



Transitions

A Publication of the Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance

this month in...

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From the Commissioner

Dear Fellow Employees,

For some time now, many of my messages to you have focused on Welfare Reform and time-limited benefits. I have talked about the array of programs and services developed to help families transition from welfare to work and the supports which continue to be available to them, including Post-Employment Services, Transitional Child Care and Access to Jobs. This month I want to shift somewhat and go "back to basics." Housing is one of the most basic needs any family has. Although there are many issues surrounding housing, there is much we can do to both preserve the housing our recipients already have and to help them take advantage of programs available to assist them with housing issues.

The first thing which needs to be done is to ask questions: To ask at every eligibility review and every Transition Plan meeting, "How is your housing situation? Is your rent up to date? Do you have any outstanding issues with your landlord?" The point of these questions is to address potential housing issues before they become problems. If recipients are falling behind in their rent, what are they doing about it? Should they be placed on vendor payments? Do they need to work out payment plans with their landlords? Should they be referred to housing search for homelessness prevention services? The goal is to avoid homelessness at all costs. Homelessness is one of the most disruptive events which can occur in the life of a family. Though the Department supports a number of emergency shelter programs, a shelter is not a home. We must do everything we can to help a family preserve the housing they have or to find new housing *before* they become homeless.

Continued on Page 3

From the Forms File

New Forms

The following two forms will be used in conjunction with the monthly Income/Expenses Report which identifies cases in which income on file is less than expenses. Refer to Field Operations Memo 2000-2 for more information.

02-450-0100-05

IncExp-1 (1/2000)

Income /Expenses Form

02-451-0100-05

IncExp-2 (1/2000)

Summary Sheet for Income/Expenses Report

Revised Forms

The following two forms have been revised. Refer to Field Operations Memo 2000-3 for more information on the use of these forms. The Spanish version of the VLA will be available soon.

18-070-0200-05

VLA (Rev. 2/2000)

Shared Housing Verification

18-083-0200-05

LL/VER (Rev. 2/2000)

Landlord Verification

The following form is now available in Spanish.

02-567-0100-05

DVCONTREQ (S) (1/2000)

*Request for a Waiver Continuation of TAFDC Program Requirement(s)
Due to Domestic Violence*



Revised Brochure

The Relocation Benefit Brochure has been revised to reflect the increase in Relocation Benefits. See page 8 in this issue of *Transitions* for further information. A supply of this brochure should be placed in Transitional Assistance Office waiting rooms, and the obsolete brochures removed.

02-810-0120-05

02-811-0120-05 (S)

RBB (1/2000)

Relocation Benefits

Revised Poster

The Relocation Benefit poster has been revised to reflect the increase in Relocation Benefits. See page 8 in this issue of *Transitions* for further information. A supply was shipped to Transitional Assistance Offices in January. The old poster should be removed from Transitional Assistance Office waiting rooms and replaced with this one.

02-815-0120-05

02-816-0120-05 (S)

RBP-1 (1/2000)

Relocation Benefits Poster



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FYI - Census 2000 - Recipient Mailing	8
Relocation Benefit	8

Revised Flyer

The Relocation Benefit Flyer has been revised to reflect the increase in Relocation Benefits. See page 8 in this issue of *Transitions* for further information. A supply of these should be placed in Transitional Assistance Office waiting rooms, and the obsolete flyers removed.

02-814-0120-05
 02-817-0120-05 (S)
 RBP (1/2000)
 Relocation Benefits Flyer

The Earned Income Credit flyers have been reissued to reflect 1999 tax information. A supply of these flyers should be placed in Transitional Assistance Office waiting rooms

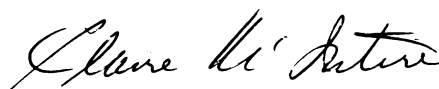
18-300-0100-05
 18-301-0100-05 (S)
 EIC-Flyer-1 (1/2000)
 Earned Income Credit Flyer

