

# Transitions



A Publication of the Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance

## this month in...

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## From the Commissioner

Dear Fellow Employees,

I always look forward to writing the annual letter marking our Department's progress, and this year, in particular, I am extremely proud of what we've been able to accomplish. Over the past 12 months, our hard work has paid off in many areas and I'd like to celebrate a few of these successes with all of you. After all, our achievements not only bolster the economic self-sufficiency of Massachusetts residents, but also uplift the spirits of some of the most vulnerable in our Commonwealth.

### Across the state, the impact of our efforts is apparent.

- In 2006, our Food Stamp Program continued to gain national recognition. In the most recently released report by the Food Research and Action Center, a leading nonprofit organization working to fight hunger, Massachusetts ranked number one in the nation for increased participation over both a one-year period and a five-year period!

This alone is an outstanding achievement, but your hard work was also showcased in two other key Food Stamp Program areas. This past fall, we were recognized by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) for a Best Application Processing Timeliness award of slightly over \$1 million. Although the award marks the third consecutive year that Massachusetts has received recognition in this category, this year's honor also represents a first-place lead among fifty states.

Finally, as many of you are aware, this was all achieved without compromising the accuracy or integrity of the Massachusetts Food Stamp Program. In fact, this year the payment

error rate is approximately 2% below the national average and merited a \$3.45 million bonus award from the USDA.

- This year also marked the continuation of our campaign to engage parents in work and work-related programs. With new initiatives to reach full engagement, our goal for all TAFDC clients is either employment or participation in activities that will lead to employment. To do this, our Cash Assistance and Full Engagement (CAFE) Program staff are expanding job opportunities for all of our clients, including those with special needs.

Beginning in 2006, Vocational Rehabilitation Services became available statewide, and many of you encouraged and helped connect individuals with these services. More recently, we initiated the Human Services Vocational Education and Training Program in cooperation with the Community College System and the Human Resources Division at the Executive Office of Health and Human Services. This program is currently being offered to certain clients in the Westfield and Tewksbury area. It provides individuals with training and employment in the health care and mental health fields.

This initiative and others are in keeping with our aim to provide clients with jobs that offer good salaries and career advancement. As a result, we engage approximately 13,000 individuals in employment, education and training programs each month. More significantly, each month over 1,300 of these same individuals have been placed into competitive jobs earning an average hourly wage of \$9.28.

- The past year has seen our Department's Housing and Homeless Services Program move forward with a "Housing First" approach. Adopting the housing first model means that, along with a number of other states across the country, Massachusetts has signed onto an ambitious course of action for enlisting the public and private sectors in a ten-year plan to end homelessness.

The housing first model calls for moving homeless individuals and families into permanent housing as quickly as possible and then providing the services and long-term supports necessary to keep them in permanent homes. It's a comprehensive response

to national research indicating that the high level of services a family receives while in a shelter is no more effective at helping families achieve economic self-sufficiency than rapid re-housing with wrap around support services. Local studies have also shown that keeping families housed is a better investment option than temporary emergency shelters.

In strengthening our commitment to this approach, we've been working on a couple of initiatives. In one of our efforts, we entered into an agreement with the Department of Mental Health (DMH) to use a portion of our funds and help expand DMH Housing First Pilot Projects in Framingham, Boston, Southeastern Massachusetts and counties in Western Massachusetts (Franklin, Hampshire and Hampden). In another initiative started just last month, our Department, in cooperation with the Department of Housing and Community Development, launched a housing first model at Springfield Housing Authority's Marble Street Apartments. There,

seven "hard-to-house" families have already signed leases, and we expect an additional eight families will take advantage of this opportunity.

In addition to all of this progress, our work continues on the Local Housing Authority Transitional Housing Program. This year, 11 local housing authorities are in the program, and we have 116 units available for tenancy.

**In all three DTA program areas, maintaining focus on the economic development of our clients through training and employment is paramount.** The reasons for this are two-fold.

Working can provide financial and emotional benefits for the entire family. Through direct contact with your clients, many of you witness the personal satisfaction derived from securing a job or gaining employment skills. Ensuring a more stable economic path for our clients and their children has its own rewards.

