



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

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Lieutenant Governor

JUDYANN BIGBY, M.D.
Secretary

JULIA E. KEHOE
Commissioner

Field Operations Memo 2010-02
January 22, 2010

To: Transitional Assistance Office Staff

From:  John Augeri, Assistant Commissioner for Field Operations

Re: ARRA \$25 Weekly Unemployment Compensation Benefit
Noncountable for SNAP

Overview

A new law enacted on November 6, 2009 changes the treatment of the \$25 weekly ARRA unemployment compensation (UC) payment in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). The \$25 weekly UC payment is now excluded from the calculation of income and resources. However, the payment remains countable in both the TAFDC and EAEDC cash programs.

Purpose of Memo

This memo:

- advises TAO staff of BEACON changes to the SNAP calculation to facilitate the implementation of the new law;
- issues procedures for entering unemployment compensation benefits on BEACON;
- advises staff about the recalculation of PA and NPA SNAP cases impacted by the new law:
 - active cases;
 - categorically eligible cases, formerly active at zero benefits; and
 - closed cases.

BEACON Changes

Effective with BEACON Increment 2.1.27, scheduled to be deployed on January 25, 2010, there will be changes to the SNAP calculation. The adjusted SNAP calculation will automatically deduct the \$25 ARRA weekly UC benefit amount from the total UC benefit amount entered on the Other Income Window.

**Entering
Unemployment
Compensation
Income on
BEACON**

Although the \$25 weekly ARRA UC benefit is now noncountable for SNAP, case managers must continue to add the \$25 weekly ARRA UC benefit to the **Weekly Pay Rte** as displayed on the Unemployment Insurance Information Inquiry screen when entering UC income for all programs. **This is the same procedure for entering UC income as was instructed in Field Operations Memo 2009-18.**

In addition, case managers must enter the UC Claim Filed Date as the Start Date on the Other Income window. It is crucial that this information is entered in the Start Date field because this date will determine whether BEACON excludes \$25 per week from the total UC income entered on the Other Income window. The Claim Filed Date can be found on the Unemployment Insurance Information Inquiry screen and reads **CIm Filed**.

IMPORTANT: Since the date entered in the **Start Date** field of the Other Income window determines whether BEACON should exclude the \$25 weekly ARRA UC benefit from the total UC income entered, **it is very important that case managers enter the correct date in BEACON.**

Field Operations Memo 2009-18, issued on March 25, 2009, implemented the ARRA changes that impacted the Department's Programs. One section of page 3 of this memo specifically addresses the \$25 weekly ARRA UC benefit and reads in part:

“Persons approved for unemployment benefits before January 1, 2010 will be grandfathered in and allowed to receive the extra \$25 per week for the duration of their unemployment benefit period but will not be paid the extra \$25 for any claim week beginning after June 30, 2010.”

This statement, as far as it pertains to end dates of the \$25 weekly ARRA UC benefit is no longer true. The January 1, 2010 and the June 30, 2010 dates have changed and it is possible that these dates will change again. TAOs will be informed when to stop adding the \$25 weekly ARRA UC to the regular UC income before entering it in BEACON.

**BEACON
Recalculation of
Active Cases**

Over the weekend of January 23, BEACON will:

- recalculate SNAP benefits for active PA and NPA SNAP cases with at least one person on file receiving UC benefits, using the adjusted SNAP calculation. This recalculation will impact February's SNAP benefit amount;
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**BEACON
Recalculation of
Active Cases
(Continued)**

- calculate and issue retroactive SNAP benefits owed with the February benefit amount; and
- enter the following on the BEACON Narratives tab:
ARRA UC Stimulus payment not countable for SNAP. Benefits were recalculated for February and retroactive SNAP benefits issued, if appropriate.

All active cases that recalculate to a change in benefit amount will be sent a streamweaver notice (Attachment A) during the week of January 25, informing the household of the reason for the change in SNAP benefit amount, the new monthly benefit amount and the retroactive benefit amount, if appropriate.

**BEACON
Recalculation of
Categorically
Eligible, Formerly
Active at Zero
Benefit Cases**

Over the weekend of January 23, BEACON will also:

- recalculate SNAP benefits for categorically eligible, formerly active at zero benefit SNAP cases, with at least one person on file receiving UC benefits, using the adjusted SNAP calculation. This recalculation will impact February's SNAP benefit amount;
Note: Based on the recalculation, many of these households will now receive a SNAP benefit greater than zero.
- calculate and issue retroactive SNAP benefits owed with the February benefit amount;
- create an EBT card request for categorically eligible SNAP cases, formerly active at zero benefit, now eligible to receive a benefit greater than zero, if the household did not receive a DTA benefit within the last four months; and
- enter one of the following BEACON Narrative entries:
 - **Used When a Card Request is not made:** *ARRA UC Stimulus payment not countable for SNAP. Benefits were recalculated for February and retroactive SNAP benefits issued, if appropriate; or*
 - **Used When a Card Request is made:** *ARRA UC Stimulus payment not countable for SNAP. Benefits were recalculated for February, retroactive SNAP benefits issued, if appropriate and an EBT mail card request was created.*

All categorically eligible, formerly active at zero benefit cases moving from zero benefit to a benefit amount greater than zero will be sent a streamweaver notice (Attachment B), during the week of January 25, informing the household of the reason for the change in the SNAP benefit amount, the new monthly benefit amount and the retroactive benefit amount, if appropriate.

