

Transitions

March 2004
Vol. XIX No. 3



A Publication of the Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance

this month in...

Transitions

From the Hotline	2
Disability Changes	2
ESP - Changes to Young Parents Program (YPP) Enrollment - TAFDC	3
FYI - Legal Service Office Name and Telephone Number	4
FYI - Direct Deposit Pilot Project	4
FYI - Results of the EBT Card Naming Contest	4
Work Requirements - TAFDC Tab Issues	5
FYI - Changes to Policy Online	5
Custodial Parent Notice from DOR	5
From the Forms File	6
ESP Transportation Services - TAFDC	6
Mandatory Change Reporting for Required Households	7
FYI - Treatment of Nutritional Assistance Program (NAP) Benefits from Puerto Rico, American Samoa and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI)	7

Continued on Page 3

Dear Fellow Employees,

As Commissioner, I have spent a good deal of time observing, listening and working alongside many of you. Lately, the most striking feature of our work here at the Department is the manner in which we routinely approach change. Anticipating change in policy, budget priorities, daily tasks and staffing patterns has become the norm. The pace in state government is often rapid, and keeping up with these changes, while not always easy, can be made easier by exploring many informational tools at our disposal.

For instance, we are all accustomed to using Policy Online when we need to double-check a regulation or procedure. (To save time, many of us have even decided to eliminate the monthly maintenance of our paper manuals altogether and rely on the on-line version.) Many of you read last month's *Transitions* on-line for the first time. By simply clicking on the pink bar at the Policy Online home page, we can now access our Department's most recent monthly publication. In fact, with the addition of this feature, the paper version of *Transitions* is no longer necessary and will no longer be distributed to local offices. For those of you who may need a paper copy of *Transitions* for training purposes or some other reason, the option of printing out the document is always available. In the meantime, we can all take comfort in knowing that we are no longer using as much paper as before or as much time filing paper.

Time-saving enhancements also regularly occur on BEACON as well as on our Department's home page located at www.state.ma.us/dta. Food stamp applicants have the option of printing out their application directly from our on-line home page and, in some cases, are applying directly on a new web-based application. Making the application process more accessible to clients also makes our goal of increasing food stamp participation easier to attain. If you

Continued on Page 3

From the Hotline

Q. An EA applicant told me that she was evicted from public housing for nonpayment of rent in December 2002. She was able to move into a more permanent apartment with one of her sister's friends. The friend had been looking for a roommate and was willing to split the rent. My applicant lived in the apartment with this friend for slightly over one year. One month ago, however, my applicant was informed that the friend's lease would not be renewed because the landlord's son was moving back into the apartment with his new family. Now that my applicant has had to move out of the apartment, she is requesting EA. Is she currently eligible for shelter benefits?

A. If this applicant is otherwise EA eligible, then she is also eligible for shelter benefits because her previous eviction from public housing is not the reason for her current homelessness. She was able subsequently to locate and live in more permanent housing.

The policy states that an applicant is ineligible for EA if evicted for nonpayment of rent, but, in this situation, your applicant is **currently** homeless because her landlord refused for personal reasons to renew the lease .

For more information on shelter eligibility reasons and regulations, refer to 106 CMR 309.040. In addition, Chapter III in the *EA User's Guide* provides information on shelter benefit procedures.

Q. A woman came to our office yesterday to apply for TAFDC. She is applying for herself and her stepdaughter's son. Is she eligible for TAFDC, and, if so, how would I verify this relationship?

A. No, she is ineligible because she does not meet the TAFDC relationship requirements. She is not considered a blood relative, a parent by legal adoption or a spouse of the blood relative or parent. The only acceptable "step" relationships in TAFDC are stepparent, stepsister or stepbrother. For more information on relationship requirements and verifying relationship requirements in TAFDC, refer to 106 CMR 203.585.

Also, eligibility for EAEDC benefits, for example, as a caretaker family, should be explored. Refer to 106 CMR 320.400.

Disability Changes

All

A User's Guide: Transitional Assistance Programs and BEACON Update 050
Field Operations Memo
2004-1

This update transmits the following changes:

Chapter XIII: Assessed Person Nonfinancial Statement, Section H: Disability. The Disability window functionality is now automated.

BEACON now:

- tracks the disability review process;
- updates the window with the findings from the Department's Professional Review Organization (PRO), currently Disability Evaluation Services (DES) at UMass;
- tracks the SSI application process; and
- updates the window with the findings from the SSI review process.

The memo gives TAO staff an overview of the new automated disability process.