But there is another reason for the Department's employment and training imperative. Providing these services also produces some very tangible results. For

example, federal regulations allow our state to be reimbursed 50 cents for every dollar spent on employment and training-related activities provided to food stamp recipients. For Federal Fiscal Year 2006, our Administration and Finance Unit within Central Office has taken advantage of this opportunity and secured over \$714,000 in federal reimbursements. These reimbursements, along with other federal bonuses are used by our Department to provide additional employment and training services for TAFDC families. Hundreds of Massachusetts families are benefiting significantly from these revenue maximization efforts.

Of course, none of these achievements were possible without the knowledge and dedication of our field staff. Our Department's commitment to maintaining a skilled workforce is evident in our training and professional development opportunities.

This past year, over 88% of all DTA staff attended at least one learning/training event. In addition, classes offered through the Center for Staff Development, the Human Resources Division, and through specific vendors were attended by over 300 Department employees. Training conducted by our DTA Training Unit prepared new food stamp AU managers for joining our TAO workforce. In all, 59 individuals completed 14 weeks of classes, BEACON Labs and On-the-Job-Training. Additionally, 37 new TAFDC AU managers assumed their positions, having just completed 18 weeks of intensive training.

To all of you who have recently joined the DTA team, as well as to our more experienced employees, thank you for playing an integral part in helping us reach our year-end goals.

I'd like to wish you all a happy and healthy New Year.

Sincerely,



John Wagner, Commissioner

## From the Hotline

A “From the Hotline” index of the questions and answers published in *Transitions* during 2006 has been compiled below. The index is intended to provide quicker access to policy information. Please remember that this index explains policy and procedure as of the month and year in which the question and answer were issued.

### Emergency Assistance

Topic	Month	Related Policy/Procedure 106 CMR:
Housing Assistance Program	August	309.039
Self-Sufficiency Plan	August	309.040, <i>EA User's Guide: Emergency Assistance, SSI Benefits and BEACON</i> , Chapter V
SSI Benefits and Emergency Assistance	August	<i>EA User's Guide: Emergency Assistance, SSI Benefits and BEACON</i> , Chapter XII
Twelve-Month Period Exceptions	August	309.040

### Food Stamps

Topic	Month	Related Policy/Procedure 106 CMR:
Application Processing	September	FO Memo 2006-30
Asset: Prepaid Funeral/ Burial Lot	April	363.140
Categorical Eligibility	October	365.180
Citizenship Verification	March	362.210
Employment and Training	November	362.310
Flexible Credits	February	FYI, January 2006
Lump Sum	October	363.130
Noncitizen	March/May	362.220
Noncountable Asset: Gift Cards	December	
Residents of Institution	July	361.240
Student Eligibility	November	362.410

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## Quality Corner

This month we will discuss an error caused by the incorrect attribution of shelter expenses.

### Shelter

The grantee lived with her boyfriend and five children. They received TAFDC and SSI. The boyfriend was the biological father of three of her children; before he was made active in the grantee's TAFDC AU, the boyfriend had his own EAEDC AU.

At the time of the last certification, the grantee verified that her monthly rent was \$247. This rental amount was entered on BEACON under the grantee's name. QC determined that BEACON used a total of \$447 as the shelter amount in the grantee's FS calculation.

When the grantee's boyfriend was receiving EAEDC, monthly rent of \$200 dollars was attributed to him for both cash and FS. The rental amount on the Shelter Expenses window was never zeroed out when the boyfriend was made active in the grantee's TAFDC AU. Therefore, BEACON added the boyfriend's old rent of \$200 to the current \$247 rental amount attributed to the grantee. The use of the boyfriend's rent in the FS benefit calculation caused an error.

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## From the Forms File

Please be advised that an initial supply of DTA letterhead with the names of Deval L. Patrick, Governor, Timothy P. Murray, Lieutenant Governor and JudyAnn Bigby, M.D., Secretary of EOHHS were distributed to TAOs and a full supply will be shipped as soon as possible.

