

T Transitions

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this month in...

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From the Commissioner

Dear Fellow Employees,

The last month has been a hectic one. Visits to local offices and meetings with staff have provided me firsthand information on our day-to-day business. Visits to legislators have also been a priority and the release of the Senate budget, which provided a markedly better funding level for the Department than the House of Representatives budget, was most welcome.

I have also begun to develop a new Department strategic plan. To look to the future, it is important to study the past, to learn from possible mistakes and to reflect on successes. The accomplishments of this Department over the past decade are impressive.

The Department operates under a few simple principles: to promote personal responsibility and self-sufficiency in those we serve; to provide benefits accurately to eligible recipients; and to provide services in a professional and courteous manner. Outlined below are just a few of the things DTA has accomplished in the last decade with the hard work of dedicated staff committed to these principles.

Welfare Reform

Major structural changes to both TAFDC and EAEDC have led to caseload reduction and corresponding savings while at the same time increasing opportunities for individuals to leave welfare behind. The TAFDC caseload has declined from 114,671 in 1993 to 46,953 today, reducing spending by over \$400 million annually. The implementation of the Emergency Aid to the Elderly, Disabled and Children program in 1991 led to a caseload decline from a high of 38,899 in 1991 to 15,884 today, reducing costs by \$100 million per year. These savings have allowed the state to make major

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From the Hotline

- Q.** I have a food stamp client who moved to Massachusetts from New Hampshire. He is a Food Stamp Work Program required individual but I don't know how to determine if he has used up his three months of non-participation with the Food Stamp Work Program. How can I make this determination?
- A.** Although the Food Stamp Program is national, you are only responsible for determining the client's non-participation limit of three months out of 36 months *within Massachusetts borders*. There is currently no system that can track work program requirement activity from state to state. Regulations concerning the work program requirement and the Food Stamp Employment and Training Program requirement are found in 106 CMR 362.300, 362.310 and 362.320.
- Q.** A mother came into our office applying for TAFDC for herself. Her daughter is receiving SSI. She holds a joint bank account with her daughter that exceeds our \$2,500.00 asset limit. I was going to deny the application, but the mother claims the account was established by her for the sole and exclusive purpose of providing for her daughter. The account contains SSI retroactive payments to her SSI child. Although the mother has *access* to these funds, she claims this is a "dedicated account" and that the money is not actually *owned* by her. She also claims that should she use these funds on expenses that are not related to her daughter's illness, SSA would pursue the matter of misuse with my client. Can I approve this application as the client has access but not ownership of this "dedicated" SSI account?
- A.** Yes. "Dedicated" accounts may be established for certain retroactive SSI funds. No other funds may be deposited into these accounts and none of the funds belong to the parent of the SSI child. By law, your applicant may only use these funds for specific items and services related to her daughter's illness. As long as your client can verify through SSA that these restrictions on the "dedicated" SSI account exist and she is otherwise eligible, you can approve this TAFDC application.



From the Forms File

Revised Forms

AU Managers are reminded to discard the old version of any form and use the new revised form.

The following four forms were revised to include the 90-day appeal time limit. Refer to Field Operations Memo 2002-14 for more information.

13-040-0602-05

13-044-0602-05 (S)

TES-WN-1 (Rev. 6/2002)

Warning Notice of Noncompliance

13-041-0602-05

13-043-0602-05 (S)

TES-WN-2 (Rev. 6/2002)

Warning Notice of Noncompliance/Temporary Emergency Shelter Placement

02-202-0602-05

02-204-0602-05 (S)

TES-TR-1 (Rev. 6/2002)

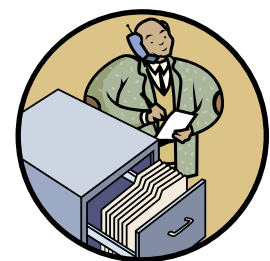
Notice of Shelter Transfer

02-280-0602-05

02-281-0602-05 (S)

TES-TR-3 (Rev. 6/2002)

Notice of Transfer Due to Shelter Termination



investments in items like child care, transportation and other supports.

Organizational and Operational Changes

In 1995, the agency was transformed from the Department of Public Welfare to the Department of Transitional Assistance. Much more than a symbolic name-change, this new name underscores significant changes in how we do our business.

- The role of front-line case managers has changed to include employment and self-sufficiency functions.
- The role of Teen Parent Specialists was created to focus on the unique needs of teen parents.
- A unit of specialized workers was created to help victims of domestic violence become self-sufficient, and special rules to help victims cope with domestic violence were implemented.

In addition to these internal initiatives, the Department has collaborated with other agencies to better serve welfare recipients by developing:

- over 120 teen structured housing placements;

- Structured Job Search and Post-Employment, and Access to Jobs transportation services;
- the FOR Families outreach and referral program; and
- MAAT Teams providing coordinated services to homeless families.

Technology Initiatives

Technology has modernized Department operations, including:

- implementation of EBT;
- expansion of desktop computing to enhance productivity through the use of word processing, spreadsheets, electronic mail and Internet access; and
- implementation of BEACON.

This is a partial list of achievements but it raises the question of where do we go from here. Both the TAFDC and Food Stamp programs face reauthorization at the federal level with resulting changes in state policy and operations. Our budget situation for FY03 is far from certain. We continue to be faced with homeless families needing temporary shelter. Expanding access to Food Stamp benefits continues as a priority and a challenge. We have a strong record and have never been daunted by obstacles. I believe that we can, and will, develop a plan for the future that will build on our successes. I know that I can count on your support and participation—it continues to be the cornerstone of our success.

