

# T Transitions

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*A Publication of the Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance*

*this month in...*

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## *From the Commissioner*

Dear Fellow Employees,

Last month I assumed my new duties as your Commissioner. I am very excited about this opportunity and at the same time recognize the responsibilities that come along with the job. One thing that has made my initial weeks easier is the strong organization Claire McIntire put in place while she was Commissioner. I have known Commissioner McIntire for a number of years and have always had the greatest respect for her abilities and her leadership. Now I am also aware of, and grateful for, her ability to put together a strong team. During my tenure at EOHHS, I worked with a number of central office staff, and in my initial weeks at DTA I have visited several local offices and met with staff at all levels. The ability and the commitment of those I have encountered has impressed me tremendously and is a proud legacy for Commissioner McIntire. And for me, strong staff, and the stability they provide, will be an important asset in the coming months.

I would prefer to begin my time at DTA on a positive, upbeat note. But the outlook for Fiscal Year 2003 is neither positive nor upbeat. As I am sure you are aware from news reports, the budget proposed by the House of Representatives would drastically reduce the Department's two administrative accounts. These are the accounts that fund our salaries, pay rents, buy supplies, cover utility expenses and provide pens and paper. In addition to the cuts to the administrative accounts, the proposed House budget also impacts many program accounts. The State Supplemental Food Stamp Program, currently suspended due to lack of funding, is dramatically underfunded in the House budget. The Emergency Assistance rent

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## *From the Hotline*

- Q.** When is a food stamp AU entitled to the Heating SUA?
- A.** A food stamp AU is entitled to the Heating SUA when the food stamp AU:
- incurs heating costs separately from its rent or mortgage and is billed regularly for its heating costs; or
  - receives Low Income Home Energy Assistance Act (LIHEEA) payments.
- Q.** Is a food stamp AU's eligibility for the Heating SUA based on: a) *eligibility* for the LIHEEA Program; b) actual *receipt* of an LIHEEA payment; or c) the *authorization* of a LIHEEA payment?
- A.** Eligibility for the Heating SUA is based on receipt of a LIHEEA payment - either already or reasonably anticipated to be received. If a LIHEEA payment has been authorized, the AU Manager can anticipate with reasonable certainty that it will be received.
- Note:** AUs that have their utilities included in their rent may receive a LIHEEA payment.
- Q.** What is considered "reasonable anticipation" of receipt of LIHEEA?
- A.** "Reasonable anticipation" of receipt of LIHEEA must be determined on an individual household basis. There are some guidelines that may be used. For example, if a food stamp AU received LIHEEA during the previous heating season and anticipates applying again and LIHEEA funds are available, it is likely that a LIHEEA payment will be received, and the AU would then be entitled to the Heating SUA. The Provider agencies for the LIHEEA payment are the best sources of information if receipt of LIHEEA funds is questionable.
- Q.** I think that my food stamp AU meets the criteria for a LIHEEA payment and would be eligible if she applied. Can I give this household a Heating SUA?
- A.** No. If the AU has not applied and does not intend to apply for LIHEEA, it cannot be anticipated with reasonable certainty that a LIHEEA payment will be received. The Heating SUA is given to AUs who have received or will be receiving LIHEEA. You should encourage all individuals who may be eligible for LIHEEA to apply.

- Q.** How would a LIHEEA payment made to the landlord be handled?
- A.** A LIHEEA payment could be sent directly to the landlord, and the rent the AU must pay would then be reduced by the amount of the LIHEEA payment. For food stamp purposes, however, the full amount of the rent must be allowed as a shelter deduction and the AU must be given the full Heating SUA.

## *Federal Veterans' Match*

TAFDC, EAEDC, FS  
Field Operations Memo  
2002-10

The Federal Veterans' Match identifies assessed persons who may be receiving federal veterans' benefits and benefits from the Department of Transitional Assistance. This report will be run quarterly.

This memo provides information and instructions for reviewing and acting on matched data.

## *BEACON Todays Issued in May 2002*

BT 81 Earned Income Match  
Discrepancies (4/29/02)

BT 82 Recipient Notices Dated  
4/26/02 (5/2/02)

BT 83 Two-Day Process for  
Approving FS Applications on Day 30 (5/20/02)

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***Change in the Number of Free ATM Cash Withdrawals for TAFDC and EAEDC Recipients***

TAFDC, EAEDC  
Field Operations Memo  
2002-11

- Beginning June 1, 2002, the number of free ATM cash withdrawals TAFDC and EAEDC recipients can make with their EBT card will change from four to two per month.
- Recipients are also being encouraged to utilize Direct Deposit instead of receiving their cash benefit via EBT.
- Recipients were notified about the change by a special mailing in May.

*“Don’t tolerate me as different. Accept me as part of the spectrum of normalcy.”*

**Ann Northrop**  
*(U.S. Gay Rights Activist)*

arrearrage benefit, also currently suspended, received no funding in the House budget. Funding for the EAEDC Program was cut by more than 10%.

