

Transitions

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this month in...

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From the Commissioner

Dear Fellow Employees,

The year 2001 has been a tumultuous one. The events of September 11 continue to impact us as individuals and as a country and, inevitably, that impact will continue for some time to come. On a much smaller scale, but very important to us, we worked hard to review and test the BEACON system and to fully implement it this past August. This implementation is one of the major changes this agency has ever experienced and I know that it has not always been smooth or easy. But work continues on improving the system and conversations I have had and messages I have received tell me that as your familiarity with BEACON increases you are more confident in using the system to do your job.

Now I am looking to 2002 and to what our focus will be in the future. We are in the process of developing a new strategic plan with one of its key elements being an increased emphasis on the Food Stamp Program and improving access to it. Food stamp benefits are a critically important support for many families. For families receiving cash assistance, they offer increased buying power on a limited income and buying power focused on the nutrition of the family. For a family transitioning from welfare to work, the benefit can make the difference between success and failure. And for working families struggling to make ends meet, food stamp benefits help provide increased access to a basic need. The problem is that many times accessing these benefits is viewed as a cumbersome, bureaucratic process—a perception that needs changing.

I am committed to having this Department do everything possible to achieve that change. We have already moved forward. In November we broadened the number of families considered “categorically

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From the Hotline

- Q. A grandmother has been receiving TAFDC for herself and her grandchildren. The grandmother's TAFDC benefits are ending because she has received 24 months of time-limited benefits. She will continue to receive TAFDC for her grandchildren. Is she required to obtain legal custody or guardianship of the grandchildren to continue to receive TAFDC for them?
- A. No. The children continue to be eligible for TAFDC in an assistance unit headed by an ineligible, nonlegally-liable grantee. That grantee does not need to obtain legal custody or guardianship. See 106 CMR 203.200.
- Q. If a household receives severance pay in one payment, is it a nonrecurring lump sum payment for cash and/or food stamp purposes?
- A. A one-time severance package or pay would be considered a "non-recurring lump sum payment" and treated accordingly. For cash regulations, see 106 CMR 204.240. For food stamp regulations, see 106 CMR 363.230(I) and 363.103(E).
- Q. A TAFDC family in my caseload is in a shelter for victims of domestic violence and has been there for over 60 days. The grantee has found an apartment and she is requesting assistance to help with moving-in expenses. Is she eligible to receive the relocation benefit?
- A. Yes. The amount of the relocation benefit is \$750.00 and can be used to secure permanent housing for a TAFDC family who has been in a shelter for victims of domestic violence for 60 days or more. See 106 CMR 705.350.

Stay Informed!



From the Forms File

Revised Forms

Reminder: AU Managers are reminded to discard the old version of any revised form and use the new revised form. Before ordering new forms, survey your needs and order only the amount you can reasonably expect to use.

02-201-1101-05

02-260-1101-05 (S)

T-A34/36 (Rev. 11/2001)

Assignment of Support Rights, Cooperation with Child Support Enforcement Division, or Good Cause Claim

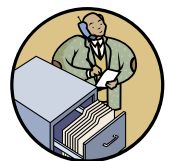
The revised T-A34/36 now includes a check box as an alert to indicate a history of Domestic Violence.

13-220-1101-05

TES-EPR-1 (Rev. 11/2001)

Emergency Placement Request

The revised TES-EPR-1 now inquires about family information and unique circumstances, for example, job location, medical issues and physical challenges. This information is used in both the initial motel/hotel placement and any requests for transfer. Refer to Field Operations Memo 2001-36 for more information.



Hotel/Motel Placements

EA Field Operations Memo 2001-36

This memo addresses hotel/motel placement procedures regarding:

- the activities for approving hotel/motel placement;
- requesting a hotel/motel transfer through Central Office Housing Division;
- transferring the AU record after 30 days of hotel/motel placement to the new TAO covering the location of the hotel/motel;
- issues that may warrant not transferring the AU record to the new TAO; and
- the review of the 10/30/2001 hotel/motel placement list by the Regional Directors to identify the AU records that should be transferred.

This memo also describes the responsibilities of the Homeless Coordinator/ AU Manager in both the transferring TAO and the receiving TAO.



Continued from Page 1

eligible” to include families with children under 19 with income below 200 percent of the federal poverty level. This change means these families no longer have to have their assets considered in determining their eligibility and they also receive a more generous income test. We also completely eliminated considering the value of a car in determining food stamp eligibility. These changes make it easier for low-income families and individuals to access this benefit.

