



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

DEVAL L. PATRICK
Governor

JOHN W. POLANOWICZ
Secretary

STACEY MONAHAN
Commissioner

**Operations Memo 2014-64
October 24, 2014**

To: Department of Transitional Assistance Staff

From: *AOS* Anne O'Sullivan, Assistant Commissioner for Policy, Program and External Relations

Re: TAFDC, EAEDC and SNAP – Notice Simplification

Overview

The Department is in the process of reviewing and making changes to many of its policies and procedures to improve services to our clients with disabilities. Improving services is the objective of the *Harper, et al. v. Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA)* settlement.

In an effort to improve services through better communication with our clients, the Department has simplified notices. These changes are effective with BEACON Build 46.5 scheduled for October 27, 2014.

Purpose of Memo

This Operations Memo:

- provides examples of simplified notice language;
 - shows the language added to many notices as a result of the *Harper* settlement; and
 - provides changes to notices as a result of Business Process Redesign (BPR).
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**Simplified Notice
Language**

The Department communicates actions taken on client's cases through Electronic Benefit Calculation (EBC) notices. Over the past several years, a workgroup at Central Office has been working on simplifying the numerous paragraphs that make up the over 2000 different types notices delivered to clients.

The simplified notice language attempts to lower the Grade Reading level (GRL) of all notices. What follows are some examples of the changes made:

Example 1:

"You also may be eligible for WIC. WIC is a special nutrition program for pregnant and breast-feeding women and certain low-income households with children under age five. It provides, at no cost to you, nutritious foods, such as milk, cheese, juice, cereals, eggs, peanut butter and formula, as well as nutrition education and counseling and breast-feeding information. To find out if you are eligible for WIC, and where the nearest WIC program is to you, call the WIC Hotline at 1-800-WIC-1007 (toll free)."

Is simplified to this:

"**WIC:** You also may be eligible for WIC. WIC gives free food and formula to pregnant women, new mothers and children under age five. To apply or find out more, call the WIC Hotline at 1-800-WIC-1007 (toll free)."

Example 2:

"If you or the household member cooperates with the child support requirements before we stop or lower your cash benefits, we will not change your benefits. If you or the household member cooperates with child support after we stop or lower your cash benefits, you may be eligible again as of the date you cooperate."

Is simplified to this:

"You (or the household member) can be in the grant if you agree to cooperate with the child support requirements. Ask DTA for the form you can sign to show you agree."

Some changes provide the client additional important information:

Example 3:

"You did not keep your reevaluation appointment."

Provides this additional information:

"You did not keep your reevaluation appointment. You also did not reschedule or give a good cause reason for missing the appointment. Call DTA at {IVR Number} right away to find out how to keep getting your benefits."

Harper Language Added to Notices As part of the *Harper, et al. v. Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA)* settlement agreement, the Department has agreed to place on certain notices reminders about the availability of good cause and accommodations for disabilities. What follows is an example of a simplified notice with the added good cause language:

“You or the household member did not meet the requirements of the Employment Development Plan (EDP) or give a good cause reason.

To get benefits, you or that household member must participate for two weeks in available activities or have given a good cause reason not to.

Good cause: If there is a good reason that you can't do something DTA asks you to do, we may be able to help. This is called good cause. Please tell DTA about any good cause reasons. Good cause reasons include:

- illness or injury (you or someone you take care of)
- a family emergency
- lack of child care
- lack of transportation
- other reasons we approve

Need help because of disability?

If you have trouble doing something we asked you to do because of a physical or mental health problem we may be able to give you extra help, or adjust a rule. This is called an **accommodation**.

Call the Department at 1-877-382-2363 for help with an accommodation.

If a person has earnings, he or she will lose the earned income deductions. This means more of your earned income counts against your family's TAFDC grant. Taking a household member out of the TAFDC grant makes the TAFDC grant smaller. Because of this, your income may put the smaller TAFDC family size over the income limit and completely stop your benefits. Go to the pages at the end of this notice to see how we decided your benefit amount.”

**Business
Process
Redesign (BPR)
Changes**

Business Process Redesign begins October 27, 2014. To reflect the new way the Department will conduct business, notices will direct clients to call the DTA Assistance Line number. The new notice will state:

Questions? Please call DTA at 1-877-382-2363 if you have any questions about your case, you need help because of a disability, or you have trouble reading or understanding this notice.

TAO addresses will no longer appear in the header of any notice. The return address will be the EDMC in Taunton.

Additionally, each notice will have a Data Matrix (DM) symbol. The DM symbol looks like a Smart Code and contains the client's demographic information. It will help the Electronic Document Management Center staff better attribute documentation to clients.

All returned mail will be sent to the EDMC automated processing following procedures found in Operations Memo 2013-13 A. Additional returned mail procedural changes will be revised in the near future.

Obsolete Memo

Field operations Memo 2008-22 is now obsolete.

Questions

If you have any questions, please have your Hotline designee call the Policy Hotline.
