

Transitions



A Publication of the Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance

this month in...

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From the Commissioner

Dear Fellow Employees,

With the dust beginning to settle after the hurried dash to meet the Federal welfare reform implementation deadline of October 1 - and knowing that this work continues in the weeks and months ahead - I think the time is right to begin thinking about these reforms and the longer term impact on the agency and those we serve.

Many of us were around in the mid-1990s when we last "reformed" the welfare system. Perhaps not as massive in scope as those changes, these more recent reforms were in many ways as exacting on the agency because of the quick time frame in which the Federal government required such changes to take place. And the challenge of implementing these changes became (and continues to be) even more daunting for us since state laws governing the TAFDC Program do not always comport with these new Federal requirements.

As we continue to implement these changes and anticipate what lays ahead for state TAFDC and federal TANF requirements, we have begun to undertake a self-examination of sorts in Central Office about our programs, our recipients, and the agency as a whole.

Have you ever been in a situation when someone asks where you work and you respond "the Department of Transitional Assistance," only to be greeted by a confused look? For me, it happens a lot. (I often respond "the state welfare agency" knowing that will lead to less confusion!) But this is part of the reason we have undertaken this exercise - to create a better identity for the agency and stronger link to our mission.

In an era of trying to increase recipient participation and **believing all recipients can** achieve self-sufficiency through engagement in work and work-related activities, our examination of the agency attempts to provide insight on what DTA stands for...how are we perceived (both internally and externally)...and how we make sure we convey the very business we're about. Some of you have been part of this undertaking. Several focus groups have been conducted across the state with recipients, DTA staff, as well as contact with various state legislators and our providers.

Within the weeks ahead we will be unveiling the outcome of the project which will include a new logo and tag line for the agency. I think it will be one that is exciting and will deliver a powerful message to all of us within DTA, the public, and those we serve. And though it will not change the name of the Department (that would require an act of the Legislature), it will better convey what we're about, what we believe, and what all of us strive to do each and every day. So stay tuned....

On a separate topic, I want to mention the retirement of Cescia Derderian, the Assistant Commissioner for Field Operations. Cescia has worked for DTA for 36 years and will be retiring at the end of November. Throughout my nearly five years at DTA, I have known Cescia to be nothing but one of the most outstanding public servants throughout the Commonwealth. Always professional and unfailingly committed to the agency and especially the field, Cescia's judgment, style, and vision were always right-on. In any of the most challenging situations I could imagine as Commissioner, I would want Cescia to be right by my side. I will miss her counsel, presence, and certainly her friendship. I wish her many, many years of good health and enjoyment in her retirement. She deserves it.

Sincerely,



John Wagner, Commissioner

From the Hotline

- Q.** A single mother receiving FS benefits as a household of one recently reported that her adult son had returned to her home. She said he is a student attending a local college full time and that he wants to be included in her food stamp AU. He is currently 23 years old. Is he eligible to join her AU as a student?
- A.** Yes, he could qualify for FS benefits as student if he meets student eligibility requirements. However, because of his age, he may be eligible for his own FS AU if he purchases and prepares separately from his mother. See 106 CMR 362.410 for student eligibility requirements.
- Q.** A single individual applied for FS benefits. He meets the qualifications of an eligible student. Although he has a meal plan through the college, it does not pay for all of his meals. Is he eligible for FS benefits?
- A.** It depends. To be eligible for the Food Stamp Program, this student must be purchasing and preparing a majority of his own meals. Therefore, if the student's

meal plan covers a majority of meals, the student would be ineligible for FS benefits.

Q. A full time student came in today and applied for FS benefits. He is not planning to work, but says he is caring for his five-year-old daughter. Also living in the home is his wife who is the mother of this child. Are the three members of this household eligible for FS benefits?

A. In this situation, the family may be eligible for FS benefits, but only one parent in the AU can be responsible for the care of their dependent child under six. If the father, who also happens to be a full-time student wants to claim this responsibility, then the mother is Food Stamp E&T required, unless she meets an exemption other than the caretaker of their child. For a complete list of Food Stamp E&T exemptions, refer to 106 CMR 362.310 (B).



From the Forms File

Revised Forms

The following forms have been revised due to a change in the name of the component activity of Basic Job Search/Structured Job Search to Job Search/Job Readiness and the organizational name change of Office for Child Care Services (OCCS) to Department of Early Education and Care (EEC).

