



*Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Executive Office of Health and Human Services
Department of Transitional Assistance*

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**Online Guide Transmittal 2020-45
June 25, 2020**

To: Department of Transitional Assistance Staff
From: Sarah Stuart, Associate Commissioner for Change Management
Re: TAFDC: Resuming Childcare Referrals

Overview

Access to childcare is recognized as one of DTA's most crucial support services, enabling our families to engage in employment and training opportunities as they work toward their goals. The COVID-19 pandemic has greatly impacted many families' ability to work, job search or attend education programs; and their children's ability to attend school and childcare.

Purpose

The purpose of this transmittal is to inform staff that they may resume issuing childcare referrals for eligible TAFDC and former TAFDC clients as of Monday, June 22, 2020.

DTA is updating procedures for current and former TAFDC clients requesting childcare authorizations to align with the guidance issued by the Department of Early Education and Care (EEC) on reopening childcare within the state.

Background

As we enter the first phases of businesses reopening, licensed childcare providers will be operating at a decreased capacity, with some providers waiting to reopen until a later phase. At this time, EEC is estimating the availability of care will be at 25% of pre-COVID capacity in July (a loss of 75% of capacity). It is anticipated that availability will slowly increase to about 40% capacity by the end of summer.

Due to the limited availability of care, families may have difficulty finding a provider in their area that meets their needs. In addition, although EEC's current Health and Safety guidelines allow for infant care, classroom program availability is up to individual providers. Staff must remain mindful of the challenges families will face while making a decision about childcare that is best for their family.

Status of Existing Authorizations

Effective Monday, June 22, 2020:

- All childcare authorizations active between March and July 2020 were automatically extended for 6 months by EEC;
 - Childcare authorizations ending in August will require reauthorization;
 - Renewal letters are being issued through the CCRR's starting this week (45 days in advance of the end date);
 - Parents who had an ESP childcare authorization that is ending, have since closed off of TAFDC and remain in need of childcare will need to have a Transitional Child Care referral issued.
 - Parents who had an authorization pre-COVID may opt to keep their slot with a provider but can also choose to wait until a later date to physically return to care. Parents should work with their CCRR and provider to discuss what works best for their family.
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FEW Responsibilities

FEWs must proactively reach out to families to discuss renewing their referral for childcare through DTA. If the family continues to have a childcare need, DTA will issue the appropriate childcare referral type referral. Local office managers and FEW's will be provided the Childcare Authorization dashboard on a monthly basis.

Issuing New Authorizations

ESP Approved Activity: For clients who are employed, have an offer of employment, or are engaged in an ESP activity, a childcare referral should be issued following existing Online Guide procedures.

Transitional Childcare: For clients who had their TAFDC closed within the last 12 months and now have an offer of employment, or are engaged in an education or training activity, a transitional childcare referral should be issued following existing Online Guide procedures. Additionally, if a client's 12-month window ends between March and July 2020 they remain eligible to receive a Transitional Child Care referral.

Relative Caregiver: For relative caregivers who are employed, a childcare referral should be issued following existing Online Guide procedures.

Employment Planning/Seeking Activity: This ESP activity and childcare referral type will remain suspended at this time.

Referral Procedures

DTA staff must continue to email childcare referrals to the designated CCRR mailbox. Staff must save the email as a PDF and attach a copy of the PDF to the case narrative. A copy does not need to be mailed to the client. Staff must advise the client that they will need to follow-up with their local CCRR to complete the new authorization. Recognizing that many families may have difficulty in finding an appropriate placement, the CCRRs will honor DTA childcare referrals for 90 days from the date of issuance.

Childcare Updates

EEC has confirmed that the CCRRs will conduct all appointments through video or phone conference, and there is no longer a "wet signature" requirement.

Childcare providers may no longer be offering transportation services, even if they did pre-COVID-19.

Processes for visiting childcare providers prior to enrollment may need to be done virtually.

Questions

If you have any policy or procedural questions, after conferring with the appropriate TAO personnel, please have your Systems Information Specialists or TAO management email the DTA Procedural Mailbox.

Systems issues should be directed to the Systems Support Help Desk.