18-302-0100-05
 EIC-Flyer-2 (1/2000)
 Earned Income Credit Flyer

I am very excited about a new program which will support our efforts by providing a unique housing opportunity for current and former recipients. Through the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development, Massachusetts has received 2000 JOBLink Housing Vouchers. JOBLink is a Section 8 housing program with unique requirements which benefit our recipients and reinforce our efforts to help recipients find work and transition from public assistance. To be eligible for a JOBLink Voucher an individual must be a current or former (within the last 24 months) TAFDC recipient, must meet all standard Section 8 requirements and must also be employed or be a participant in a job-readiness or post-employment program which will lead to employment, and must have a critical housing need such as excessive rent costs, a need to relocate closer to work or currently homeless. What excites me about this program is that it rewards those working or on their way to work. It provides an additional support to those recipients and former recipients who are serious about leaving public assistance. In Massachusetts, JOBLink will be administered on a regional basis by the Department of Housing and Community Development. You will be receiving more information about the implementation of this program in the near future.

Housing is a complex issue. One new program will not resolve all problems. Your being more vigilant about inquiring into the status of a family's housing will not identify every problem and allow time to develop a solution. But each step we take is vitally important. Despite its complexity, housing remains basic. It is a cornerstone in any family's plan to move to self-sufficiency and we must provide support and information in every way possible.

Sincerely,



Claire McIntire
 Commissioner



From the Hotline - FS Noncitizen Issues

- Q. I have a combination case (FS/SSFSP) in which several members share in a TAFDC grant, one member a family cap child. If I enter Type GR with the grant, will the grant be prorated properly?
- A. No. The GR entry tells PACES to prorate the grant among all active food stamp AU members. Since the family cap child, is active in the food stamp AU but, is not active in the TAFDC AU, the TAFDC grant must be prorated manually and entered on the PACES Worksheet as OU income. **Do not use Type GR income unless all members are included in the TAFDC AU.**
- Q. I have a combination case (FS/SSFSP) which contains an undocumented/illegal noncitizen. How do I prorate the income of an undocumented/illegal noncitizen?
- A. PACES prorates income among all active food stamp AU members (Status 1, Status 2, Status 6, Status 7). Since undocumented/illegal noncitizens are entered on PACES as Status 0, the income of the undocumented/illegal noncitizen must be manually prorated. Shelter costs must be prorated manually as well if the undocumented/illegal noncitizen pays/is billed shelter costs. *See Field Operations Memo 92-51 for detailed instructions.*
- Q. How is Type 'FS' Income treated in a combination (FS/SSFSP) case?
- A. The Type 'FS' Income belongs to the sanctioned member. If the sanctioned member is SSFSP-eligible, the Type 'FS' Income must be prorated, as must shelter costs. Shelter costs must also be prorated if the sanctioned SSFSP-eligible member pays or is billed shelter costs.



NPA Food Stamp Worker Responsibility for Extension-related Closed TAFDC Cases

TAFDC *The TAFDC Procedural Guide Update 027*

The procedures for Transitional Assistance Workers transferring NPA Food Stamp benefits for extension-related closed TAFDC cases to the NPA Food Stamp unit are changing. Specifically: when a former TAFDC recipient with food stamp benefits is recertified for the first time, the case is transferred to the NPA unit.

The Online Update 026

All Volume 1: *PACES User's Guide* Appendix D: Service Area Listing/Service Area Listing By Office Number

Appendix D: Service Area Listing and Service Area Listing By Office Number have been revised to reflect the move of the Boston Family Housing Office from Central Office to the Dorchester TAO.

2000 Social Security/SSI COLA Update and 2000 COLA Reports

TAFDC, EAEDC, FS, SSI Field Operations Memo 2000-4

Effective January 2000, Social Security benefits and SSI payments increased by 2.4 percent; the patient paid amount (PPA) increased by \$12 for SSI rest home cases; and the base level Medicare Part B premium remained the same at \$45.50 per month.

This memo:

- identifies COLA cases;
- summarizes the procedures followed for updating the 2000 Social Security/SSI COLA;
- provides information and the procedures to be followed, if appropriate, concerning the reports used to monitor and track the 2000 Social Security/SSI COLA updates; and
- displays a facsimile of the mailing to recipients entitled "SSI Recipients Residing in Rest Homes or Community Support Facilities (level IV)."