### Revised Form

25-310-0107-05

25-311-0107-05(S)

FRBI (Rev. 1/2007)

Family Resource Brochure  
Information Sheet

This information sheet has been revised to include updated contact information for the various services available to applicants and recipients.

09-090-1206-05

09-091-1206-05 (S)

NFL-Colon (12/2006)

Colon et al., v. Wagner Letter

This notice was developed as a result of the *Colon et al., v. Wagner* court decision. Refer to Field Operations Memo 2006-58 for more information.

### Revised Brochure

02-568-0107-05

Domestic Violence Unit  
Brochure (Rev. 1/2007)

Everyone Deserves to Be Safe

This brochure has been revised to include DTA Domestic

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### Food Stamps (continued)

Topic	Month	Related Policy/Procedure 106 CMR:
Transfer of Asset	October	363.150
Transitional Benefit Alternative	June	365.190 <i>A User's Guide: Transitional Assistance Programs and BEACON, Appendix B</i>

### Transitional Aid to Families with Dependent Children

Topic	Month	Related Policy/ Procedure 106 CMR:
Caring for the Disabled	December	FO Memo 2006-41
Citizen	May	203.670
Lump Sum Income: Lottery Winnings	October	204.240, <i>A User's Guide: Transitional Assistance Programs and BEACON, XIV-E</i>
Noncitizen	March	203.675
Temporary Absence	July	203.595

### Transitional Cash Assistance Programs

Topic	Month	Related Policy/ Procedure 106 CMR:
Funeral/Burial	May	<i>A User's Guide: Transitional Assistance Programs and BEACON, Chapter IV-D.</i>



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Violence Specialists' contact information.

25-300-0107-05

25-301-0107-05 (S)

FRSB (Rev. 1/2007)

*Family Resources Brochure*

This brochure has been revised to include updated contact information for the various services available to applicants and recipients.

### **Revision to the Notice of Approval, Denial or Termination for Emergency Assistance or Other Financial Services (NFL-9) and Procedures for Noncompliance Referrals and EA Notices**

EA

Field Operations Memo 2006-50A

This memo clarifies and explains the notification procedures to EA AUs on decisions made by the Noncompliance Committee, non-compliance referral documentation, revised EA Notices (TES-WN-13, NFL-ST and NFL-9), and detailed termination information for the NFL-9.

### **Applicant Citizenship Verification for MassHealth Eligibility: TAFDC and EAEDC**

TAFDC, EAEDC

Field Operations Memo 2006-55

This memo informs TAO staff that, effective immediately, AU Managers should strongly encourage all TAFDC and EAEDC applicants to submit the MassHealth-preferred citizenship verifications described in this memo.

Due to a change in federal law, all individuals applying for MassHealth benefits must provide verification of their U.S. citizenship. This change in federal law took effect July 1, 2006.

All TAFDC and EAEDC applicants will have to provide documentation of citizenship to either DTA or MassHealth in accordance with MassHealth regulations, or risk not receiving MassHealth benefits. Verification of citizenship is a one-time requirement. Once an applicant has submitted satisfactory verification, they will not be required to submit future verification to DTA or MassHealth.

Applications for food stamps are not affected by this change in federal law.

Beginning in April, more detailed citizenship verifications submitted by applicants will be forwarded to MassHealth in a data exchange. MassHealth may deny benefits to those recipients who cannot provide verifications recognized by MassHealth. Therefore, it is important to make sure that all applicants provide verifications that will be accepted by MassHealth.

### **TAFDC - Community Service Sites Clean-up Project**

TAFDC

Field Operations Memo  
2006-56

This memo:

- informs TAO staff about a special project to clean up the BEACON Resource Search window;
- gives TAO staff procedures for reviewing and updating the status of community service sites in their area; and
- informs TAO staff that Central Office staff will remove sites from the Resource Search window based on the results of the TAO special project.

