

T Transitions

October 2002
Vol. XVII No. 10



A Publication of the Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance

this month in...

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From the Commissioner

Dear Fellow Employees:

September has been a difficult month for all of us. Because of fiscal constraints, the agency faced the laying off of 9% of our workforce, drawn from both of the field and the central office. But the good news is that due to the generosity of many employees—over 500 staff donating a total of \$1.1 million—we were able to save 35 fellow employees' jobs. I want to especially commend DTA managers who participated at a rate of over 77 percent. Their contributions have been applied to saving jobs across the agency. In addition, we have extended the furlough/leave program until Friday, October 4, meaning any additional savings will be used to rescind/recall additional staff. So once again, DTA staff have come through during a difficult time.

Many of you may have read that the Commonwealth is facing additional revenue shortfalls, requiring the Administration to implement additional cuts. While at the time of writing this seems to be true, the Department is working to stave off additional cuts to our administrative account. It is my hope that we have weathered this very difficult time and will not have to look for further administrative savings in the near future. But as most people realize, the fiscal challenges facing the Commonwealth are not short-term and we, as an agency, need to be prepared to be live within the lower funding levels we have received.

To do this will require many changes across the Department. Some of these changes you may have already witnessed, as certain offices have closed and we now begin the process of transferring a number of staff to ensure proper coverage across our local TAOs.

From the Hotline

Q. I have a TAFDC parent who is on SSI. Recently, she informed me that she is employed, and as a result she will not be receiving payments from the Social Security Administration (SSA). When I looked into this further, I discovered that SSA still considers this individual an SSI recipient even though she is not receiving SSI payments. Although we normally consider the income and assets of those who receive SSI as noncountable, are there any exceptions to this policy?

A. The assets and income of any household member who receives SSI payments are considered noncountable, according to 106 CMR 204.140 and 106 CMR 204.250. In this household, the person is an SSI recipient receiving zero payments because her earnings are too high for her to qualify for SSI financial benefits.

Since this individual is not actually *receiving* SSI payments, both her income and assets must be counted and she is now considered a TAFDC recipient and an AU member in the TAFDC grant.

Q. I have a TAFDC recipient who was receiving benefits for herself and her two nieces. She is no longer on TAFDC, although her dependents are still eligible. (She recently remarried and her earnings, along with those of her new husband, make her ineligible.) Is this recipient eligible for up to 12 months of additional child-care services?

A. No. To qualify for up to 12 months of additional child-care services, the entire AU must be terminated. (Refer to 106 CMR 207.210(A)(1)(f)). In this situation, only the AU member was closed. However, this woman may be referred to the nearest Child Care Resource and Referral Agency for potential income-eligible child-care assistance.

Q. I have a client who is pregnant, and she is planning to take a month off from work to care for her new child. Can we continue child-care services for her two other children so that she is able to keep the slot open once she resumes her job, and if so, how long may these services continue?

A. Yes. In this situation, her written statement that she plans to return to work in one month is acceptable proof of her intent, and the child-care services may continue for up to one month,

if necessary, to maintain what would otherwise become an unavailable slot for your recipient. For more information on this topic, refer to 106 CMR 207.210(A)(2).

Q. Can a family receive Emergency Assistance (EA) benefits twice in a 12-month period?

A. Policy states that an EA AU may not be authorized to receive benefits more than once in a 12-month period. However, there are two exceptions to this policy. EA benefits *may* be authorized more than once in a 12-month period if the AU:

- leaves temporary emergency shelter for permanent housing and loses that housing prior to the expiration of the 12-month period, and shows a continued need for emergency shelter by demonstrating that the housing did not meet the definition of safe or permanent housing when the AU moved into it; or
- needs temporary emergency shelter benefits and the EA benefit received within the past 12 months was an EA rental arrearage payment. (Rental arrearage payments were provided until April 16, 2002.)

For further details, refer to 106 CMR 309.020(K).