2000 Social Security/SSI COLA

TAFDC, EAEDC, FS Field Operations Memo 99-35

Field Operations Memo 99-35, also issued as Fax 99-165, provided the following information about the yearly Social Security/SSI COLA:

- the scheduled COLA dates for each category of assistance;
- when the new Social Security and SSI amounts can be used; and
- when the reports generated as a result of the COLA will be received in TAOs. These reports should be received by Transitional Assistance Offices during the first week in February 2000.

Income/Expenses Report

All Field Operations Memo 2000-2

- The Income/Expenses report identifies cases in which income on file appears to be less than expenses. Expenses for the purpose of the report consist of shelter amount plus \$100.00. The purpose of this new report is to increase case accuracy by identifying potential error-prone cases and also to identify cases with increased potential for homelessness for possible homeless prevention services.
- A face-to-face interview is required for all cases on the report. At the interview Transitional Assistance Workers must verify all financial and nonfinancial information on file.
- If verifications indicate that all information is correct and the recipient is up to date on shelter payments, additional information as to how the recipient is able to meet expenses must be obtained. If verifications indicate the recipient is not up to date on shelter expenses, homeless prevention services must be explored.
- The Income/Expenses Form must be completed and filed in each case record. This form records the information from the report and indicates what action, if any, was taken by the Transitional Assistance Worker. TAO Directors/Designees must complete the Summary Sheet for Income/Expenses Report and return it to Central Office by the end of the following month.

FYI

Estimated Community Service Hour Requirement for Food Stamp Work Program Recipients

The state minimum wage has been increased to \$6.00 per hour effective 1/1/2000. Therefore, when initially referring an applicant or recipient to an FS/Community Service site, workers must estimate the required Community Service hours for the first month of participation using the current \$6.00 figure. To determine estimated Community Service hours, the worker must divide the food stamp benefit amount by the number of persons in the assistance unit and divide this number by the minimum wage. The result is rounded down to the nearest whole number.

Note: Due to the increase in minimum wage, the maximum Community Service requirement is 21 hours per month.

For example, an assistance unit of two both, subject to the FS/Work Program, is applying for food stamp benefits. The worker is referring the individuals to Community Service sites. Using the CALC Screen on PACES, the worker determines that the assistance unit's monthly allotment is \$205. The worker divides the allotment by the assistance unit size of 2 ($205 / 2 = 102.5$). The worker divides the result by the minimum wage ($102.5 / 6 = 17.08$). The worker rounds down to the nearest whole number. The estimated FS/Work requirement is 17 hours for each individual.

Reminder: Once an individual is accepted at a Community Service site and the FS/Community Service component on BEACON is activated, BEACON will determine the actual Community Service hour requirement for each month of participation. BEACON will also generate and send the *Community Service Notification form* informing FS/Work Program clients of their required Community Service hours.

It's Cold Outside!



Remind Recipients to call
the "Heatline"
1-800-632-8175
for
Fuel Assistance

FYI

18-Year-Old High School Students Are Exempt from FS/Work Program Requirements

According to a recent USDA clarification, an 18-year-old is exempt from FS/Work Program requirements if he or she is attending high school at least half-time. See 106 CMR 362.320(B)(8) Exemptions: Students. The policy at 106 CMR 362.400 *et seq.* will be revised to reflect this change in the near future.

Revised Forms for Landlord Verification and Shared Housing Verification for TAFDC, EAEDC, FS and SSFSP

TAFDC, EAEDC, FS and SSFSP Field Operations Memo 2000-3

To reduce Quality Control errors in shelter costs and AU membership while protecting the right to privacy of an applicant or recipient, the Department has revised the Landlord Verification Form (LL/VER) and the Shared Housing Verification Form (VLA) for easier understanding. This Field Operations Memo obsoletes Field Operations Memo 95-10.

FYI

Thibault Update

This is a reminder that Transitional Assistance Workers can process all case actions on Thibault-related cases **except** for reducing or terminating TAFDC benefits due to the time limit or for failure to meet work program requirements. The only actions that cannot be processed on Thibault cases due to the code 99 are Action Reasons:

- **29, 52 or 68** related to the 24-month time limit; and
- **27 or 73** related to the work program.

Code 99 forces the system to reject the above case actions. **All other case actions will be accepted and must be processed.**

Refer to the Field Operations Memo 99-2 series for Thibault-related instructions. Additional instructions will be issued on how to process these Thibault-related cases.