02-190-1106-05

02-189-1106-05 (S)

TAFDC-1 (Rev. 11/2006)

Employment Development Plan

02-752-1106-05

02-753-1106-05 (S)

24-EX-AR (Rev. 11/2006)

Additional Extension Request

02-737-1106-05

02-738-1106-05 (S)

24-EXAGR (Rev. 11/2006)

Extension Agreement

02-730-1106-05

24-EXHF (Rev. 11/2006)

24-Month Extension History Form

02-725-1106-05

02-726-1106-05 (S)

24-EXR (Rev. 11/2006)

24-Month Extension Request

02-740-1106-05

02-741-1106-05 (S)

TAFDC-EXTB (Rev. 11/2006)

TAFDC Extensions Beyond the 24-Month Period

The following forms have been revised to include a separate section where the name of the household member(s) involved and a description of the incident(s)/violation(s) must be included, as well as the date of each of the incident(s)/violation(s). Refer to Field Operations Memo 2006-50 for more information.

13-075-1006-05
13-076-1006-05 (S)
TES-WN-13 (Rev. 10/2006)
Warning Notice of Noncompliance

13-039-1006-05
13-042-1006-05 (S)
NFL-ST (Rev. 10/2006)
Notice of Termination of Temporary Emergency Shelter

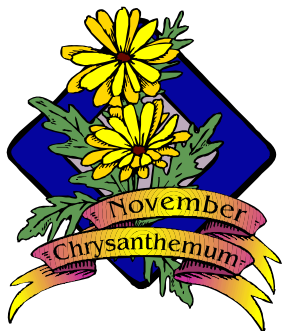
FY07 State Budget language made two changes to EA presumptive eligibility, and the following forms have been revised to reflect these changes. Refer to Field Operations Memo 2006-49 for more information.

13-260-1006-05
13-261-1006-05 (S)
NPP-2 (Rev. 10/2006)
Notice of Placement Pending EA Eligibility Determination

13-210-1006-05
13-211-1006-05 (S)
TES-IC (Rev. 10/2006)
Informational Contacts

13-250-1006-05
13-251-1006-05 (S)
APP-St (Rev. 10/2006)
Applicant's Statement for Emergency Assistance Shelter

02-035-1006-05
02-157-1006-05 (S)
NFL-9 (Rev. 10/2006)
Notice of Approval, Denial or Termination for Emergency Assistance or Other Financial Services



Quality Corner

This month we will review two errors, both related to child support income of Family Cap children who are not included in the TAFDC AU. See TAFDC regulations at 106 CMR 203.300 for policy regarding the Family Cap.

Scenario 1

The first situation involved a household with a mother and two children receiving TAFDC, and two younger Family Cap children not receiving TAFDC but included in the FS AU. On the FS application form, the grantee responded No to the Other Income question. The FS AU was certified using her TAFDC income of \$593 and a subsidized rental amount of \$328. During the review, the DOR screen on ViewDirect showed that the grantee had been receiving child support directly from the absent parent of the two Family Cap children. When this unreported income was included in the FS calculation, it caused a large error.

Scenario 2

The second situation consisted of a mother receiving SSI, one child receiving TAFDC, and a second child who was a Family Cap child. This FS AU of three was recertified for one year.

When the AU was reviewed by QC, the DOR screen on ViewDirect revealed that the grantee had received two lump sum child support payments for the Family Cap child; she also started receiving regular child support payments just prior to her last recertification. The unreported income resulted in an overissuance.

What's an AU Manager to Do?

Even though both of these errors were recipient errors, there are a few things the AU Manager can do at the time of application, recertification, or redetermination.

In the first scenario, a family of five was subsisting on a TAFDC budget for three, and the family's subsidized rent amounted to more than half of the household's total reported income. As subsidized rent amounts are based on household income, it is likely that the child support income was reported to the housing authority but not to DTA. The fact that the subsidized rent represented such a large portion of the income the grantee reported to DTA should have caused the AU Manager or Supervisor to pursue the possibility of other income. Checking matches and other databases such as ViewDirect is one way to accomplish this.

During application, reevaluation or recertification interviews, AU Managers must ask the grantee about the absent parent(s) and whether or not any child support income is being received. Procedurally, whenever there is a Family Cap child, a child who receives SSI or a child in the FS AU not receiving TAFDC or other income, the AU Manager must check the DOR screen on ViewDirect to see if child support is being paid to the grantee for that child. For more information on the income of Family Cap children, see *A User's Guide: Transitional Assistance Programs and BEACON*, Chapter XIII-J.

Note: AU Managers are reminded to the importance of referring overpayments to the Fraud and Overpayment Referral Screening (FORS) Unit by completing the AR Referral folder in BEACON. For more details on overpayment referrals, see *A User's Guide: Transitional Assistance Programs and BEACON*, Chapter II-E.