Elimination of the STAFDC Program

TAFDC

A User's Guide: Transitional Assistance Programs and BEACON Update 032

The Citizenship Chapter (XIII-E) in the User's Guide has been revised to:

- Remove references to STAFDC;
- Remove reference to the Noncitizen Desk Guide (Information on noncitizen statuses and documentation is found in Policy Online: ***Online Noncitizen Guide***); and
- Include procedures for closing an existing record of the assessed person's INS status and for entering a new record of the person's new INS status, such as an LPR who has become a naturalized citizen.

"Never believe that a few caring people can't change the world. For, indeed, that's all who ever have."

Margaret Mead

Continued from Page 1

Over the next couple of weeks these actions will continue to play out across the field. In addition, I have been working with senior staff to examine the way we do business and to explore ways in which our practice can be redesigned and made more effective, both from a worker's and a recipient's perspective. You are an integral part of this examination and Field Operations has begun the discussion with staff and several offices. I encourage you to make sure any ideas or suggestions you may have are shared with your TAO and with Central Office. As was the situation with the layoff plan and the furlough plan, it is essential we work together.

The Department of Transitional Assistance is an integral agency and our jobs are a fundamental function of state government. Especially during this economic downturn, our roles and responsibilities take on a heightened importance to the most vulnerable families of the Commonwealth. The importance of what we do, each and every day, cannot be overemphasized. Our task may be greater, and so too, now our commitment. Thank you for your continued support and dedication to these families and the Department.

Sincerely,



John Wagner
Commissioner



COMMUNICATION is the KEY

Quality Corner

This month we will review two recent errors involving SSI recipients that could have been prevented, one with some additional interviewing and one with follow-up on available information.

Shared Living

An SSI mother has lived with her daughter's family for more than 15 years. Her daughter has been her authorized representative for all those years and has signed all of the certifications. Her daughter does not receive food stamp benefits. Mother and daughter share the rent and the mother pays half the electricity, but was given a full non-heating SUA. Even though the daughter does not receive food stamp benefits, the mother pays half of the utilities and is only entitled to half of the SUA.

What can an AU Manager Do?

Look closely at the food stamp application. In this AU, the daughter was listed on the application at the same address. When that occurs, sharing is very likely. A pro-rated share reflects the number of households that live together – in this case two.

Match Information

A thirty-two year old SSI recipient has worked during the school year as a bus monitor since 1997. Since then his AU has never shown any earned income in the food stamp calculation. During several months in mid-2001 some matches were not available in BEACON. When this AU recertified in December 2001, however, the match information was showing on the match module, yet no earned income was considered in the calculation. Since the AU was certified for 24 months, there was a large potential for error.

What can an AU Manager Do?

Be sure to check match information, even for SSI AUs. Both PRISM and BEACON had several matches for new jobs and for substantially increased earnings for this recipient. Unfortunately, none of this important information was acted upon.



FYI

Changes to Policy Online

This month, you will see the following changes to Policy Online:

- a new option titled "FMCS Codes" has been added to the BB Options window. When this option is selected, a new window titled "FMCS Codes" will be displayed. This month the following FMCS data elements can be selected from the FMCS Codes window: Category, Status, Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) and Direct Deposit (DD). When an option is selected, the corresponding definitions will be displayed. Additional FMCS data will be added in the coming months.

In addition, you will see revisions to the following:

- Service Area Listing By City/Town;
- Service Area Listing By Transitional Assistance Office;
- SSI Regional Office Listing By City/Town;
- SSI Regional Office Listing; and
- Region Number/TAO Number/TAO Name Listing.

These revisions are based on the Roslindale TAO closing and corrections to the spelling of the names of cities and towns.

- ZIP Codes listed for the TAOs servicing sections of Boston.

Mandatory Direct Deposit

TAFDC, EAEDC
State Letter 1234
Field Operations Memo
2002-23

- As a cost-savings measure, the Department is instituting mandatory Direct Deposit for the TAFDC and EAEDC programs.
- Direct Deposit will now be mandatory for any eligible grantee who has a bank account unless an exemption is met.
- Failure to cooperate with the Direct Deposit process will result in the grantee being sanctioned (closed).
- This State Letter updates the Direct Deposit regulations.
- This memo gives TAO staff instructions for implementing the Direct Deposit requirement.