If you have any Thibault-related policy questions, have your hotline designee call the Policy Hotline at (617) 348-8478.



The Online Update 025

All

Volume 1: *PACES User's Guide*

Appendix B: PACES Input Document Codes

Appendix C: Action Reasons

Appendix L: Action Reason Release Chart

- The definitions of Action Reason 33 “Case or household member closed due to the eligibility for, or receipt of, another type of assistance” (categories 2 and 4) and “Case or household member closed due to the eligibility for, or receipt of, Food Stamps in another category/case” (category 9) have changed. Action Reason 33 is now defined as “Reserved: Special projects/special situations as determined by Central Office.”

Transitional Assistance Workers will be notified by Central Office when to use Action Reason 33. In those situations where Action Reason 33 was previously used to close or reduce a case, the appropriate Action Reason must now be used.

- For category 2 only, Action Reason 46 has been eliminated. Action Reason 78 must be used to close the PA FS portion of the case.
- For categories 2 and 4, Action Reason 78 will Dever with only a T-6 transaction.

Appendix B: PACES Input Document Codes/Appendix C: Action Reasons

- Cases that may meet the definition of Option Code U (Grantee and/or household member ineligible due to multiple cash, food stamp benefit application) must be called in to the Policy Hotline prior to taking any action. Instructions will be provided on how to proceed with the case or household member closings or reductions.

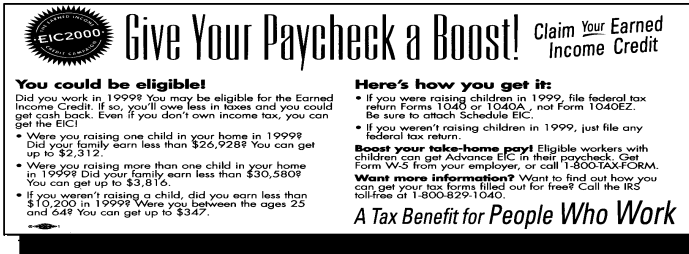
Appendix L: Action Reason Release Chart

- Appendix L has been revised to reflect the elimination of Action Reason 46 for category 2.

FYI

Earned Income Credit - Recipient Mailing

A notice will be mailed to all active TAFDC, EAEDC and Food Stamp recipients during the month of February to inform them of the federal Earned Income Credit (EIC) and the Massachusetts Earned Income Credit for 1999 earnings.



You could be eligible!
Did you work in 1999? You may be eligible for the Earned Income Credit. If so, you'll owe less in taxes and you could get cash back. Even if you don't own income tax, you can get the EIC!

- Were you raising one child in your home in 1999? Did your family earn less than \$26,928? You can get up to \$2,312.
- Were you raising more than one child in your home in 1999? Did your family earn less than \$30,580? You can get up to \$3,816.
- If you weren't raising a child, did you earn less than \$10,200 in 1999? Were you between the ages 25 and 64? You can get up to \$347.

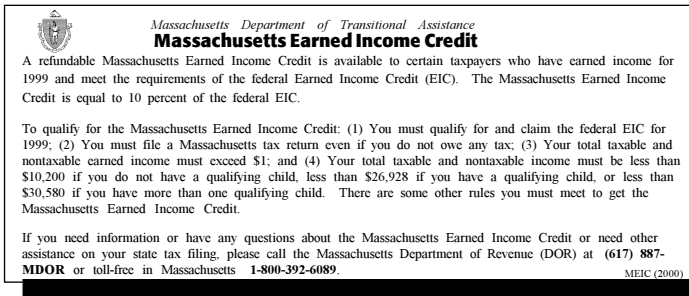
Here's how you get it:

- If you were raising children in 1999, file federal tax return Forms 1040 or 1040A, not Form 1040EZ. Be sure to attach Schedule EIC.
- If you weren't raising children in 1999, just file any federal tax return.

Boost your take-home pay! Eligible workers with children can get Advance EIC in their paycheck. Get Form W-5 from your employer, or call 1-800-TAX-FORM.

Want more information? Want to find out how you can get your tax forms filled out for free? Call the IRS toll-free at 1-800-829-1040.