A number of other steps are being considered to increase access. We are working on a plan to make a simplified food stamp application available on our web site. Families will be able to access this application, print it and mail or bring it to the Department for processing. It is hoped that letting families fill out their own application while informing them of the types of verifications we need will take some of the mystery out of the process and encourage people to apply. The current mail-in quarterly reporting process is also being expanded to include cases with unearned income, and for those with earned income the number of wage stubs required with the returned report is being reduced from eight to four.

We plan to seek a waiver from the federal government to reduce or eliminate the requirement for face-to-face interviews. We are exploring ways to increase the participation of SSI recipients through joint efforts with the Social Security Administration. And we are looking at how to better use automation to simplify processes and improve access.

The bottom line is simple. Food stamps are such an important benefit that families need to see that and to want to take advantage of them. We need to determine how to make it easier for eligible families to obtain food stamp benefits. Figuring this out and taking the necessary steps will be a critical focus for us in the new year. I know I can count on your cooperation and assistance.

As 2001 draws to a close, I want to thank you for your hard work during 2001—not an easy year, and I deeply appreciate your efforts. I want also to wish you and your families the happiest of holiday seasons.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Claire McIntire". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Claire McIntire
Commissioner

Quality Corner

This month we will review three recent food stamp errors. One was agency caused and could have been prevented. The other two were recipient caused, but could have been prevented if the AU Manager had taken into account **all the circumstances of the case**.

Terminated Income

A TAFDC recipient lost her job in May 2001. She stated on her Monthly Report that the job had terminated and sent a copy of the termination letter from her employer to the AU Manager. Her wages were not zeroed out and she received a reduced grant in July. She did not return her Monthly Report in July, believing it was not necessary since she was no longer working. She was about to be closed in August for failing to complete the Monthly Report. When she reported all this to her AU Manager, the closing was stopped, but the income was still not zeroed out. More than two months after her income stopped, that same income was being deducted. This resulted in a food stamp benefit underissuance of more than \$300 – a very large error. At any of several points this AU could have been corrected. In each instance, however, it was left in error.

High Expenses / Low Income

At the most recent food stamp recertification, the recipient provided a landlord verification that she was paying \$500 rent and was responsible for utilities as well. Her only known income, however, was her \$530 TAFDC grant. Since she had not applied for any rental arrearage, she was likely up to date with her rent. One of two circumstances could exist: she had unreported income or she was mistating her rent. As it turned out, she had completed the landlord verification herself and had a friend sign it.

What Can an AU Manager Do?

The AU Manager in this case should have been suspicious. The recipient's income was lower than her rent and utilities. She was not behind in her rent. If the AU Manager suspected unreported income, she could have investigated that. It is easier, however, to check on the rent. The AU Manager could call the landlord, ask to see a copy of the lease, or ask for a copy of the rent receipt. Any of these would likely have identified the real circumstances.

Direct Shelter Payments

The third error involved a recipient whose divorced husband was voluntarily paying \$200 rent to the landlord. According to the recipient, this was being paid directly to the landlord. Accordingly, the AU Manager subtracted the husband's contribution from the rental amount and allowed the full utilities. The AU Manager did not verify that the money went directly to the landlord.

In fact, the landlord never received the money directly from the ex-husband. As verified by Quality Control, it went to the ex-wife every month. Under these circumstances the money is treated as a voluntary contribution, subject to reporting as any other form of child support. Failing to do so in this case resulted in an overpayment.

What Can an AU Manager Do?

The AU Manager in this case should have verified with the landlord that the money was sent to him directly. If the money was not received directly by him, it should have been treated like any other form of child support paid directly to the recipient.



FYI

Food Stamp Household Expenses

The Landlord Verification form and the Shared Housing Verification form are the preferred methods of verifying information on landlord/tenant and shared housing arrangements; however, food stamp regulations provide that verification cannot be limited to a single type of document. The AU Manager must accept alternative forms of verification if provided. See 106 CMR 361.640.

