

Transitions

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this month in...

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From the Commissioner

Dear Fellow Employees,

Work is an essential ingredient for anyone trying to raise a family. We don't need public policy experts to remind us of this. Each day, many of you see the direct impact earnings have on the financial stability of families. For example, the basic TAFDC grant plus Food Stamps for a nonexempt family of three is well below the federal poverty level. But by engaging in just 20 hours of employment per week at the minimum wage, the addition of wages and earned income tax credits can lift the family out of poverty and begin remapping their future. The solution sounds simple and yet our work program has reached only a small portion of all TAFDC families over the past two years. In fact, while our Department had pioneered a number of welfare reform measures just a decade ago, our current TAFDC work program has the 3rd highest rate of exemptions for any state. Since our welfare reform waiver is about to expire, federal requirements will necessitate that we change the way we've been operating our work program.

With full engagement, we can begin satisfying current federal requirements while also helping more families find a path out of poverty. Many of you are familiar with this employment service model, but for those of you who are just now reading about it, full engagement means that our Department will begin reaching out to nearly every family in our caseload. Although policy details haven't been finalized, full engagement also means that more clients will be required to engage in a plan that identifies and eliminates their barriers to work and financial independence. Sounds familiar? For most of you, this may *seem* like a repackaging of procedures you've been practicing for years. This is partially true. For quite some time, our policies have included employment development plans

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designed to focus clients on finding jobs, but full engagement also means that we will be providing an expanded menu of ESP programs and supports to a broader population of families.

Full engagement is the right thing to do, and we are committed to doing it well. For this reason, we will be implementing program changes gradually. After observing some of the best full engagement programs designed by other agencies both here in Massachusetts and in other states, we have already taken a number of steps.

- Last month, we began the roll-out of a statewide training session on “Serving Customers with Disabilities” that teaches techniques for approaching clients with disabilities and supporting their job efforts. The training is being delivered by the Institute for Community Inclusion (ICI). ICI is known nationally for its expertise in providing employment services to individuals with disabilities.
- Starting this month, a new initiative offering vocational rehabilitation services and benefits planning assistance to both nonexempt and exempt families is being launched in targeted areas (Lowell, Hyannis, Dorchester, Newmarket Square, Springfield Liberty, Springfield State and New Bedford).
- To further ensure that families have the appropriate supports, our FY06 budget request includes the additional funding necessary for child care and other ESP services. The budget request also calls for additional Department staff to support full engagement activities.

With the expiration of our federal welfare reform waiver and a new state budget pending, full engagement activities will continue to play an important role in your work day. To support you in these full engagement efforts, we plan on keeping you informed of new client opportunities and programs.

Each of our clients has the right to a job. It is only fair that we begin offering our programs to those who may need additional support and encouragement. At the same time, I realize that you will continue to need *our* support in implementing these changes. To do this, we at Central Office will be depending on you to let us know what full engagement programs, procedures and initiatives you feel are successful and which you feel need streamlining and/or

improvements to better meet your needs and the needs of those you serve.

Thank you for all that you can do to make full engagement a reality.

Sincerely,



John Wagner, Commissioner

From the Forms File

Revised Forms

25-105-0405-05

25-106-0405-05 (S)

BEA/CCA (Rev. 4/2005)

Child Care Referral Notice

This form has been revised to clarify the responsibilities of the AU Manager and the Child Care Resource and Referral Agency (CCR&R). Refer to Field Operations Memo 2005-1A for more information.

17-011-0405-05

17-014-0405-05 (S)

ESP-16-Cash (Rev. 4/2005)

Referral and Response Form - TAFDC, EAEDC

17-015-0405-05

17-017-0405-05 (S)

ESP-16-FS (4/2005)

Referral and Response Form - Food Stamps

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Quality Corner

This month we will discuss two errors caused by incorrectly deleting Social Security income. Even though the misinformation came from a household member other than the grantee, the first error could have been prevented because other information on BEACON for this AU was inconsistent.

