

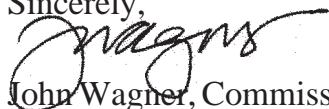
media campaigns all focused on increasing participation. Recently, we expanded our online application opportunities even further. The Fall River Office is currently accepting food stamp applications directly from clients who apply online from their personal computers, or at public sites like libraries or nonprofit organizations.

Each outreach initiative has yielded significant results. This upward trend continues at the same time that we've managed to maintain superior program integrity. Thanks to each one of our local offices, the Food Stamp Program in Massachusetts has one of the lowest error rates in the Northeast region, and nationally, for fiscal year 2005 we rank among the top ten. Our success in this area was highlighted at the Nor'easter Conference where we were honored with a special Payment Accuracy award from Food and Nutrition Services. More recently, our 3.88 percent error rate was recognized by the federal government with a bonus award of \$3,458,500.

Timely food stamp case processing was also a focal point at the Nor'easter Conference. We looked at best methods for accurately determining food stamp eligibility while ensuring case processing within 30 days. As you know, timely application processing is a food stamp priority. We've modified parts of the verification process and are working toward streamlining application processing time-frames. Most recently, we've determined that, in certain situations, applicants submitting mandatory verifications between day 31 and day 60 are no longer required to submit a second application. Our intention is two-fold: to simplify the application process for clients while also saving you time and effort. Future plans to facilitate the verification process for clients include an updated and simplified BEACON-generated Verification Checklist, and elimination of the "Blue Form" for most applications.

Although this year's Nor'easter and DTA Conferences are behind us, work to further the goals outlined at these events is ongoing. Over the second half of this year, we'll be moving beyond these ideas and looking for better ways to implement programs and sustain the energy that these Conferences created. Whether providing food and nutrition assistance, housing services or job training, together we'll continue working to strengthen communities across Massachusetts "one family at a time." Thanks for all you do to make this happen.

Sincerely,



John Wagner, Commissioner



From the Hotline

- Q.** Are there temporary absences in the TAFDC Program that would make an otherwise eligible dependent child ineligible for TAFDC benefits?
- A.** Yes. If a child has been removed from the home as the result of a court order after a care and protection hearing, or if the only child in an AU has been removed by DSS in accordance with DSS procedures, then temporary absence may not be claimed.

Temporary absences that exceed 120 days may be extended only when the child or grantee is hospitalized, when the child is attending a residential school returning home on vacations and holidays or when there is a family crisis. A claim of temporary absence for a family crisis is subject to approval by the Commissioner or his designee.

- Q.** What about my TAFDC recipient whose only child attends a boarding school Monday through Friday? Is the Assistance Unit still eligible for TAFDC benefits in this situation?

- A.** Yes. As long as the AU is otherwise eligible, this child may be considered temporarily absent from the home for up to 120 days. This recipient needs to demonstrate that she continues to exercise responsibility for the “day-to-day care and control” of her child.

Examples of exercising care and control include: being responsible for decisions about the child’s health care, clothing and personal items; actively participating in the planning discussions of her child’s school requirements; keeping a room ready for visits from the child; and remaining in close contact with the child.

For more information on this topic, refer to 106 CMR 203.595.

- Q.** How is temporary absence verified?
- A.** The temporary nature of an absence is verified in writing by the recipient. The written verification must contain the start and expected end date of the absence or if the recipient is claiming good cause because the temporary absence exceeds 120 days,

the recipient must provide documentation from the school or institution verifying that the grantee has regular contact with the child and continues to exercise care and control.

NOTE: In the Food Stamp Program, a child attending a boarding school is considered a resident of an institution. (Refer to 106 CMR 361.240.) During long-term breaks from school when the child is living at home, such as the summer months, the child may be added to the food stamp AU. Make a note in the Narrative to keep track of the start and end dates of these long-term breaks.

From the Forms File

New Form

02-557-0606-05

DVWR-CL (6/2006)

Check List for a Domestic Violence Waiver Request

This form is used as a guide for the AU Manager when submitting a domestic violence waiver request to Central Office for consideration.

TAFDC – ESP Vocational Rehabilitation Referral

TAFDC

Field Operations Memo 2006-29

This Field Operations Memo instructs AU Managers how to make referrals to the Vocational Rehabilitation component. These instructions are needed because the Vocational Rehabilitation component is not *initially* listed on the ESP Component Eligibility window on BEACON.