None of this is good news. But I want you to know that I am working hard to correct these issues. I have been meeting with legislators in the House to seek amendments to the House budget and am also working with the Senate which will release its budget in the near future. With both groups, one of the areas I am emphasizing is the importance of direct service staff. I do not need to tell you that the departure of many of your colleagues through the Early Retirement Incentive Program has already left many offices understaffed. We simply cannot face the loss of additional staff and continue to provide the level of service our clients deserve and need.

The picture is far from rosy. I cannot make any promises that everything will turn out perfectly. But I can promise you that I will work as hard as I can to make sure that people understand what we do, understand the programs and services we provide, and understand how important these things are to many of the Commonwealth’s neediest citizens. I also plan to continue to visit offices around the state and look forward to meeting many of you and to hearing your thoughts and ideas.

Sincerely,

John Wagner  
Commissioner



**COMMUNICATION is the KEY**

## ***From the Forms File***

### ***New Forms***

The following form is used to track AU action on assessed persons identified as possibly receiving federal veterans' benefits and benefits from the Department of Transitional Assistance. Refer to Field Operations Memo 2002-10 for more information.

***02-410-0502-05***

***FVM-1 (5/2002)***

***Federal Veterans' Match Log***

The Federal Veterans' Match Appointment Letter (FVMAL) is used to contact assessed persons identified as possibly receiving federal veterans' benefits and benefits from the Department of Transitional Assistance to schedule an appointment for reevaluation. Refer to Field Operations Memo 2002-10 for more information.

***18-067-0502-05***

***18-068-0502-05 (S)***

***FVMAL (5/2002)***

***Federal Veterans' Match Appointment Letter***

### ***New Posters***

The EBT Poster must be displayed in TAO waiting areas as well as anywhere else EBT material is available. Refer to Field Operations Memo 2002-11 for more information.

***18-850-0602-05***

***18-851-0602-05 (S)***

***EBT-P***

***EBT Poster***

The Good Cause poster reminds applicants and recipients about good cause reasons and to contact their worker if they think they have a good reason for not meeting a Department requirement. It must be displayed in TAO waiting areas. Remember to handwrite the telephone number of the local legal services agency in your area on the line provided at the bottom of the poster. Refer to Field Operations Memo 2002-13 for more information.

***18-875-0502-05***

***18-876-0502-05 (S)***

***GC-P***

***Good Cause Poster***

### ***Revised Form***

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

The Image-1 form has been revised to now record 1) the mailing address of the EBT card requester; 2) the active card number; 3) whether the PIN will be mailed to the EBT card requester; and 4) to request that the form be faxed to EBT Management, where appropriate.

***16-015-0602-05***

***Image-1 (Rev. 6/2002)***

***Request for Mass EBT Card***

Revised Brochure

The Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT-TB) brochure has been revised to remove language regarding how many free ATM withdrawals TAFDC and EAEDC recipients are allowed each month. Along with the EBT-TB, there is also an EBT Handout/Insert (EBT-0602) informing recipients of the change. The EBT Liaison must ensure that, when individuals are given a brochure, they are also given a handout/insert. Refer to Field Operations Memo 2002-11 for more information.

***18-825-0402-05***

***18-826-0402-05 (S)***

***EBT-TB***

***Electronic Benefit Transfer***

### ***Obsolete Form***

Information from the EBT-7 has been incorporated into the revised Image-1.

**18-834-0398-05**

**EBT-7 (3/98)**

**EBT Pin Mail Request**

### ***Calculation of the Grant Amount for TAFDC and EAEDC***

TAFDC, EAEDC  
State Letter 1222

Regulations used to explain the grant calculation for TAFDC and EAEDC benefits have been changed. A statement explaining that the grant amount is multiplied by a percentage determined by the Department has been added. This percentage will be used if benefits must be reduced due to funding or other issues.

### ***Notice Requirements for the Reduction or Elimination of Benefits Under a State Benefit Program***

STAFDC, EAEDC, SSFSP  
State Letter 1223

These regulations specify notice requirements if funding for a state benefit program is reduced or eliminated.

### ***Suspension of SSFSP Benefits***

FS, SSFSP

Field Operations Memo 2002-9A

Field Operations Memo 2002-9B

Field Operations Memo 2002-9C

Field Operations Memo 2002-9D

Field Operations Memo 2002-9A told TAO staff that, as a result of the *Nguyen v. Wagner* lawsuit, the Department was enjoined from implementing all activities in Field Operations Memo 2002-9 (issued April 18, 2002).

Field Operations Memo 2002-9B and Field Operations Memo 2002-9C gave TAO staff preliminary instructions about processing applications impacted by the suspension of SSFSP benefits.

Field Operations Memo 2002-9D gave TAO staff procedures for processing SSFSP and FSP/SSFSP (Combination) AUs as required by the terms of the settlement agreement and informed staff that SSFSP benefits would be suspended beginning May 11, 2002.