Social Security Income

In the first error, the recipient was receiving both SSI and RSDI in the amounts of \$413 and \$201, respectively. The recertification form was completed by the recipient's boyfriend who did not know all the current information concerning the income in the AU. To the RSDI question, he responded that his girlfriend no longer received RSDI, but indicated that she continued to receive the same amount of SSI.

The AU Manager looked at one page of a three page bank statement which showed a direct deposit for SSI, and then deleted the recipient's RSDI.

During the Quality Control review, the reviewer checked SDX, BENDEX, and SVES information and reviewed the client's bank statement which showed that both the SSI and RSDI were directly deposited into the recipient's bank account as of the time of the last recertification. All verifications show that the recipient had never stopped receiving RSDI.

The second error is very similar. An elderly couple received \$104 in SSI each and \$562 in RSDI for the husband and \$297 for the wife. At the recertification, the AU Manager deleted the RSDI for both the husband and the wife, believing the recipient had produced a letter showing the RSDI was terminated. However, there was no copy of this letter in the AU record, and QC verified through SDX, BENDEX and SVES that the RSDI was never terminated for either the recipient or his wife. In addition, the AU's rent was \$800 per month. If the RSDI had been, in fact, terminated, the household's rent would have been far above their combined SSI income of \$208, and this should have alerted the AU Manager to question the reason the rent was so high for a subsidized unit.

What Can an AU Manager Do?

Before either RSDI or SSI is changed or deleted on BEACON, the AU Manager must check the online verification sources, primarily BENDEX and SDX.

- BENDEX is updated twice monthly with recent RSDI benefit changes for ongoing recipients.
- BENDEX records for new or reopened recipients generally appear one month after the benefit effective date.
- SDX shows State and Federal SSI payments and is updated daily with recent SSI changes for Massachusetts residents.

To access the BENDEX, or SDX, go to Policy Online BA screens. After accessing these screens, if there is still inconsistent payment information, the AU Manager should do an overnight SVES inquiry. If the SVES inquiry fails to resolve the

inconsistencies, ask the recipient to bring verification from the Social Security Administration.

It is also important to remember the following tips about Social Security income:

- RSDI income for the aged is rarely discontinued.
- If it is discontinued, the AU Manager must explore the reason for the termination of the RSDI income since it is almost certain to affect eligibility in other ways.
- If for some reason an individual loses their RSDI and is still eligible for SSI, the SSI income should increase to meet the standard budget, making up the money lost.
- Of the two programs, SSI is more likely to be discontinued because it is a needs-based program, and receipt of any other income could cause the SSI recipient to become over income for continued SSI benefits. It is also possible that the recipient is no longer considered disabled after an SSI review.

From the Hotline

- Q.** A woman was applying for TAFDC for herself and her twin eight-year-old cousins. When we tried to verify relationship, it didn't appear as if these children were her actual first cousins. Then, we realized that the twins were the son and daughter of the applicant's first cousin. Is this woman considered an eligible grantee relative?
- A.** Yes. You can approve this AU if the members are otherwise eligible for TAFDC. The children are considered the grantee's first cousins once removed. Therefore, they meet the relationship requirement as defined in 106 CMR 203.585.
- Q.** Can a portion of my ESP participant's Supported Work income be considered noncountable income for TAFDC purposes?
- A.** No. All of the wages received through the Worksite employment phase of Supported Work are considered earned income. For information on how the TAFDC grant with earnings is calculated, refer to 106 CMR 204.500.

- Q.** Is there a situation when Supported Work wages would make the TAFDC AU financially ineligible but the case would still remain open?
- A.** Yes. If the ESP participant becomes financially ineligible for TAFDC because of her wages from a Worksite employment placement, then the TAFDC AU remains open at a zero grant for the duration of the Worksite employment. The Supported Work participant and the children in the AU are still considered TAFDC recipients. For more information on Supported Work, refer to 106 CMR 207.160.



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These forms have been revised to mirror the BEACON versions. See Field Operations Memo 2005-20.