TAFDC Ineligible Noncitizens Work Program Required Status Reasons	7
Quality Corner	8
FYI - Elimination of the Paper Version of <i>Transitions</i>	9
EAEDC Disability Standards Changes and Elimination of EAEDC Category of Participation in a Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission Program	9
FYI - BEACON Help Revisions	9

ESP – Changes to Young Parents Program (YPP) Enrollment – TAFDC

**TAFDC
State Letter 1272**

This State Letter transmits the following change:

Enrollment in the Young Parents Program is limited to participants from 14 through 19 years of age. Twenty-year-olds may participate, but may not enroll. Once a YPP participant reaches age 21, he or she may no longer participate in YPP.



haven't explored our Department's web site recently, I encourage you to take another look. We rely on you for suggestions on how to make the site more informative and easier to use.

Another way to visit our Department's home page is via our state government's web site located at <http://www.mass.gov>. In the coming months, the Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS) plans to redesign their portal site. Each department home page will be more uniformly designed and easier to read. Home page similarities across the various state agencies, as well as common navigational styles, will make resource and referral connections easier to master. By completing this initiative, EOHHS intends to provide better links between agencies and thereby foster greater collaboration. The redesign will enhance the value of these web tools and allow us to connect more quickly to the information we need so that we can better serve our clients.

While slowing down the pace of our work environment may not always be within our control, I hope that your facility in using these new tools continues to improve, and that, like myself, the information you collect with these tools will help make your workday more interesting and manageable.

Sincerely,

John Wagner, Commissioner



COMMUNICATION is the KEY

FYI

Legal Service Office Name and Telephone Number

BEACON 2.1.7 implemented changes to the selection and display process of Legal Service Office Name and Telephone Number. These changes are as follows:

Prior to BEACON 2.1.7, the legal service office and the legal service office telephone number that appeared on a recipient's notice were determined by which TAO serviced the recipient's AU. As a result of the various TAO closings and mergers, a TAO may now service many cities and towns. To ensure that the recipient is being referred to the closest legal service office, the legal service office name and telephone number is now selected based on the recipient's zip code.

FYI

Direct Deposit Pilot Project

Approximately 9000 active recipients have been identified on BEACON as having checking or savings bank accounts and not participating in the Direct Deposit Program. During March, a pilot project managed by the Finance Unit in Central Office will begin. A sample size of 100 TAFDC English-speaking recipients residing in the 617 area code will be selected for the pilot project. A mailing to the selected recipients will occur in early March and will include the following: an informational letter about the Direct Deposit Program, a Direct Deposit form, a multilingual card, a list of banks participating in the Direct Deposit Program and a return envelope. The Finance Unit will be responsible for establishing the Direct Deposit accounts. TAO Directors will receive a spreadsheet with the names of the recipients selected for the pilot project. The Finance Unit will update the spreadsheet weekly with any action taken on these AUs. When the recipient has been established on Direct Deposit, a message will be entered on the Narrative tab.

If the Direct Deposit Pilot Project is successful and the project is expanded to include all 9000 AUs, the project has the potential for resulting in a significant cost savings for the Department.

FYI

Results of the EBT Card Naming Contest

We are pleased to announce the results of the EBT Card Naming Contest. Many suggestions for both the name and design of the card were submitted. Our thanks to all who took the time to submit entries. After much consideration, the name selected for the new card is BAY STATE ACCESS. The design selected is an outline of the state with the name and state seal, at the top, and a picture of the magnificent landscape unique to Massachusetts, at the bottom.

The winning entries were submitted by the following individuals:

Wanda Cote

Mina Tillinger

Cynthia Bregor

Use of the BAY STATE ACCESS card will begin in June, 2004.

Again, our thanks and appreciation to everyone who took time out of their schedules to participate in the EBT Card Naming contest.



Work Requirements – TAFDC Tab Issues

TAFDC
Field Operations Memo
2004-6

A recent review of TAFDC APs who are work program required has revealed issues with the TAFDC tab of the Work Requirements window that prevent accurate data from being saved. Although the correct work program requirements information might appear on the window, this data might not have been properly saved in BEACON. This memo informs TAO staff about the issues associated with the TAFDC tab and solutions for resolving the issues. A report listing the affected APs was sent electronically to TAOs.

“It takes a lot of courage to release the familiar and seemingly secure, to embrace the new. But there is no real security in what is no longer meaningful. There is more security in the adventurous and exciting, for in movement there is life, and in change there is power.”

Alan Cohen

FYI

Changes to Policy Online

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

BB Options:

- Financial History Report Codes

The Financial History Report Codes table has been updated to reflect recent TAO closings and mergers.