## **TAFDC: Early Education and Care, Additional Policy Changes**

TAFDC  
Field Operations Memo  
2006-57

This memo alerts TAO staff to the following additional EEC policy changes which will streamline voucher services for TAFDC recipients:

- EEC has instructed the Child Care Resource and Referral agencies (CCR&Rs) to accept the DTA Child Care Referral notice as proof of the TAFDC recipient's eligibility for child care and not require duplicate documentation from recipients;
- CCR&R counselors will write the voucher for the days and number of hours indicated on the DTA Child Care Referral notice and include additional hours, when appropriate;
- CCR&R counselors will contact AU Managers to correct unclear or discrepant information; and
- AU Managers are asked to note on the Child Care Referral notice the number of credit hours per course the recipient in a post-educational component is taking.

## **Special Procedures in Colon, et al., v. Wagner Court Order**

EA  
Field Operations Memo 2006-58

On December 21, 2006, the Department issued notices to families who were terminated from EA shelter between December 2005 and November 2006. This memo explains the steps to take when a family who received the *Colon v. Wagner* notice comes into a TAO to reapply for shelter benefits.

## **FYI**

### **BEACON Online Help Updates Issued in December 2006**

BEACON Online Help Update Issue #4 (12/20/06)

## **FYI**

### **Case Record Access and BEACON**

Individuals (and their designated representatives) have the right to review and copy information in their case record. A case record includes electronic information that is maintained in BEACON as well as the individual's physical case record. Accordingly, an individual may request and is entitled to copies of BEACON screens. The Department is currently developing a protocol to assist AU Managers with these types of case record requests. See 106 CMR 701.330 (Transitional Cash Assistance) and 106 CMR 360.300 and 360.400 (Food Stamps) for specific program policies.



## FYI

### Changes to the EOHHS mass.gov DTA Homepage

This month you will see the following changes to the EOHHS mass.gov DTA home page.

#### Format Change

The EOHHS mass.gov site has a new design. The content and structure of the site has not changed.

#### News and Updates

The News and Updates section contains the following new links:

- *MA Leads Nation in Improving Food Stamp Participation*
- *MA Emergency Assistance (EA) Sheltering Program for Homeless Families; and*
- *Testing a Typology of Family Homelessness in Massachusetts: Preliminary Findings.*

#### Research and Statistics

The link entitled *DTA Facts and Figures* displays caseload information, grant level, eligibility standards and FY06 appropriations for December.

The program links (Emergency Aid to the Elderly, Disabled and Children; Food Stamps; Homeless; Supplemental Security Income; and Transitional Aid to Families with Dependent Children), when selected, display updated caseload information.

#### For Researchers - Financial Assistance - Welfare Reform - Temporary Assistance for Needy Families

The Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) State Plan can be accessed from the **For Researchers Tab** and selecting the link entitled **Welfare Reform**.



## FYI

### Changes to Policy Online

This month you will see the following changes to Policy Online:

#### 2007 Link

The following Policy Online pages contain a 2007 link:

- BEACON Online Help Updates;
- Field Operations Memos;
- FYIs;
- State Letters;
- TAO E-Mails - Special Procedures; and
- Transitions.

#### Online Forms

The Online Forms option includes the following forms:

- Notice of Approval, Denial or Termination for Emergency Assistance or Other Financial Services;
- Notice of Termination of Temporary Emergency Shelter; and
- Warning Notice of Non-compliance.

“Forgiveness is not an occasional act: it is a permanent attitude.”

Dr. Martin Luther King



## **FYI**

### **EAEDC: The AP-SSI-1 Form**

Current procedures require EAEDC applicants and recipients who are disabled or over age 65 to complete the *Authorization for Interim Assistance Reimbursement (Initial SSI) (AP-SSI-1)* or the *Authorization for Interim Assistance Reimbursement (Reinstated SSI) (AP-SSI-1A)*.

AU Managers are reminded that the AP-SSI-1 or AP-SSI-1A form is valid for one year from the date the applicant or recipient signs the form. The receipt of the signed form must be recorded on the BEACON Disability window on the SSI Tracking Tab following procedures in *A User's Guide: Transitional Assistance Programs and BEACON*, Chapter XIII, Section H.