Form Available in Spanish

18-185-0405-05(S)

VLA(S)(Rev.4/2005)

Shared Housing Verification



TAFDC – Work Program Requirement Clarification

State Letter 1296
TAFDC

This State Letter transmits the following clarifications to the TAFDC Program:

- (1) A combination of activities to meet the Work Program requirements may include any Work Program activity.
- (2) It is the Department's responsibility to find a Community Service site for the recipient/ applicant.

TAFDC, EA and Food Stamp Changes Due to the Increase in the Federal Poverty Guidelines

State Letter 1297
TAFDC, EA and FS

This State Letter transmits changes to regulations based on the increase in the Federal Poverty Guidelines. The Federal Poverty Guidelines are used to calculate the eligibility standards in the following programs:

- (1) TAFDC: Income from the Parent(s) of a Teen Parent Under Age 18;
- (2) EA: EA Eligibility Standard; and
- (3) Food Stamps: Gross Monthly Categorical Eligibility Income Standards.

Child Care Referral Notice

TAFDC
Field Operations Memo 2005-1A

Field Operations Memo 2005-1A issues changes to Field Operations Memo 2005-1. Some instructions have been changed, and the *Child Care Referral* notices (system-generated and paper version) have been modified as follows:

- The CCR&R tells the recipient how many hours of child care will be authorized; and
- The CCR&R will not return the *Child Care Referral* form when the recipient accepts the child care placement.

TAFDC – Work Program Sanction Functionality Change and Participation Good Cause Warning Notices – Clarification

TAFDC
Field Operations Memo 2005-8 A

Field Operations Memo 2005-8, page 3, reminded AU Managers to enter the Food Stamp Attributed Amount (“Riverside Rule”) before Authorizing the pending Work Program Sanction on the Interview Wrap-up window.

Field Operations Memo 2005-8A offers a clarification of the instructions. Specifically, AU Managers should **not** delete the pending Work Program Sanction if it is determined to be an appropriate sanction.



Bay State CAP Questions and Answers

FS

Field Operations Memo 2005-18

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts Combined Application Project (Bay State CAP) was implemented on February 1, 2005. Field Operations Memo 2005-4 provided detailed information about the Bay State CAP project, including the responsibilities of Social Security Administration (SSA) and Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA) staff. The memo also described the conversion process, in which BEACON converted eligible food stamp Assistance Units (AUs) in receipt of Supplemental Security Income (SSI) to Bay State CAP. Field Operations Memo 2005-18 transmitted information regarding issues/concerns that have been raised in connection with the implementation of Bay State CAP.

The format is a series of questions and answers and is divided into two sections: conversion issues and process issues.

Issuance of Section 8 Vouchers

EA

Field Operations Memo 2005-19

Field Operations Memo 2005-19 advises TAOs that the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) is issuing Section 8 vouchers until June or July and expects to recommence issuance in January 2006. No action by DTA staff is necessary at this time.

Changes to the ESP Referral and Response Form – TAFDC and FS

TAFDC, FS

Field Operations Memo 2005-20

Field Operations Memo 2005-20 provides TAO staff with changes made to the ESP Referral and Response Form as they relate to the TAFDC and FS programs.



Resumption of the Automated EAEDC/SSI Referral/Closing Process EAEDC

Field Operations Memo 2005-21

In February 2004, the automated EAEDC referral process for SSI applications and appeals began.

In May 2004, the Department stopped the automated closings of these APs in order to give them warning notices informing them about the potential closing before the automatic closing took place.

With Increment 2.1.14, the automated closings resumed with warning notices (Attachments A and B) generated before the potential closings.

TAFDC – 12-Month Limit on Education or Training Activity Meeting the Work Program Requirement

TAFDC

Field Operations Memo 2005-23

Participating in an education or training activity meets the Work Program requirement for up to 12 months (see 106 CMR 203.400(A)(2)(i)). The 12 months may be a **calendar year** or may be a series of **non-consecutive months**.

A notice informing recipients

that they are reaching the end of the 12 months will be mailed when month 9 participation forms have been entered on the Monitor Participation window. This means the notice will be mailed to the recipient **the month after** month 9 has been used.

This Field Operations Memo informs TAO staff about:

- the notice to recipients who have participated in an education or training activity for 9 months; and
- processing recipients and applicants affected by this 12-month limit.