TAFDC - Community Service and the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) and Special Project

TAFDC

State Letter 1318

Field Operations Memo 2006-46

To comply with federal law (the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA)), the Department must limit the number of hours a recipient may participate in community service. Under FLSA, community service hours are limited based on the amount of TAFDC benefits and food stamp benefits, received, divided by Massachusetts' minimum wage.

This memo informs TAO staff about:

- how these changes will impact TAFDC APs and AUs;
- a tool for calculating the FLSA-based community service hours; and
- a special project to inform the current recipients enrolled in community service about this change.

This state letter transmits the following changes to the TAFDC Program:

- the maximum number of hours a grantee can participate in a community service program is now limited by the federal Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA).

TAFDC - EEC Changes to Child Care Services

TAFDC

Field Operations Memo 2006-47

DTA and the Department of Early Education and Care (EEC) have met on several occasions to discuss child care needs of TAFDC recipients, and to develop policies and procedures to better meet those needs. EEC has made changes to its child care policies, effective November 3, 2006. This memo tells staff about the EEC policy changes.

FY 07 RAFT - Residential Assistance for Families in Transition

EA

Field Operations Memo 2006-48

The Residential Assistance for Families in Transition (RAFT) Program is accepting applications for FY 07. The program is administered by the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) through contracts with the regional nonprofit housing agencies that operate the Housing Consumer Education Centers. RAFT will provide short-term, limited financial assistance which will enable families to retain housing, obtain new housing or otherwise avoid homelessness.

Emergency Assistance - Presumptive Eligibility

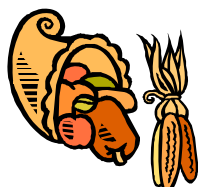
EA

State Letter 1319

Field Operations Memo 2006-49

There are two significant changes to EA presumptive eligibility. The changes are:

- temporary emergency shelter benefits received under presumptive eligibility will not be subject to the 12-month rule; and
- the EA-Presumptive AU will receive aid pending the appeal decision when the AU appeals the termination of the shelter benefits timely.



Revision to the Notice of Termination of Temporary Emergency Shelter (NFL-ST) and the Warning Notice of Non-compliance (TES-WN-13)

EA

Field Operations Memo 2006-50

This memo notifies staff that the Notice of Termination of Temporary Emergency Shelter and the Warning Notice of Non-compliance have been revised to include a separate section where the name of the EA AU member(s) involved, a description of the incident(s)/violation(s) and the date of each of the incident(s)/violation(s) occurred.

FYI

BEACON Online Help Updates Issued in October 2006

BEACON Online Help Update Issue #1 (10/2/06)

BEACON Online Help Update Issue #2 (10/26/06)

“Friendship with oneself is all-important, because without it one cannot be friends with anyone else.”

Eleanor Roosevelt

FYI

Changes to DTA Online

This month you will see the following changes to DTA Online:

Diversity - Events

November has been designated as National American Indian Month. The Diversity - Events option includes a link to a summary about this designation.

Monthly Updates

Monthly Updates includes the following new options:

- *From the Forms File*
- *From the Hotline*
- *FYIs*
- *Keypoints*
- *Quality Corner*
- *Transitions*

These enhancements allow access to the information summarized in the current month's issue of *Transitions* and access to the current month's issue of *Transitions*. *Transitions* will continue to be issued as a paper document and will be added to DTA Online each month.

FYI

Completion of Disability Evaluation Services (DES) Medical Release Forms

Medical release forms, currently part of the TAFDC and EAEDC Disability Supplement form, are completed when an individual makes a disability claim. There have been issues with the way the release forms are completed by applicants and recipients, as well as, AU Managers' ensuring forms are properly completed. As a result, DES has clarified for DTA what is needed to properly complete these forms.

When a doctor or other medical provider works for a hospital or clinic, DES will accept medical release forms with the name of the specific doctor providing treatment on the first line of Section II of the release form, and the name and address of the hospital or clinic with which that doctor is affiliated on the address line that follows. There needs to be separate signed release forms for ***each provider named and each affiliated hospital or clinic***.

Note: An attempt should be made by the AU Manager to contact the individual to complete additional medical release forms when necessary.

The incorrect completion of medical release forms or the receipt of an insufficient number of signed release forms should not delay processing an applicant's or recipient's disability claim, or the re-opening of a closed AU, if all other eligibility factors are met. A TAFDC individual may still be eligible as a nonexempt AP or eligible as an exempt AP for a reason other than "Disability". In addition, AU Managers must explore the possibility of a presumptive TAFDC exemption found in 106 CMR 203.530 (F).