### ***Suspension of EAEDC Benefits***

EAEDC

Field Operations Memo 2002-12

Field Operations Memo 2002-12A

Budget shortfalls were expected to leave the Department without EAEDC funding for the remainder of fiscal year 2002. The Department planned to suspend benefits to certain EAEDC recipients beginning May 29, 2002. To implement this change, a "funding reduction" percentage was scheduled to be put in place in BEACON effective May 22, 2002.

Field Operations Memo 2002-12 transmitted procedures to implement this suspension to TAO Staff.

Field Operations Memo 2002-12A rescinded all procedures in Field Operations Memo 2002-12.

## ***Quality Corner***

This month we will review a type of error that is becoming more of a problem: unreported earnings, especially among SSI cases. During the spring and summer of 2001, there were no DOR matches loaded into BEACON. While the match information is a valuable tool, the AU manager could have caught many of these errors. Each of the following cases had been redetermined after the unreported earnings began, but none was corrected.

### ***SSI Student***

A student at a state college began working in August 1999. He worked during the school year and was off during the summer. He was recertified in September 2001. While the most recent matches were not available, there were several older matches on the system that contained relevant information about his work pattern. There was no evidence that the AU manager discussed whether the recipient would be returning to work when he returned to school.

### ***SSI Disabled***

Another recipient received SSI for a disability, and was last certified in December 2000. Three months later he went to work. A new hire match appeared on April 10<sup>th</sup>, before the matches stopped being loaded onto BEACON. At no time did the recipient report the income or the job. This was clearly a recipient error, but acting upon the April alert would likely have prevented it.

### ***History of Earnings***

In this third case, a recipient had a long history of earnings, dating back to 1997. Because there were earnings on the SDX file, the case did not migrate to the Demo Unit, but remained in the local office. He was certified in September 2001 for six months, but had been working for a Temp agency since October 2000. While there were no matches issued in 1999 or 2000, someone who has worked in the past is very likely to work again.

### ***What Can an AU Manager Do?***

From June through October 2001, no matches from the DOR were loaded into BEACON. All matches that were not loaded during that time have been loaded and are now available on-line. Check ALL matches at EACH certification for recipients with a history of earnings and no known earned income. Also, be sure to review the match

information that has been loaded in the last few months. Be sure to check all known sources of information. If the circumstances in the case are likely to change in the future, be sure to give a correspondingly short certification period. Remember, if the case is an NPA FS AU with a history of earned income be sure to put the case on Universal Quarterly Reporting. Finally, be sure to ask the recipient if he or she is working – don't assume they cannot work simply because they are disabled

### ***Good Cause Criteria for TAFDC and EAEDC and the TAFDC Good Cause Medical Statement for Non-Presumptive Claims of Disability***

TAFDC, EAEDC  
Field Operations Memo  
2002-13

This memo:

- clarifies the general use of good cause for TAFDC and EAEDC; and
- explains and outlines situations in which TAFDC applicants and recipients must use the TAFDC Good Cause Medical Statement (TAFDC-GCMS).

## **FYI**

**[www.gettingfoodstamps.org](http://www.gettingfoodstamps.org)**

**[www.gettingfoodstamps.org](http://www.gettingfoodstamps.org)** is a web site launched by Project Bread. It was designed under a grant from the United States Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service. The goal is to help increase participation in the Food Stamp Program by providing access and eliminating barriers for individuals who want to know more about the Program and their potential eligibility. This web site provides visitors with information about the Food Stamp Program, information about eligibility requirements, information about verifications, access to a printable application form and helpful hints for filling out the form. A calculator is also available on the site to help an individual estimate benefits.

The Department of Transitional Assistance Web Site has been updated to include links to the **[www.gettingfoodstamps.org](http://www.gettingfoodstamps.org)** site. By selecting Benefits Info/FAQs, Programs or Other Services Available from the Home Page, a visitor can access the gettingfoodstamps site.

## ***Changes to the Benefit Issuance Mechanism and Extension Processing***

All

***A User's Guide: Transitional Assistance Programs and BEACON Update 026***

***Chapter XVI, Section C: Benefit Issuance Mechanism*** has been updated to address:

- The issuance of original and replacement PINs via mail by designated TAOs and for certain applicants and recipients;
- Revised procedures for issuing PINs by mail for applicants, recipients and authorized representatives or authorized payees in both designated and non-designated TAOs;
- The issuance of Valid-Without-Photo Mass EBT cards by designated TAOs and for certain applicants and recipients; and
- Revised procedures for issuing Mass EBT cards and Valid-Without-Photo Mass EBT cards for applicants, recipients and authorized representatives or authorized payees in both designated and non-designated TAOs.

***Chapter XVI, Section E: Extensions*** has been updated to address changes to the extension process on BEACON.

### ***Specifically:***

- TAFDC extension AUs that begin a new 60-month period are changed to a TAFDC Basic AU.
- Work requirement and 24-Month clocks are reset.
- These AUs will appear on the "State Clocks" View when the clock count is "1" or more for AU Managers to track and schedule reevaluations.

## ***Department Obligations Under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)***

All

State Letter 1224

Regulations have been added outlining how the Department interprets and implements the Americans with Disabilities Act in the Department's cash assistance programs, food stamp programs and fair hearing process.