Reference Documentation Window:

- SSI Regional Office Listing - City/Town
- SSI Regional Office Listing

These titles were changed to:

- SSI Area Office Listing – City/Town
- SSI Area Office Listing

and

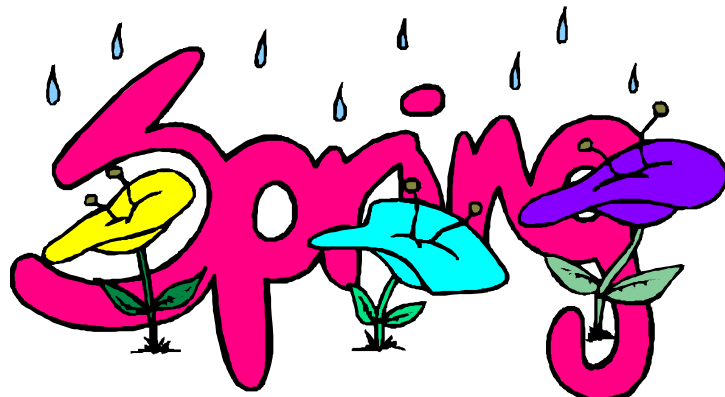
- The TAO Information Listing.

The TAO Information Listing table includes the toll-free phone numbers, where applicable.

Custodial Parent Notice from DOR

TAFDC
Field Operations Memo 2004-4

This memo informs TAO staff that DOR has developed a new notice that is sent monthly to current and former TAFDC recipients telling them about the child support collected in the previous month. A copy of the notice is attached to the memo.



From the Forms File

Revised Forms

04-200-0204-05

04-201-0204-05 (S)

EAEDC-DS (Rev. 2/2004)

EAEDC Disability Supplement

02-710-0204-05

02-711-0204-05 (S)

TAFDC-DS (Rev. 2/2004)

TAFDC Disability Supplement

The revised Disability Supplements contain a revised Medical Records Release Form. Transitional Assistance Offices **must** discard the old versions and use the new revised Disability Supplements.

04-012-0304-05

EAEDC-MR (Rev. 3/2004)

Emergency Aid to the Elderly, Disabled and Children Medical Report

The Medical Report has been revised to replace the EAEDC medical and vocational standards with SSI disability criteria and to make the Medical Report compliant with the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA). Transitional Assistance Offices **must** discard the old version and use the new revised EAEDC Medical Report.

Revised Brochure

04-040-0304-05

04-041-0304-05 (S)

EAEDC-PB (Rev. 3/2004)

Emergency Aid to the Elderly, Disabled and Children Program

This brochure has been revised as a result of the elimination of the EAEDC eligibility category of Participating in a Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission (MRC) program.

Obsolete Forms

04-013-0392-05 (E&S)

EAEDC-5 (Rev. 3/92)

Client Authorization to Verify Vocational Rehabilitation Participation

04-014-1091-05

EAEDC-6 (Rev. 10/91)

Verification of Involvement in a Vocational Rehabilitation Program

The above forms are obsolete because the EAEDC eligibility category of Participation in a Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission (MRC) program has been eliminated.

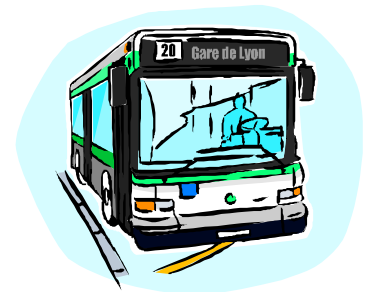
ESP Transportation Services – TAFDC

TAFDC

State Letter 1273

This State Letter transmits the following change:

The maximum transportation payment has been raised to \$71. The actual dollar amount has been removed from policy. Instead policy now states, “an amount determined by the Department.”



Mandatory Change Reporting for Required Households

FS
State Letter 1271

This State Letter transmits the following changes to food stamp policy for assistance units subject to the change reporting requirements at 366.110(A). This change **does not** apply to AUs subject to Transitional Benefit Alternative (TBA) or Universal Semiannual Reporting (USR) requirements.

- 1) The threshold at which changes in earned and unearned income must be reported to the Department has increased. Required assistance units must report changes in unearned income of more than \$50 per month and changes in earned income of more than \$100 per month.
- 2) Changes in income may now be reported as late as within 10 days of the date that the assistance unit receives the first payment attributable to the change in income.



FYI

Treatment of Nutritional Assistance Program (NAP) Benefits from Puerto Rico, American Samoa and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI)

Before the introduction of EBT, the Nutritional Assistance Program (NAP) benefit was issued in check format and therefore was countable as unearned income when a recipient applied for food stamp benefits in a mainland office during the same month the NAP benefit was issued. The widespread use of the EBT delivery system negates this practice since NAP benefits issued via EBT are noncountable as unearned income.

Effective immediately, the Department must not count NAP benefits issued in Puerto Rico, American Samoa and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, even when issued in the same month a household applies for food stamp benefits. For example: a person with a social security number ending in 9, who received his or her NAP benefits in Puerto Rico on February 14, 2004 may apply for food stamp benefits in Massachusetts on February 27, 2004, and later be found eligible for the cyclical month of February if all other eligibility factors are met, not counting the NAP benefits received in Puerto Rico earlier that month.