**BEACON
Recalculation of
Closed Cases**

During the week of January 25, BEACON will:

- calculate and issue retroactive SNAP benefits owed to certain closed cases using the adjusted SNAP calculation.
- enter the following on the BEACON Narratives tab:
ARRA UC Stimulus payment not countable for SNAP. Benefits were recalculated and retroactive SNAP benefits issued, if appropriate.

All closed cases impacted by the new calculation will be sent a streamweaver notice (Attachment C), informing the household of the retroactive benefit amount.

Questions

If you have any questions, please have your Hotline designee call the Policy Hotline.

**BEACON NOTICE
LANGUAGE WITH VARIABLE TEXT (ENGLISH)**

{BEACON_USER STREET_ADDRESS} CAN {#} Important Notice - Read Carefully
{BEACON_USER CITY, STATE, ZIP} Este Mensaje Es Importante - Lea Cuidadosamente

Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance

{RECIPIENT_NAME}
{RECIPIENT_ADDRESS}
{RECIPIENT_CITY/TOWN, STATE, ZIP}

{RECIPIENT_SSN}
{BEACON_USER OFFICE NAME}

{M/DD/YYYY}

Dear {GRANTEE}:

There is a new federal law that may change the amount of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly food stamps) benefits that you receive. Under the new law, we now do not count a portion of your Unemployment Compensation benefits when determining your SNAP benefit amount.

Your SNAP benefits will go to {SNAP_NEW_AMOUNT} on {SNAP_DATE}. Benefits owed in the amount of {RETRO_AMOUNT} will be deposited into your EBT account with your February benefits.

If you disagree with the amount of your SNAP benefits, you have the right to a fair hearing. The back side of this notice contains important information about your hearing rights. To request a hearing, complete the back side of this notice.

The regulation(s) used in reaching these decisions are {CITATIONS 366.500}.

If you have any questions, call {WORKER_PHONE_NUMBER} and ask for your case manager {WORKER_NAME}.

If you have trouble reading or understanding this notice, you may also call Recipient Services toll-free at 1-800-445-6604.

BEACON NOTICE
LANGUAGE WITH VARIABLE TEXT (ENGLISH)

{BEACON_USER_STREET_ADDRESS} CAN {#} Important Notice - Read Carefully
{BEACON_USER_CITY, STATE, ZIP} Este Mensaje Es Importante - Lea Cuidadosamente

Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance

{RECIPIENT_NAME} {RECIPIENT_SSN}
{RECIPIENT_ADDRESS} {BEACON_USER_OFFICE_NAME}
{RECIPIENT_CITY/TOWN, STATE, ZIP}

{M/DD/YYYY}

Dear {GRANTEE}:

The Department sent you a notice informing you that you were not going to receive Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly food stamps) benefits because your income was too high. We kept your SNAP case open in case your circumstances changed.

Due to a new federal law, we now do not count a portion of your Unemployment Compensation benefits. As a result of this change, you are now eligible for monthly SNAP benefits in the amount of {SNAP_BENEFIT}. These benefits and benefits owed to you in the amount of {RETRO_AMOUNT} will be deposited into an EBT account for you on February XX.

If you disagree with the amount of your SNAP benefits, you have the right to a fair hearing. The back side of this notice contains important information about your hearing rights. To request a hearing, complete the back side of this notice.

The regulation(s) used in reaching these decisions are {CITATIONS_366.500}.

If you have any questions, call {WORKER_PHONE_NUMBER} and ask for your case manager {WORKER_NAME}.

If you have trouble reading or understanding this notice, you may also call Recipient Services toll-free at 1-800-445-6604.

In a few days, you will receive an Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) card in the mail to get these SNAP benefits. You will also receive a Personal Identification Number (PIN) in a separate envelope. These mailings might not be received on the same day.

Your EBT card can be used like an ATM or bank card at most food stores and supermarkets to buy food. You will need your PIN to use the card. If you have an old EBT card, please destroy it when you receive the new EBT card. The new card will cancel out the old card.

**BEACON NOTICE
ENGLISH SAMPLE**

{BEACON_USER_STREET_ADDRESS} CAN {#} Important Notice - Read Carefully
{BEACON_USER_CITY, STATE, ZIP} Este Mensaje Es Importante - Lea Cuidadosamente

Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance

{RECIPIENT_NAME}
{RECIPIENT_ADDRESS}
{RECIPIENT_CITY/TOWN, STATE, ZIP}

{RECIPIENT_SSN}
{BEACON_USER_OFFICE_NAME}

{M/DD/YYYY}

Dear {GRANTEE}:

The Department sent you a notice that your Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly food stamps) benefits stopped due to changes in your household circumstances or because your income was higher than the limits for the program.

Because of a new federal law (effective November 6, 2009), we now do not count a portion of Unemployment Compensation benefits when determining SNAP benefit amounts.

According to our records, you or someone in your household is receiving or received unemployment compensation. As a result of the new law, you are owed SNAP benefits.

SNAP benefits in the amount of {SNAP_RETRO_AMOUNT} are owed to you as a result of this new law. These benefits are now in your EBT account.

If you disagree with the amount of your SNAP benefits, you have the right to a fair hearing. The back side of this notice contains important information about your hearing rights. To request a hearing, complete the back side of this notice.

The regulation(s) used in reaching these decisions are {CITATIONS 366.500}

If you have trouble reading or understanding this notice, you may call toll-free 1-800-249-2007.