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Online Guide Transmittal 2023-41
May 19, 2023

To:	**Department of Transitional Assistance Staff**
From:	**Sarah Stuart, Associate Commissioner for Change Management**
Re:	**Cross Programs: DTA Guidelines for Procedural Mailbox Engagement**

Overview

The Procedural Mailbox is a resource for resolving policy and procedural issues that staff may encounter. Policy staff assigned to the Procedural Mailbox review inquiries and provide responses to questions submitted by Authorized Mailbox Users. The Procedural Mailbox is a valuable tool when:

- clarification is needed on existing guidance;
- staff encounter clients with unique case circumstances for which they are unable to find answers within available documentation;
- policy subjects intersect and staff do not know which policy takes priority; and
- staff have conferred with their supervisors and local office managers and still cannot reach a policy decision.

Each office or Central Office business unit must collaborate and develop an internal process among managers, System Information Specialists (SISs) and supervisors to work through and screen questions before they are submitted to the Procedural Mailbox.

Purpose

This Online Guide Transmittal advises staff of new guidelines for Procedural Mailbox engagement.

Office Internal Collaboration

When staff have policy and procedural issues, they must first consult with their supervisor for assistance in finding a resolution. If the issue cannot be resolved with the assistance of the supervisor, the supervisor may reach out to other supervisors or their manager for further assistance. Each office must develop an internal process for assessing policy/procedural matters before they are submitted to the Procedural Mailbox.

Authorized Mailbox Users

Local Offices

Authorized Mailbox Users are Local Office Directors, Local Office Assistant Directors and System Information Specialists (SISs).

Staff must work through their TAO internal vetting process before a question is submitted to the Procedural Mailbox. This includes following the instructions below:

- Workers **must submit any policy/procedural questions they have to their respective supervisors** for assistance in finding a resolution. Important: Workers must not directly submit questions to TAO managers or SISs. They must first work through the issue with their respective supervisor. It is the supervisor's responsibility to determine if the question needs to be escalated to a manager or a SIS, and if so, the supervisor must escalate the question to a manager or a SIS.
- If the issue cannot be resolved with the assistance of the supervisor, the supervisor must work through their TAO internal process or reach out to their manager for further collaboration and assistance.
- The TAO manager or SIS will submit unresolved questions to the Procedural Mailbox.

Authorized Mailbox Users (Continued)

Central Office

Authorized Mailbox Users are Central Office Unit Directors and Central Office Unit Assistant Directors.

Reminder: All Authorized Mailbox Users must include their titles in their email signature at the end of the email.

DTA Procedural Mailbox Form

This transmittal introduces the DTA Procedural Mailbox form. This form will allow Authorized Mailbox Users to provide pertinent details about the inquiry being made. The DTA Procedural Mailbox form will also improve communication between Authorized Mailbox Users and Policy staff.

All sections of the DTA Procedural Mailbox Form **must** be completed before submission to the Procedural Mailbox. The only exception are those sections designated for Policy staff.

The Authorized Mailbox User must complete the following fields on the DTA Procedural Mailbox Form:

- Name of the Requestor
- Authorized User Role / Office
- Program(s)
- Topic
- Client APID
- Question/Inquiry
- Online Guide Search
- Other Business Units Consulted

Responses will be developed by the appropriate Policy/Program staff.

Office Feedback

Upon receipt of a response from the Policy Unit, the Authorized Mailbox User may determine that the response does not adequately address the question/inquiry.

The Authorized Mailbox User must then complete the **Office Follow-Up Question section** on the same form on which the response from Policy was recorded.

The Policy Unit will review the follow-up inquiry and provide an updated response. It is anticipated that the use of the new DTA Procedural Mailbox form will reduce instances of miscommunication and/or inadequate responses.

Sending an Inquiry to the DTA Procedural Mailbox

Questions or inquiries submitted to the Procedural Mailbox must be sent to the email address DTA.Proceduralissues@state.ma.us.

The email must include the following details in the Subject line:

- **DTA Program(s)** pertinent to the question/inquiry: TAFDC, EAEDC, SNAP, P-EBT or a combination of programs that apply.
- **Program Topic(s)** (e.g. Household Composition, Earned Income, Unearned income, etc.)

Staff must then attach the completed DTA Procedural Mailbox Form to the email.

Important: This email must be sent as a "Secure:" email and Authorized Mailbox Users must include their title in their email signature at the end of the email. **Do not send emails to the *DTA.Policy.Unit* email address.** Although this email address includes the word *Policy*, it does not go to Policy staff.

Example 1: An Authorized Mailbox User has a question about Household Misfortune and wants to submit it to the Procedural Mailbox.

The email subject line would read as follows:

Subject: Secure: SNAP – Household Misfortune

The Authorized Mailbox User must also complete and attach the DTA Procedural Mailbox form.

Sending an Inquiry to the DTA Procedural Mailbox (Continued)

Example 2: An Authorized Mailbox User has two questions; the first question is about the TAFDC Work Program Requirements and the second is about the Earned Income Disregard.

The email subject line would read as follows:

Subject: Secure: TAFDC – Work Program Requirements / Earned Income Disregard

The Authorized Mailbox User must also complete and attach the DTA Procedural Mailbox form.

Important Reminders

- Managers and supervisors must work internally to determine if the question/inquiry needs to be submitted. Supervisors must assist staff in consulting the Online Guide for answers and work through the TAO/Central Office business unit's internal vetting process before the supervisor submits the question to a manager or SIS.
- Questions submitted to an Authorized Mailbox User must come from a TAO supervisor, not from a worker.
- Questions must be framed and recorded on the Procedural Mailbox Form. Inquiries must not be a copy of an email chain nor a request for a general case review. If the email submitted to the SIS or manager from the supervisor does not frame a question about the issue, the SIS or manager must either frame the question or ask the supervisor that initially submitted the email to do so.
- When new guidance is issued, Authorized Mailbox Users may submit follow-up questions or requests for clarification to aid in understanding of the new guidance.
- After a response is submitted by Policy/Program staff, case reviews and subsequent benefit calculations are the responsibility of office staff. The Authorized Mailbox User must not resubmit an inquiry for a review of the case or benefit calculation. Supervisors and managers are responsible for such reviews.

Important Reminders (Continued)

- Procedural Mailbox responses are developed and provided on a case-by-case basis, considering the specifics of each question. Therefore, the responses provided by Policy staff cannot always be saved and utilized for similar cases, given that each inquiry may contain unique circumstances.

- Once an inquiry is submitted to the Procedural Mailbox, the case in question must not be processed until a response is provided. Processing the case prematurely can lead to extra touches when an answer is provided. This could be the calculation of related benefits owed to the client or recoupment of benefits owed to the department.

- Mailbox questions are processed in the order in which they are received. Please keep this in mind, especially if a case is close to application denial or recertification/reevaluation end dates.

  Note: Policy staff are mindful of timeframes associated with case processing and strive to provide responses as quickly as possible. However, when cases are escalated, response timeframes will vary based on the complexity of the inquiry and the specific stakeholders that need to weigh in on the decision. When this happens, the case in question will be made whole, in terms of benefits owed, if any.

New Online Guide Pages

Topic: DTA Guidelines for Procedural Mailbox Engagement
Book: DTA Guidelines for Procedural Mailbox Engagement
Page: Procedural Mailbox Engagement

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 them to DTA.Procedural Issues.

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