A Tax Benefit for People Who Work



Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance
Massachusetts Earned Income Credit

A refundable Massachusetts Earned Income Credit is available to certain taxpayers who have earned income for 1999 and meet the requirements of the federal Earned Income Credit (EIC). The Massachusetts Earned Income Credit is equal to 10 percent of the federal EIC.

To qualify for the Massachusetts Earned Income Credit: (1) You must qualify for and claim the federal EIC for 1999; (2) You must file a Massachusetts tax return even if you do not owe any tax; (3) Your total taxable and nontaxable earned income must exceed \$1; and (4) Your total taxable and nontaxable income must be less than \$10,200 if you do not have a qualifying child, less than \$26,928 if you have a qualifying child, or less than \$30,580 if you have more than one qualifying child. There are some other rules you must meet to get the Massachusetts Earned Income Credit.

If you need information or have any questions about the Massachusetts Earned Income Credit or need other assistance on your state tax filing, please call the Massachusetts Department of Revenue (DOR) at (617) 887-MDOR or toll-free in Massachusetts 1-800-392-6089.

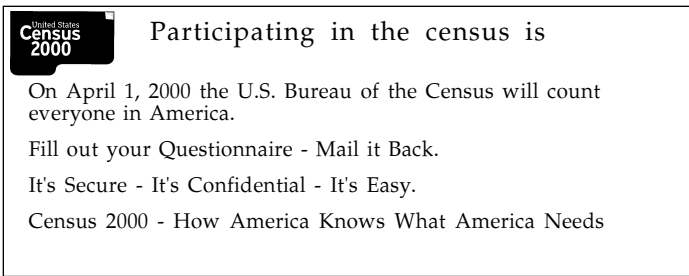
MEIC (2000)

FYI

Census 2000 - Recipient Mailing

The United States Constitution mandates a census every 10 years to determine how many seats each state will have in the U.S. House of Representatives. The census is also used for many other purposes. Census questionnaires will be mailed out in March 2000. It is very important that people respond to the census and get counted.

The notice shown below is being mailed to all active TAFDC, EAEDC and Food Stamp recipients during the month of February. The purpose of the mailing is to inform recipients of the Census and to encourage them to respond to it.



United States
Census 2000

Participating in the census is

On April 1, 2000 the U.S. Bureau of the Census will count everyone in America.

Fill out your Questionnaire - Mail it Back.

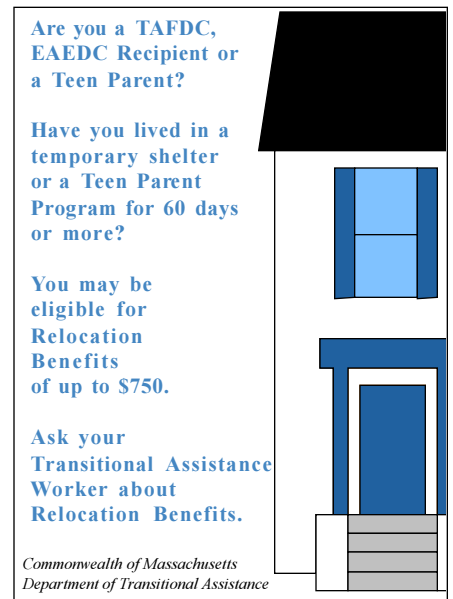
It's Secure - It's Confidential - It's Easy.

Census 2000 - How America Knows What America Needs

Relocation Benefit

TAFDC, EAEDC
State Letter 1185
The TAFDC Procedural Guide Update 028
The Emergency Assistance Reference Guide Update 001

The relocation benefit has been increased to \$750. This benefit is available for expenses directly related to a TAFDC or EAEDC family or a teen parent's inability to secure permanent housing and move from the temporary emergency shelter or the teen structured living program. The benefit is available after being in the shelter or TPL for 60 days or more and may not be authorized more than once in a 12-month period.



Are you a TAFDC, EAEDC Recipient or a Teen Parent?

Have you lived in a temporary shelter or a Teen Parent Program for 60 days or more?

You may be eligible for Relocation Benefits of up to \$750.

Ask your Transitional Assistance Worker about Relocation Benefits.

Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Department of Transitional Assistance