

# Transitions

May 2002  
Vol. XVII No.5



A Publication of the Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance

## this month in...

### Transitions

From the Hotline	2
FYI - Excess Medical Deduction	2
Changes to Calculation for FS/ SSFSP Combination Cases	2
Food Stamp Expanded Categorical Eligibility	3
From the Forms File	3
FYI - Fuel Assistance and SUA	4
Fair Hearing Rules	4
BEACON <i>Todays</i> Issued in April 2002	4
TAFDC, EA and Food Stamp Changes Due to the Increase in the Federal Poverty Level	4
Suspension of SSFSP Benefits	5
Insufficient Funds in the EA Rental Arrearage Account	5
Reduction of EAEDC Benefits	5
FYI - Treatment of Refugee Reception and Placement Cash Grant	6
FYI - Extension of Unemploy- ment Compensation Benefits	6
FYI - Food Stamp Change Reporting and New Benefits	7

## From the Commissioner

Dear Fellow Employees,

After nearly six years as your Commissioner, and more than 30 years as an employee of this agency, I have decided to retire. This decision is somewhat bittersweet. While I am excited about this new phase of my life and what it may offer, I have loved this job and there are many things I will miss.

When I became Commissioner there were several things I knew with certainty. I knew that I was lucky to have the support of superb staff in central office and in local offices. I knew that I would manage during interesting times in our "business." I knew that change, on a major level, would be the rule rather than the exception. And I knew that some days and weeks would be a roller coaster ride! I was right on all counts.

I also believed and planned that we would accomplish great things. With your help and hard work, we have. We implemented time limits for TAFDC recipients and figured out how to give extensions to some who reached their limit; we established a statewide EBT system for both cash and food stamp benefits, helping to eliminate the welfare stigma; we developed and implemented the BEACON system which provides us state-of-the-art technology to do our jobs; we survived the switch from our familiar weekly paychecks to a biweekly system; we instituted programs and supports for victims of Domestic Violence which are models for the rest of the nation; we figured out that helping people get jobs wasn't enough, we had to help them keep those jobs and so we developed post-employment programs; along with the rest of the world we prepared for Y2K and woke to find everything humming; and we became more sophisti-

## From the Hotline

- Q.** Does the recent elimination of EA rental arrearages and disaster benefits (Field Operations Memos 2002-5, 2002-6, 20002-8 and 2002-8A) also apply to SSI Special Benefits for Aged and Disabled recipients? (These benefits cover natural disasters, fire, moving payments and burial payments.)
- A.** No. All SSI Special Benefits may still be issued to SSI recipients as they are not funded from any EA account.
- Q.** I have a TAFDC two-parent AU in which the father is disabled and the mother wants to stay home and care for her one-year-old baby. Can this mother be considered exempt as the child is under two years of age?
- A.** If one parent claims to be disabled, the other parent cannot claim an exemption due to having a youngest child under age two unless there is medical documentation that the parent claiming to be a disabled grantee is unable to care for the child in the household. Refer to 106 CMR 203.100 and *A User's Guide: Transitional Assistance Programs and BEACON* pages XI-A-1 through XI-A-7 for details.
- Q.** I have a food stamp client who works for our local school department and has an annual contract. He will not be working during the summer months and has opted to receive his income during the ten month school period. How do I consider his income?
- A.** When considering the income of school employees, remember that each employee may receive their earnings differently. Some are paid over 10 months and others are paid over a 12 month period. In both situations, teachers and school employees, who work under a renewable annual contract, are considered to be receiving their pay over the entire year even though they may opt to receive their salary only during the school year. Refer to 106 CMR 365.430 for more details.

## FYI

### Excess Medical Deduction

AU Managers are reminded that the reasonable cost of transportation and lodging to obtain medical treatment or service is an allowable

medical deduction for elderly and disabled food stamp AUs.

If the AU uses their own vehicle for transportation, they are eligible for mileage at the rate of 28 cents per mile. If the AU uses public transportation, they have to verify the costs incurred. Refer to 106 CMR 364.400(C) for more information on excess medical deductions.

### Changes To Calculation for FS/SSFSP Combination Cases

#### FS, SSFSP State Letter 1219

This State Letter transmits changes to the treatment of income, assets and deductions of SSFSP members in combination FS/SSFSP AUs. These regulations also change the treatment of income, assets and deductions of persons failing to comply with SSN requirements and persons disqualified due to undocumented citizen status.

This change was made in an effort to save SSFSP monies and eliminate proration. BEACON has been modified to automatically calculate benefits for FS/SSFSP Combination AUs. **AU Managers no longer have to prorate the income or deductions of SSFSP members.** Additional information on this change will be issued shortly.

## Food Stamp Expanded Categorical Eligibility

FS

State Letter 1220

*A User's Guide: Transitional Assistance Programs and BEACON Update 025*

This State Letter transmits changes and clarification of the regulations that expanded food stamp categorical eligibility. The following AUs are now categorically eligible: a pregnant woman (in an AU by herself) and a child(ren) under 19 years old residing with an adult who exercises food stamp parental control.