BEACON *Todays* Issued in November 2001

BT 58 SSNs Ending in "4"
Reconciliation
(11/9/01)

BT 58A AUs With SSNs ending
in "4" Reinstated On or
Before Friday 11/9
(11/14/01)

BT 59 Procedures for Chang-
ing Addresses and Pro-
ducing Correct Notices
(11/21/01)



Changes and Clarifications to TAFDC and EAEDC Regulations

TAFDC, EAEDC State Letter 1213

This State Letter transmits the following:

- Changes have been made to the TAFDC regulations to clarify which dependent child is sanctioned for failing to meet the Learnfare requirement.
- Youthbuild and Americorps allowances, earnings or payments to individuals participating in these programs are noncountable income for TAFDC and EAEDC.
- A drug felon must be included in the filing unit and he or she is entitled to the work-related expense deduction, dependent care deduction, and the \$30 and one-third or \$30 and one-half disregard of earned income. The regulations also include three additional groups of ineligible individuals who must be included in the filing unit.
- The first \$600 received as lump sum income was added to the EAEDC noncountable income section to reflect the regulations in the Lump Sum Income section.
- A grammatical clarification was made to the section on Limitation on Program Eligibility.

TAFDC: New Five-Year (60-Month) Period

TAFDC Field Operations Memo 2001-37

On 11/30/01, the five-year period ended for some recipients. These recipients began another five-year period effective 12/1/01. Because the five-year period is a "rolling" five-year period, not all recipients subject to this rule are eligible for a new five-year period at the same point.

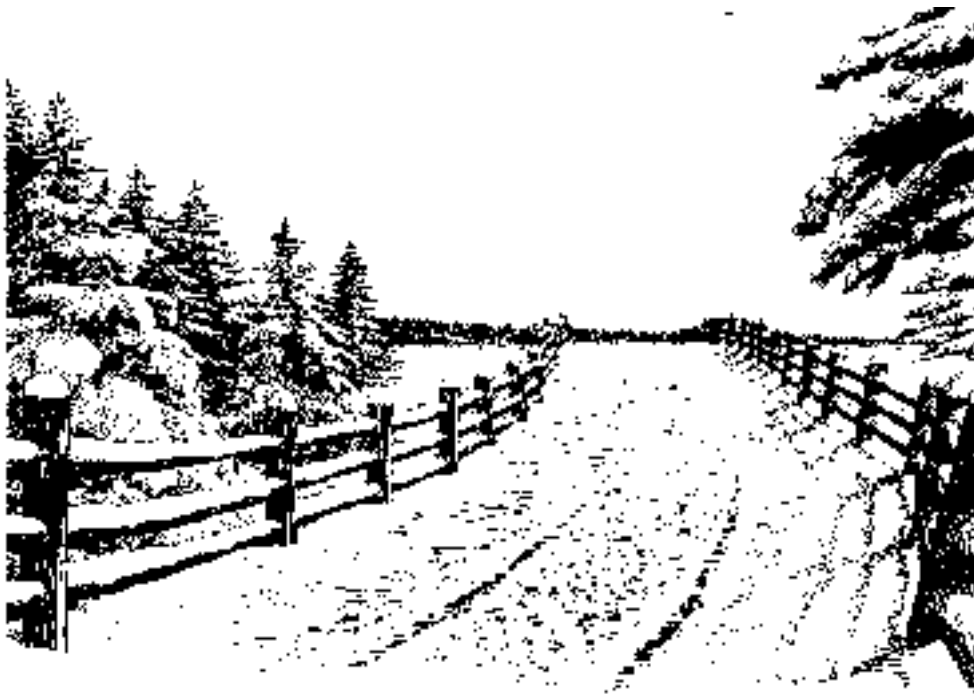
This memo provides information and instructions on how to process current recipients and applicants who are subject to the new 60-month period.

Changes and Clarifications to *A User's Guide: Transitional Assistance Programs and BEACON*

All
A User's Guide: Transitional Assistance Programs and BEACON Update 018

The following changes were made to the guide:

- Chapter III, Section D “Fast Path” functionality on the Verification Tab has been highlighted.
- Chapter XII, Section A updates information on Basic Job Search and Structured Job Search.
- Chapter IX has modified AU Composition Results window to explain how to remove a person from the AU marked “not present” in the Household window.
- Chapter XVI, Section F contains enhanced procedures on undiverting a Monthly Report.
- Chapter XIX, Section A explains a change to address match functionality for those addresses matched to unvalidated addresses.
- Index has been updated.
- Appendix A: includes the FSNL-12A.



**Every
Job
is
a
Good
Job**

**Season's
Greetings**
from
**Policy, Procedure
and
Program
Management**