of the TANF block grant. One of the most significant areas to be addressed is participation in work-related activities.

This Field Operations Memo:

- informs TAO staff of the need to conduct a desk review to determine if the AP coded “Youngest Child 2 to School” should be changed to “Youngest Child School through 8.” If the desk review identifies that the recipient must increase the hours of participation, the AU Manager **must** contact the recipient for an interview to explain the Work Program requirement as well as other AU changes and to make a referral or enroll the recipient in an activity to help the recipient to meet the required hours or;

- provides a follow-up to Field Operations Memo 2006-27: “Work Program Participation Review - Phase 2: *Age Nine and Older*; Authorizing Batch Sanctions and Removing Interrupted Sanctions – Phase 2.” Specifically, procedures for processing AUs who are in “Interrupt Status” or Batch Sanctions that are pending authorization are included; and
- gives TAO staff instructions for processing TAFDC recipients who are receiving SSI and either remain active or need some other correction in BEACON to reflect the receipt of SSI (i.e., Work Requirement Reason needs to be changed).

Revision to the Notice of Termination of Temporary Emergency Shelter (NFL-ST) Form

EA
Field Operations Memo 2006-32

This memo notifies staff that the *Notice of Termination of Temporary Emergency Shelter (NFL-ST) Form* has been revised to provide space on the notice for:

- the name of the person engaged in the criminal activity; and
- a description of the criminal activity that is causing the termination of EA shelter benefits.

FYI

BEACON Online Help

Beginning in August 2006, updates to the BEACON online help application (development of new online help windows and revisions to existing online help windows) will no longer be listed as an FYI in *Transitions*. Rather, changes and updates to BEACON online help will be listed in a new transmittal document titled: *BEACON Online Help Update*. The *BEACON Online Help Update* will be added as an option in the Reference Documentation section of Policy Online.



FYI

Changes to DTA Online

This month you will see the following changes to DTA Online:

Latest News/Photo Gallery

A new link entitled *Archives – 2005* precedes the list of memos. When selected, the memos and documents issued in 2005 will be displayed.

A new link entitled *Memo from Commissioner Wagner: Welfare Reform Legislation* has been added to the list of available options. When selected, the memo from Commissioner Wagner dated July 28, 2006 summarizing the Welfare Reform legislation, will be displayed. The text of the press release announcement follows the memo from the Commissioner.

Monthly Updates

A new link entitled *Monthly Updates* has been added to the list of options displayed on the left side of the homepage. When selected, the FYI entitled *Changes to DTA Online* for the month will be displayed.

Training

A new job aid entitled *Food Stamp Application Workflow* has been added to the list of job aids available online. This job aid outlines the stages and time frames of the food stamp application process.

FYI

Changes to the EOHHS mass.gov DTA Homepage

This month you will see the following changes to the EOHHS mass.gov DTA Homepage:

Programs and Services

The link entitled *Domestic Violence* has been moved from the Key Resources section to *Programs and Services* section of the Homepage.

Key Resources

A new link entitled *Contact Us* has been added to the list of available options. When selected, a listing of the names of units and corresponding telephone numbers (including TTY numbers) will be displayed for applicants and recipients. The title of the unit links to the page on the DTA site where additional information is located.

News and Updates

A new link entitled *Romney Files Amendments to Welfare Bill* has been added to the list of available options. When selected, the press release dated July 28, 2006 announcing the filing of the amendments to the legislation will be displayed.

FYI

Changes to Policy Online

This month you will see the following change to Policy Online:

Job Aids

A new job aid entitled *Food Stamp Application Workflow* has been added to the list of job aids available online. This job aid outlines the stages and timeframes of the food stamp application process.