Malden and Revere Shelter Placements: Transfer of Cases to North Shore TAO

EA
New Initiative Memo

A new initiative, developed in cooperation with the Directors of the Revere, Malden, and North Shore TAOs, and based on a regional model for carrying homeless AUs, took effect March 1, 2005. This memo identifies:

- Homeless Coordinator/AU Manager responsibilities resulting from the initiative; and
- ICM responsibilities resulting from the initiative.

The memo was effective April 1, 2005.

FYI

MBTA Poster for Food Stamp Outreach

As part of its ongoing food stamp outreach project, the Department has worked in partnership with USDA to produce and display two posters on subways in Greater Boston during the months of May, June and July. (See samples below.) The posters invite people to call a special, toll-free number at DTA Central Office, **1-866-950-FOOD**, to find out if they are eligible and how to apply, and also include the Department's web site address **www.state.ma.us/dta**, (also available through **www.mass.gov/dta**). The Department's message, "Good Food, Good Health," links food stamp benefits with good nutrition. The posters are part of a media campaign DTA has launched together with USDA. USDA is running radio ads broadcast in Massachusetts by WBZ-AM, WJMN-FM, WMJX-FM, WODS-FM, and WXKS-FM. These ads also give out the **1-866-950-FOOD** number to call for food stamp information.

Note: If the individual called the number above, which is for the Centralized Eligibility Operations (CEO), and was mailed an application by CEO, be sure to code the source as CEO/FS from the source dropdown list.



Good Food Good Health

**Food Stamps
There When You Need Them**

Call the Food Stamp Program (toll free) at
1-866-950-FOOD
or visit our web site at www.state.ma.us/dta
to find out if you qualify and how to apply

A message from USDA Food and Nutrition Service and the Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA)
USDA and DTA are equal opportunity providers and employers



Tener Buenos Alimentos Es Tener Buena Salud

**Los Cupones para Alimentos
Estan Ahi Cuando Usted Los Necesite**

Llame gratis al Programa de Cupones para Alimentos al
1-866-950-3663
o visite www.state.ma.us/dta en la Internet
para averiguar si usted califica y saber como usted puede aplicar

Un mensaje de USDA y Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA)
USDA y DTA son proveedores e empleadores que ofrecen oportunidades iguales para todos

FYI

BEACON Help Revisions

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

Added:

Warnings, Edits and Messages:Apply For Assistance

Revised:

AU Mandatory/Responsible

AUs Reassigned (View)

Apply For Assistance

Eligibility Explorer

Reevaluation

Warnings, Edits and Messages:AU Mandatory/Responsible

Warnings, Edits and Messages:Eligibility Explorer

Warnings, Edits and Messages:Reevaluation

FYI

Family Cap

AU Managers are reminded to pay special attention when adding a Family Cap child to the AU for food stamps and MassHealth. Be careful not to add the child for cash benefits when entering the Family Cap child information on the AU Mandatory Responsible window. To prevent the child from being added to the AU for cash, the following procedures must be followed:

- click “No” for *Applying*,
- click “Yes” for *Mandatory Inclusion*,
- from the dropdown box for the *Inclusion* reason, select “Used for Elig Determ,” and
- from the dropdown box for *Responsibility* select “Dependent Child-Family Cap.”

This will prevent the Family Cap child from being erroneously added to the AU for cash.

“It is often easier to become outraged by injustice half a world away than by oppression and discrimination half a block from home.”

Carl T. Rowan

FYI

Policy Online Change

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

Online Forms

The *Centralized TAFDC Office Transfer Checklist* has been added to Policy Online.

FYI

Transaction Sign-off Accuracy

In response to recent quality control errors, supervisors are reminded to click on the *Selection* pushbutton in *Interview Wrap-up* and *Open All* carets to view all *Requests* with a status of *Pending Authorization*. If the AU requires a new calculation, supervisors must click on *EBC Results* and review the details of both the *AU Members* tab and the *Financial* tab. Thorough review of all AU activity is required to help ensure accuracy.



MAY