A new AP-SSI-1 or AP-SSI-1A form must be completed by a recipient after a year, or when an applicant or recipient makes a subsequent disability claim after:

- the Social Security Administration had made a final determination on a previous SSI claim or appeal; or

- the applicant or recipient has agreed to terminate the previous authorization.

If an EAEDC AU closes and a reapplication is made within a year of the closing, the AU Manager must check the date on the BEACON SSI Tracking Tab. If the date of the original AP-SSI-1 or AP-SSI-1A is within the year, then a new form is not needed. If the date is greater than one year or no date appears on BEACON, an AP-SSI-1 or AP-SSI-1A must be completed, signed and entered on the SSI Tracking Tab.

## **FYI**

### **Food Stamp Reporting Requirements**

Food stamp reporting requirements vary based on AU circumstances i.e. Universal Semiannual reporting (USR), Transitional Benefits Alternative (TBA), Combined Application Project (CAP) Change Reporting households or TAFDC Monthly Reporting (MR). At application, reapplication and reevaluation, the AU Manager must clearly explain the reporting requirements to the recipient. This is particularly necessary when the AU is changing from a simplified reporting type such as USR, which has limited reporting requirements, to mandatory change reporting that requires the applicant or recipient to report on a broader range of changes.

To avoid costly Quality Control errors resulting from the applicant's or recipient's failure to report changes that may affect eligibility or benefit amount, the AU Manager must ensure that the applicant or recipient understands the reporting requirements. This must be done whether the interview is conducted in person or by telephone.

See 106 CMR 366.110 for details on household reporting responsibilities.

## **FYI**

### **Increase in the State's Minimum Wage**

Effective January 1, 2007, the minimum wage in Massachusetts will be increased to \$7.50 per hour. All required calculation routines in BEACON will be updated to reflect this change. Additionally, the Fair Labor Standard Act (FLSA) calculation *tool* has been updated.

Please refer to 2006-46 for procedures to use the FLSA calculation tool.

AU Managers must ensure that:

1. recipients who are required to perform community service are listed as active in the community service component in BEACON; and
2. the earnings of recipients who satisfy their work requirement through a combination of work and community service are entered in BEACON so that the correct FS benefit amount and the correct number of community service hours are calculated for the recipient.

## FYI

### MBTA Fare Changes

The MBTA fare values and passes in BEACON have been adjusted due to the change in MBTA fares that took effect on January 1st. Since the costs of monthly passes have changed, some recipients may think they are not receiving the proper amount for their transportation benefit. In fact, the amounts have been adjusted to reflect the new MBTA fare structure.

For more information on the new fare structure, see [www.mbta.com](http://www.mbta.com).

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### What's an AU Manager to Do?

The AU Manager should have eliminated the shelter expenses attributed to the boyfriend at the time he was added to the TAFDC AU. Attributing shelter costs to the correct person and program is very important in preventing errors.

Whenever an AU is being processed at application or recertification or when completing maintenance activities, such as a change in shelter expenses, the AU Manager must ensure that no other adult household member has shelter costs incorrectly attributed on BEACON. Shelter expenses incorrectly attributed to an AU member will impact the FS benefit calculation and may cause an error. For more information, refer to the FYI *Attributing Shelter Costs in BEACON* in the December 2006 issue of *Transitions*.

## FYI

### Project SAFE Additional Sites

New Initiatives memo: *Pre-Employment Services for Homeless TAFDC Families Initiative*, issued September 5, 2006, informed TAO staff about the Safe Assistance to Further Economic Empowerment (Project SAFE) Program implemented in 2006 in three emergency shelters: Millennium House in Boston, David Jon Louison in Brockton, and House of Hope in Lowell. In November 2006, the Department offered the Project SAFE's training course to residents of Family House Shelter in Dorchester.

The Department plans to make the Project SAFE program available to the residents of Tri-City Shelter in Malden in late January or early February 2007, and in two additional shelter sites by the end of June 2007. One of the proposed additional sites is the Safe Harbor Shelter in Hyannis. The final site for Project SAFE will be announced in a future edition of *Transitions*.