FYI

Mailing Regarding the Fuel Assistance Program

The fuel assistance mailing occurred in late September this year. During the last cycle in September, TAFDC, EAEDC and FS recipients received a brochure about the Fuel Assistance Program. Information on this brochure included an overview of the program and explained how to apply for fuel assistance. It also included a list of agencies statewide where applications can be filed.

TAFDC and EAEDC recipients also received a BEACON-generated notice with verification of their grant amount. Food stamp benefit recipients received information about the Fuel Assistance Program but did not receive verification of their benefit amount. The program overview notice told food stamp recipients that if: 1) they receive food stamp benefits; 2) they receive fuel assistance; and 3) their heat is included in their rent, they may be entitled to more food stamp benefits.

During fuel assistance season (November through April), AU Managers are reminded to ask recipients at every contact if they receive fuel assistance. If they receive fuel assistance and food stamp benefits, make sure they are given the heating Standard Utility Allowance ***even if they are not paying heat separate from their rent.***



***Food Stamp Program - October 1, 2002
Cost-of-Living Increases and Asset Limit Change
for Disabled Individuals***

FS, SSFSP
State Letter 1236
Field Operations Memo 2002-21

This State Letter and memo implement the annual cost-of-living changes in the Food Stamp Program and the asset limit change for disabled individuals effective October 1, 2002.

COST-OF-LIVING CHANGES:

Maximum Benefit Allotments - The maximum benefit allotment levels for all assistance unit sizes have increased.

Income Eligibility Standards - The Gross, Net, and 165 Percent Income Eligibility Standards have increased.

Shelter Deduction - The Shelter Deduction increased to \$367.

Standard Deduction - The Standard Deduction has been replaced by a deduction that varies according to AU size. This deduction will be adjusted annually for cost-of-living increases.

Standard Utility Allowances - The heating Standard Utility Allowance remains at \$391. The nonheating Standard Utility Allowance remains at \$237. The telephone Standard Utility Allowance remains at \$28.

Homeless Shelter/Utility Deduction - The Homeless Shelter/Utility Deduction remains at \$143.

ASSET LIMIT FOR DISABLED INDIVIDUALS:

The asset limit for disabled individuals has increased to \$3,000. Elderly and disabled individuals are now subject to the same asset limit.



FYI

***Change in Benefit
Availability for Daily
Issuances***

Effective October 7, 2002, food stamp and cash EBT daily issuances will be available to recipients at 11 AM. Food stamp and cash EBT cyclical benefits will continue to be available to recipients at 6 AM on their cyclical start date.

Note: Day 7 Expedited Food Stamp benefits and Day 30 Regular Food Stamp benefits will continue to be available to recipients at 7 PM if authorized on BEACON by 5:00 PM.

This change allows the Department to cancel, either through batch or manually, food stamp and cash benefits which were paid in error.

***BEACON Todays Issued in
September 2002***

BT 95 Changing an Assessed Persons INS Designation (9/13/02)

BT 96 BEACON Release 2.0.18 (9/23/02)



Food Stamp Employment Training and Referrals

FS, SSFSP
Field Operations Memo
2002-24

- The Farm Bill of 2002 significantly reduced funding for the Food Stamp Employment and Training Program (FS/ET).
- This memo instructs AU Managers to stop referring nonexempt FS/ET and voluntary FS Work Program participants to DET for job search, effective immediately.