## From the Forms File

The following brochures are now available in Spanish.

09-170-0402-05

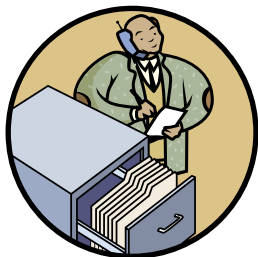
*FS-PB (S) (Rev. 4/2002)*

*Food Stamp Program*

02-213-002-05

*TAFDC-PB (S) (Rev. 4/2002)*

*Transitional Aid to Families with Dependent Children Program*



Continued from Page 1

cated technologically with e-mail, data warehouses and the use of a variety of software now a part of our everyday life.

There have, of course, been low points. Certainly, it has not been easy dealing with the variety of funding and budget issues we have faced recently and continue to face today. But even in these worst of times, I remain incredibly proud of you. You have grasped the issues that confronted us and understood the difficult decisions that have been made. Your support and concern for your colleagues, and most importantly, for the people we serve has been unwavering.

I am grateful for the work of every employee in the Department. Whatever praise or good reputation I have enjoyed has been a result of the efforts of each and every one of you. I have never been afraid to work hard but the burden of the work I have had to do as Commissioner has been eased by the knowledge that the staff of this agency are the most outstanding work force in state government. I am particularly grateful for the work and friendship of those closest to me. Deputy Commissioner Todd Maio, Assistant Commissioners Bill Bell, Cescia Derderian, Jim Reen and Ed Sanders-Bey, General Counsel Tom Noonan and Press Liaison Dick Powers have provided unfailing support and valued opinions. And my administrative assistant, Vera Ward, has kept me sane and on schedule.

I also want to wish my successor, John Wagner, the very best. I have known John for a number of years and he brings a high level of commitment and enthusiasm to his new role. I know that he can count on receiving the same support and dedication that you always gave me.

I will always be incredibly proud of what we have accomplished together. These years have been exciting, frustrating, challenging, chaotic and fascinating—but never boring. My personal thanks to each of you for your help and support.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Claire McIntire".

Claire McIntire  
Commissioner

## FYI

### Fuel Assistance and SUA

At application, redetermination or recertification, AU Managers must explain to food stamp recipients that Low Income Home Energy Assistance Act (LIHEAA) benefits are a form of fuel assistance. If an assistance unit does not incur any out-of-pocket costs for heating but verifies they already received or reasonably anticipate receipt of LIHEAA benefits, they are eligible for the heating SUA. Refer to 106 CMR 364.400(F) for more information on LIHEAA.

### Fair Hearing Rules

#### All State Letter 1221

This State Letter changes existing regulations to allow the Department to determine when fair hearings will be conducted telephonically.

### BEACON *Todays* Issued in April 2002

BT 78 BEACON Release 2.0.13 (4/1/02)

BT 79 Changes to the Food Stamp Recertification/Timely Case Closing Process (4/1/02)

BT 80 BEACON Release 2.0.14 (4/16/02)

“The color of the skin is in no way connected with strength of the mind or intellectual power.”

*Benjamin Banneker*

(U. S. mathematician, astronomer, surveyor, 1731-1806)

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

#### TAFDC, EA, FS State Letter 1218

This State Letter transmits changes to the regulations due to the increase in the Federal Poverty Level.

- The amount of income available from the parent(s) of a teen parent under age 18 to the teen parent's filing unit is based on 200 percent of the Federal Poverty Level.
- To be eligible for Emergency Assistance, the assistance unit's income must be equal to or less than the EA Eligibility Standard, which is based on 130 percent of the Federal Poverty Level.
- To be eligible for food stamp benefits, certain categorically eligible assistance units' income must be equal to or less than the 200 percent of the Federal Poverty Level.  
(See 106 CMR 364.976).



## Suspension of SSFSP Benefits

FS, SSFSP  
Field Operations Memo  
2002-9

Budget shortfalls have left the Department without full funding for SSFSP for the remainder of fiscal year 2002. The Department must suspend benefits to current SSFSP recipients beginning May 7, 2002. To implement this change, a “funding reduction” percentage will be put in place in BEACON effective May 1, 2002. For SSFSP benefits, the percentage used will be zero.

SSFSP applications authorized on BEACON on or after May 1 and pending transactions that release on or after May 7 will be calculated using the new (zero) benefit amount.

This Field Operations Memo tells TAO Staff how to implement this suspension.