Sincerely,



John Wagner
Commissioner

TAFDC/EAEDC Potential to Graduate View, State Clock View, Deprivation Factors

TAFDC, EAEDC

A User's Guide: Transitional Assistance Programs and BEACON Update 028

Chapter II, Section A: "TAO Office Explorer Views" has been updated to include a new View added to the Office Explorer titled "TAFDC/EAEDC Potential to Graduate." This View:

- replaces the *Potential to Graduate Report* and the *EAEDC Student 18-20 Years Report*;
- identifies TAFDC and EAEDC APs who are 18 or older with the potential to graduate from a secondary school; and
- provides AU Managers with initial information to disposition the AU status of affected APs.

The information provided by this update summarizes the new View, describes APs identified on the View, and describes AU Manager actions based upon information identified on the View.

Additionally, this section has been updated to include the revised functionality of the "State Clocks" View.

Chapter IX: AU Composition Results has been updated to explain how to assign deprivation factors to dependents within a TAFDC AU as well as to the TAFDC AU.

Appendix B has been updated to make technical corrections.

BEACON Todays Issued in June 2002

BT 84 Overpayment Notice
(5/28/02)

BT 85 BEACON Release 2.0.15
(6/3/02)

BT 86 Revised Overpayment
Notice (6/4/02)

BT 87 Food Stamp Expanded
Categorical Eligibility
(6/5/02)

EA - Court Order - 90 Days to Appeal

EA
Field Operations Memo
2002-14

The court enjoined the Department from using the 10-day appeal period as specified in 106 CMR 309.070(B)(2) relating to EA actions. Until new regulations are promulgated, the 90-day appeal time limit must be used. Current EA notices have been revised to reflect the 90-day appeal time limit.

Fair Hearing Rules Corrections

All
State Letter 1226

State Letter 1226 removes 106 CMR 343.610 (E) from the Fair Hearing Rules and reissues 106 CMR 343.630 due to a technical correction.

"It really boils down to this: that all life is interrelated. We are all caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied into a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly."

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

EA Termination and Denial Reasons on the AU Composition Results Window

EA

EA User's Guide: Emergency Assistance, SSI Special Benefits and BEACON Update 006

This Update issues:

- a list of the denial and closing reasons for an EA AU or an EA member found on the AU Composition Results window of the Eligibility Explorer;
- a chart of the closing and denial reasons for a pending or active AU or AU member (Appendix A);
- additional information for completing the NFL-ST, TES-WN-1 and TES-WN-2 notices; and
- information for how to determine the 10-day advance period required for the notices. This information has been written into the procedures, along with how to complete certain forms. In most instances, a systems-generated notice is not produced for the EA closing or denial reason. The NFL-9 and NFL-ST must be manually completed by the TAO staff.

Food Stamp Expanded Categorical Eligibility

A User's Guide:

Transitional Assistance Programs and BEACON Update 027

The User's Guide has been updated to include:

- procedures for screening applicants for food stamp categorical eligibility;
- the new Food Stamp Categorical Eligibility Chart which outlines the relationship between the categorical eligibility factors and each categorical eligibility group; and
- guidelines for when asset information does not need to be entered on BEACON for categorically eligible food stamp AUs.

FYI

Recipient Mailing for Summer Food Service Program

During June, the Department mailed the notice shown below to all TAFDC, EAEDC and NPA food stamp recipients who have a dependent child and live in a community participating in the Summer Food Service Program (approximately 32 communities statewide). The purpose of this mailing is to offer children age 18 and under food at no cost served at a designated community site during the summer. Recipients are encouraged to call the toll-free number (Project Bread) for information. The notice is double-sided in English and Spanish.



Quality Corner

This month we will review an error on how to determine if an individual can claim enough work quarters to be eligible for federal food stamp benefits.

Qualifying Work Quarters for LPR Noncitizens

Two recent error cases involved noncitizens who were incorrectly identified as SSFSP recipients. In the first case, the wife had not worked and would appear to have been eligible only for state food stamp benefits. Her husband, however, was working at the time and had more than 40 quarters of work before they applied for food stamp benefits in 2001. Since they had been married for 11 years, and had not been on a means-tested program, all the quarters were countable for the wife. As a result, she is eligible for federal food stamp benefits rather than SSFSP.

In a similar case, the wife, a widow, was receiving Social Security survivor's benefits. In order to receive that benefit, her spouse must have worked at least 40 quarters, thereby making her eligible for federal benefits.

What Can an AU Manager Do?

Investigate all possible sources of eligibility for federal food stamp benefits. Be sure to look at other family members whose work quarters may be credited to the noncitizen. In each of these cases, the wife was entitled to federal food stamp benefits through her husband's history of employment. In other cases, a noncitizen may be credited with the work quarters of a parent while the noncitizen was under age 18. Looking into all potential federal eligibility could have eliminated these errors. See 106 CMR 362.220(A)(3) for the policy on qualifying work quarters. You can also refer to the BEACON Help windows which include a good deal of information regarding 40 quarters if you need policy clarification.



COMMUNICATION is the KEY

TAFDC - Child Care

TAFDC
State Letter 1225

This State Letter transmits revisions to the TAFDC regulations on child care. The Office of Child Care Services (OCCS) currently administers child-care services and will promulgate new regulations for their agency effective June 21, 2002. Therefore, DTA is eliminating duplicative, unnecessary or conflicting regulations, including chapter 106 CMR 308.

The Department is also revising its regulations regarding individuals eligible for child-care services to include teen parents, certain ineligible grantees, sanctioned individuals trying to cure a Work Program sanction and individuals applying for an extension of benefits who are meeting the Basic Job Search or Structured Job Search requirements.