EA: Shelter Placement and EA Eligibility Standard

EA, TAFDC, EAEDC
Field Operations Memo 2002-17A
Systems User's Guide Update 152
Volume 3: **SSPS User's Guide**

- Field Operations Memo 2002-17A provided instructions for reviewing the EA eligibility of families in shelter whose income may exceed the lowered EA Eligibility Standard. The memo included special instructions for calculating the date the shelter benefits will be terminated.
- Only TAOs with EA AUs identified as potentially having income greater than the eligibility standard received the **Shelter AUs Greater than Federal Poverty Level** report.
- EA AUs not listed on the report that potentially have income greater than the eligibility standard are to be added to the report and scheduled for assessment appointments.
- The Director/designee will submit the TAO's annotated report to the Regional Director upon completion of the reviews or by November 15, 2002, whichever is earlier.
- Due to the elimination of various benefits, SSPS has been updated. Some benefit codes, procedure codes and situation codes have been eliminated.
- Revisions to an existing SSPS screen, **Vendor Inquiry - Display**, have been implemented to better accommodate AU Managers in viewing particular vendor information. Also, a new screen, **Contract Shelter Summary**, has been developed to assist AU Managers in viewing shelter information.

Stay Informed!

From the Forms File

Revised Form

AU Managers are reminded to discard the old version of any form and use the new form.

04-002-0902-05

04-009-0902-05 (S)

AP-SSI-1 (Rev. 9/2002)

Authorization for Interim Assistance Reimbursement (IAR) (Initial SSI Claim)

Language has been added to the AP-SSI-1 to ensure that all new SSI applicants are properly tracked on the DTA matches with SSA for EAEDC reimbursement funds.

Revised Brochure

09-070-1002-05

09-079-1002-05 (S)

FSP-INFO (Rev. 10/2002)

How to Get Food Stamp Benefits

The FSP-INFO brochure has been updated with the new cost-of-living income limits for food stamp benefits and also contains revised categorical eligibility language.

Revised Poster

18-400-0902-05

18-401-0902-05 (S)

ADA

Public Notice (Americans with Disabilities Act Requirements)

Language on the ADA poster has been revised to state that an appeal of a decision by the Director of Equal Opportunity can now be made to the Department's Division of Hearings. Reference to the Executive Office of Administration and Finance as the forum for the appeal has been deleted. Please remove the old version and display the new one in TAO reception areas.



Right to an Interpreter

All

Field Operations Memo
2002-22

- The Department, in conformance with federal law, is required to tell applicants and recipients of their right to interpretation services and provide interpreters to applicants and recipients whose primary language is not English or who use American Sign Language (ASL).
- This memo gives TAO staff procedures for providing interpreter services.

Composition of the Assistance Unit

TAFDC

State Letter 1235

This State Letter clarifies Department policy regarding:

- noncitizens excluded from the TAFDC filing unit but who have a legal obligation to support the dependent child; and
- the eligibility of a parent in an assistance unit where the only child is ineligible due to the Family Cap provision.



Noncitizen Changes

TAFDC, EAEDC, FS

State Letter 1237

Field Operations Memo 2002-20

- The Food Stamp Farm Bill of 2002 provided for the restoration of food stamp eligibility to qualified noncitizens who are otherwise eligible and who are receiving or are certified to receive disability benefits regardless of the date of entry into the U.S. A noncitizen is now eligible for federal food stamp benefits as of October 1, 2002 regardless of the date of entry into the U.S. if he or she has a status of Refugee, Asylee, Withholding of Deportation, Parolee, Cuban/Haitian Entrant, Conditional Entrant, Amerasian or LPR.
- MIS has identified current SSFSP recipients who have been identified as disabled on the Disability window. These SSFSP recipients were automatically converted to FSP benefits as of September 23, 2002.
- The Noncitizen Online Guide has been updated with the food stamp eligibility for disabled noncitizens.
- The TAFDC and EAEDC noncitizen regulations have been revised to include Section 212(d)(5) as acceptable for a Cuban/Haitian entrant. TAFDC regulations have also been revised to include a Cuban/Haitian entrant or an Amerasian immigrant as acceptable adjustment statuses for a Legal Permanent Resident (LPR) status.
- TAFDC noncitizen regulations have been revised regarding a noncitizen who has been continuously present in the U.S. since August 22, 1996. A noncitizen who lawfully entered the U.S. as an immigrant or nonimmigrant before August 22, 1996, and whose current noncitizen status was granted on or after August 22, 1996, and who has been continuously present in the U.S. from the date of the latest entry prior to August 22, 1996 until the status was granted, meets the eligibility criteria for that noncitizen status.



Autumn