*Remember*

## Insufficient Funds in the EA Rental Arrearage Account

EA  
Field Operations Memo 2002-5  
Field Operations Memo 2002-6  
Field Operations Memo 2002-8  
Field Operations Memo 2002-8A

- Initially, TAO staff were advised that the EA Rental Arrearage account had insufficient funds to provide for rental arrearage payments and disaster benefits (excluding shelter benefits) until the end of June 2002. It was anticipated that the funds in the account would be sufficient to cover SSPS invoices for rent arrearages and disaster benefits entered in SSPS by April 12, 2002.
- Instructions were provided for applications taken as of April 16, 2002 and how to process invoices as of April 16, 2002.
- As of April 9, 2002 the funds were completely depleted from the account and **no additional SSPS invoices may be issued for rental arrearage payments or payments for disaster benefits (excluding shelter).**
- AU Managers or Homeless Coordinators are asked to keep a record of all denials due to insufficient funds and to place a copy of the NFL-9 and the RFA-1, if applicable, in the Director/designee’s office for review at a later time if funds become available.

## Reduction of EAEDC Benefits

EAEDC  
Field Operations Memo 2002-7  
Field Operations Memo 2002-7A

Budget shortfalls have left the Department without full EAEDC funding for fiscal year 2002. The Department was planning to reduce current benefits by 55 percent beginning April 26, 2002.

Field Operations Memo 2002-7 told TAO Staff how to implement this reduction.

Due to court action, Field Operations Memo 2002-7A suspended all activities in Field Operations Memo 2002-7.

## FYI

### Treatment of Refugee Reception and Placement Cash Grant

The Reception and Placement Cash Grant offered under the Department of State or Department of Justice Reception and Placement Program is given to refugees within the first 30 days of arrival and is no less than \$400 but could be more depending on the situation of the refugee(s). The grant is verified by a receipt or referral letter to DTA given to the refugee by his or her refugee resettlement agency that clearly identifies that it is a Reception and Placement Cash Grant and the amount of the grant.

The Reception and Placement Cash Grant is considered noncountable income when determining eligibility for TAFDC and EAEDC (see 106 CMR 204.250(CC) and 106 CMR 321.250(Z)) and a nonrecurring lump sum payment when determining eligibility for food stamp benefits (see 106 CMR 363.130(E)).

Even though this grant is given to refugees within the first 30 days of arrival, AU Managers are reminded that refugees do not have to wait 30 days before applying for assistance. 106 CMR 702.105 states, *“Every person has the right, and must be afforded the opportunity, to apply for assistance without delay.”* Process these applications in accordance with the cash and food stamp processing timeframes, located at 106 CMR 702.160 and 106 CMR 361.080, respectively.

## FYI

### Extension of Unemployment Compensation Benefits

On March 10, 2002 the federal government extended the time period individuals eligible for Unemployment Compensation (UC) can receive benefits. Individuals eligible for the UC extension can receive extended benefits for half the number of weeks the individual collected regular UC benefits, up to a maximum of (13) thirteen weeks. The extended benefit amount will be the same as the individual’s regular UC benefit amount.

AU Managers must inform applicants and recipients who may be eligible for extended UC benefits to apply, as applying is also a condition of eligibility to receive TAFDC and EAEDC (106 CMR 702.700(A)). Individuals can apply for extended UC by

calling 1-800-535-0796 or by stopping at one of DET’s 32 walk-in centers located throughout the state.

The UC extension will appear in Unearned Income Matches in the Match History Tab of BEACON when DET sends DTA the match information, which occurs monthly. This means AU Managers must have applicants and recipients verify the amount of extended UC and enter the unearned income into the Other Income Status Window because the UC extension may not appear in Unearned Income Matches until one month after the individual is receiving UC. Please refer to *A User’s Guide: Transitional Assistance Programs and BEACON*, pages XIV-D-1 through XIV-D-2 for further instructions on processing unearned income.



## Stay Informed!

Every  
Job  
is  
a  
Good  
Job

## **FYI**

### ***Food Stamp Change Reporting and New Benefits***

When a client reports a change that results in an increase in food stamp benefits the AU Manager should review food stamp regulations at 106 CMR 366.120(A) to determine if this increase requires expedited action.

#### ***If expedited action is required:***

- process the change to allow the AU to receive the new food stamp benefits no later than the first allotment issued ten days after the date the change was reported to the Department. In no event shall these changes take effect any later than the month following the month in which the change was reported. If the change is reported too late to adjust the next allotment, the change must be made by the tenth day of the next cyclical month.

For Example: An AU with an SSN ending in "0" reports a \$100 decrease in income during May. This AU would be eligible for increased food stamp benefits for the month of June. If the AU reported the change and it was too late for the Department to adjust the food stamp benefits normally issued on June 1, the AU Manager would issue supplemental food stamp benefits for the amount of the increase by June 10.

#### ***If expedited action is not required:***

- process the change to allow the AU to receive the new food stamp benefits no later than the first allotment issued ten days after the date the change was reported to the Department.

For Example: An AU with an SSN ending in "2" reports a \$30 decrease in income on the 15th of May. This would increase the AU's June benefits. If the same decrease were reported on May 28, and the AU's normal issuance cycle was June 4, the AU's allotment would have to be increased in July.

---

## THE GOAL OF TAFDC!

