



Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Executive Office of Health and Human Services
Department of Transitional Assistance
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Field Operations Memo 2007-50
September 28, 2007

To: Transitional Assistance Office Staff

From:  John Augeri, Assistant Commissioner for Field Operations

Re: Food Stamp Program: Change for Notices to Categorically Eligible Households with Zero Benefit Amount

Overview

The Department sends the standard approval, reopening, recertification or change notices to categorically eligible households whose benefit amount is zero. These notices can be confusing because no actual benefit is being issued, yet they include language about the benefit date, certification period, acceptable uses of food stamp benefits, etc. The resulting confusion among applicants and clients has resulted in increased calls to Recipient Services, TAOs and AU Managers who must repeatedly explain the meaning of these notices.

The Department has changed the language of the Zero Benefit notices to eliminate the confusion created by the current notice. These changes are effective as of October 1, 2007.

The purpose of the new language in the Zero Benefit notice is to:

- reduce confusion and decrease the negative feedback created by the existing notices;
 - ensure that applicants and clients understand that, although they are eligible for the Food Stamp Program, they will not receive a benefit unless their circumstances change; and
 - encourage applicants and clients to report changes that may positively impact their benefit amount.
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**The Zero Benefit
Notice**

There are two versions of the notice. For approvals, reopenings and recertifications, the notice reads as follows:

We have reviewed your food stamp application. Because your countable income is over the limit for your household size, you will not receive food stamp benefits at this time.

For households that report a change that causes the benefit to be zero, the first line reads as follows:

We have reviewed your food stamp case based on the changes you reported. Because your countable income is over the limit for your household size, you will not receive food stamp benefits at this time.

In both versions, the notice informs the applicant or client that the case will remain open and encourages the client to report any changes that may affect food stamp benefits as follows:

We will keep your case open until [end certification date] in case there is a change in your household's circumstances that qualifies you for benefits. We will also follow up with you in a separate notice before that date.

If your household's circumstances change (for example, your income changes, a household member moves in or out, a household member becomes disabled or your rent increases), please call us immediately so we can review your case again. The telephone number is listed below. You will not have to fill out another application.

The remainder of the notice includes standard language about WIC, non-discrimination and the right to free legal services. The reverse side of the letter includes the appeal notice.

Questions

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