TAFDC Ineligible Noncitizens Work Program Required Status Reasons

TAFDC
Field Operations Memo 2004-5

This memo informs TAO staff that seven Work Program Required Status Reasons were added onto the TAFDC tab of the Work Requirements window. It explains that these reasons differentiate ineligible noncitizens who are work program required, from those who are exempt (not work program required). At the next case maintenance contact or next eligibility review, whichever comes first, ineligible noncitizens must be reviewed and their status updated.

Quality Corner

This month we will discuss three errors, two involving income and one involving noncitizens.

Child Support Deduction

A recipient's husband started a job before the most recent certification. The AU Manager had received four wage stubs at the time of recertification, and entered them correctly into BEACON. Unfortunately, she missed the fact that child support was being deducted weekly from the husband's wages. The application indicated that there was no child support being paid, but in fact it was being deducted from his wages.

What Can an AU Manager Do?

Paystubs should always be reviewed in some detail. They can reveal, for example, if the person is working overtime (and if overtime is customary), if they are paying child support, if they are paying other deductions, and other information. Carefully reading the paystub is an extremely effective way to avoid errors.

Self-Employment Income

This AU actually had two errors. The recipient provides daycare in her home, is contracted with by one agency, and was on USR. She is paid on a monthly basis as a contractor with no deductions for taxes or anything else (such as social security). In fact, the recipient should be considered self-employed and should not have been on USR. Her income should have been averaged over the last few months, taking her gross income minus her self-employment expenses (e.g., daycare license, expenses for home business, toys, food, and anything else she provided as part of her service).

The second error involved a rent receipt for \$576 that represented both May and June (at \$288 per month). The AU Manager used the \$576 amount for food stamp calculations. Since this was for two months, only half should have been used in the calculations for the month.

What Can an AU Manager Do?

The AU Manager should have questioned the amount of the rent, since it had doubled from what was in the AU record (as well as on BEACON). She also should have recognized that the client was self-employed and should have requested information on the necessary

deductions or a copy of the recipient's tax return. Either method is an acceptable way of determining the amount of work-related expenses.

Noncitizens and the Farm Bill

An AU was certified in October 2003 as a household of seven: two adults and five children, all with a status of LPR. In February 2003, the oldest child had turned 18. The AU Manager treated the 18-year-old as eligible for food stamps and included her income in the calculation. In accordance with the Farm Bill provisions, only children under 18 years old, residing in the United States in a qualified noncitizen status (see 106 CMR 362.220(A)) are eligible for food stamp benefits. Since this child was already 18 years old at the time of the certification, she should not have been included in the AU, and her income should not have been counted in the food stamp calculation for the remaining AU members.

What Can an AU Manager Do?

There have been a number of changes to eligibility for non-citizens in the Food Stamp Program over the last two years. In September, the Training Unit compiled a noncitizen desk guide that describes the



eligibility for all noncitizens. It is available on-line at DTAOnline/Training Online, "Entering Noncitizen Information on BEACON." Another useful tool for noncitizen eligibility statuses can be found at: Policy Online/Online Guides/Noncitizen Online Guide. Any questions should be directed to the Hotline, if necessary.

FYI

Elimination of the Paper Version of *Transitions*

To continue with the Department's initiative to move away from a paper environment to an electronic environment, the paper version of *Transitions* will no longer be issued. The current month's issue of *Transitions* can be accessed by selecting the *Publications* option on the Policy Online window. The online version of *Transitions* will be available the first workday of each month. If a paper version is required, it can be printed from the user's desktop.

Refer to the FYI in the January *Transitions* entitled: *Changes to Policy Online* for information and instructions on accessing a specific summary or topic for the current month.

EAEDC Disability Standards Changes and Elimination of EAEDC Category of Participation in a Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission Program

EAEDC

State Letter 1274

Field Operations Memo 2004-7

This State Letter transmits the following changes:

- (1) The EAEDC medical standards and vocational factors are replaced with SSI disability criteria.
- (2) Participation in the vocational rehabilitation program of the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission (MRC) is eliminated as an eligibility category in EAEDC.
- (3) An EAEDC applicant or recipient who is disabled or elderly (age 65 or older) must apply for and cooperate in the SSI application process as a condition of receipt of EAEDC.

Field Operations Memo 2004-7 gives TAO staff information about how BEACON will automatically close EAEDC AUs participating in a Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission (MRC) program. It also gives TAO staff instructions for processing pending EAEDC applications where the applicant is participating in MRC.

FYI

BEACON Help Revisions

The following is a list of Help windows that have been added or revised.

Added:

Answer an Asset Root Question
Name Clearance Guidelines

Revised:

Asset Root Questions
AU Composition Differences
AU Detail Information
AU Inquiry Tab

