

Transitions

September 2003
Vol. XVIII No. 08



A Publication of the Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance

this month in...

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From the Commissioner

Dear Fellow Employees,

Over the course of the past 15 months and four weeks since I have become the Department's Commissioner (not that I'm counting), there have been many people who have stood out during what has been a very difficult and challenging time. People who have gone above and beyond their job duty, people who have rallied together for the good of the agency and the people whom we serve, people who have dug into their own pockets to save colleagues from being laid off...many wonderful and touching memories through a challenging past year and a half.

Many times those memories have faces attached to them. I'd like to share one such face: Margaret (Maggie) Mulligan O'Brien. As many of you know, Maggie has many responsibilities at the agency, including being head of our policy and procedures unit. But another is that she is someone "behind the scenes" who often helps me in writing my monthly *Transitions* letter to staff. So I thought it only appropriate that this month I would take pen to paper, solo, and scribe for Maggie a tribute to her in appreciation for all of the hard work she has undertaken (mostly with alacrity!) through the years that has made this agency and our recipients' lives better because she was here.

You see, Maggie is one of the many faces amongst the long list of DTA staff who are electing to take early retirement. There are many "Maggies" throughout the agency who represent staff whom people relied upon, turned to, and sought out, throughout the years. Many of these employees have given their professional lives to DTA and contribute to the work you and I do each and every day. But after October, these "Maggies" will no longer be down the hall or around the corner.

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From the Hotline

Q. A teen parent came into the office recently and told me that, although she completed high school and passed the required subjects, she was unable to pass the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) Exam. To meet teen parent school attendance requirements, must she continue to attend a high school or GED program?

A. This teen parent is not required to continue attending a high school or GED program. If she can verify the successful completion of her high school course work, then she is considered to have met our teen parent school attendance requirements and is considered to have received a diploma for purposes of teen parent eligibility as described in 106 CMR 203.610. She may, however, become subject to the work program requirement and time-limited benefits.

Q. Yesterday, a teen parent came into our office and said that, although she could verify her completion of high school, she didn't pass the MCAS Exam in May and wants to retake the Exam in the fall. Furthermore, before retaking the Exam she would like to enroll in a remedial course at a local community college. Can this teen parent retake the MCAS Exam and continue to remain exempt from the time-limited benefits and the work program requirement?

A. Yes. A teen parent who has received a Certificate of Completion or can verify through a written statement from the high school that she has successfully completed her high school course work may retake the MCAS Exam and remain exempt from time-limited benefits and the work program requirement. Also, it is acceptable for her to enroll in an MCAS remedial class while awaiting her next opportunity to retake the Exam.

Q. Can the teen parent described in the previous question continue to retake the MCAS Exam indefinitely?

A. In the previous example, the teen parent failed the MCAS Exam at the end of May. This means that she must retake the Exam before the end of November to remain exempt from the time-limited benefits and the work program requirement.

If a teen parent has completed high school and fails the MCAS Exam, she can remain exempt from time-limited benefits and the work program requirement until she retakes the MCAS or for a period of six months, ***whichever is sooner.***

Information on the MCAS Exam and its impact on TAFDC eligibility can be found in *Transitions*, August 2003. Also, information on the MCAS Exam can be found by visiting the DOE website at <http://www.doe.mass.edu/pathways>.



"Humankind has not woven the web of life. We are but one thread within it. Whatever we do to the web, we do to ourselves. All things are bound together. All things connect."
Chief Seattle, 1854

TAFDC Clothing Allowance

TAFDC
State Letter 1259
Field Operations Memo
2003-18

The Department will pay a nonrecurring clothing allowance for September 2003 for TAFDC recipients. The clothing allowance is \$150 per recipient under the age of 19. The clothing allowance is prorated for recipients eligible in September 2003 but who have a start date after September 1, 2003. Payments were available August 27, 28 and 29, depending on the SSN and if the payment was made as a direct deposit or EBT.

Back to School



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The truth is my relationship with Maggie O'Brien predated my tenure as Commissioner. I remember first coming into state service back in 1995, at EOHHS, and venturing down to DTA for regular, weekly welfare reform meetings. Maggie always had a kind word and a cautious smile, which was a bit reassuring but also relayed the sense of "there's-a-lot-on-our-plate-but-we'll-get-through-this" attitude. And we always did.

Maggie is the type of person one looks forward to seeing when one is at work. Someone who is gracious, reliable, incredibly valuable, and has a great attitude and temperament. There are a lot of "Maggies" out there in the agency...but this Maggie is one-of-a-kind.

For all of the "Maggies" out there who are retiring, on behalf of the agency I offer my heartfelt gratitude and appreciation for your service. And for Maggie O'Brien—be well and think of us, for we will surely be thinking of you. You've added much to the agency. But more than that, you've made my job easier and life more enjoyable for being part of our team. You deserve to enjoy your "retirement."

There is a lot on our plate but we'll get through this.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John Wagner".

John Wagner, Commissioner



COMMUNICATION is the KEY

Removal of EAEDC Student Category and Introduction of New EBT Procedures

All

A User's Guide: Transitional Assistance Programs and BEACON Update 045

This update transmits the following changes:

- Eliminates EAEDC student category.
- Lifts the requirement to complete an Image-1 form for any recipient with a previous image on file. Recipients with a previous image on file may go directly to the IIS operator for a replacement card or PIN.
- Introduces the new EBT Card Fee Collection Form (EBT-9). This form is used to authorize the collection of the EBT card fee from the recipient's next EBT benefit issuance.
- Eliminates action on 30-day and 60-day aged EBT cash and food stamp benefits. AU Managers will only act on aged 90-day benefits.
- Food stamp EBT benefits will no longer be inactivated at day 90; these benefits will be permanently purged at day 270.
- Food stamp benefits will no longer be converted to cash when an Assistance Unit moves out of the Commonwealth since Massachusetts' EBT card can be used in all EBT states.

EA Recoupment and Pet Restriction in Hotels

EA

EA User's Guide Update 014

An EA AU who appeals the shelter termination action, receives shelter pending the appeal hearing and subsequently loses the appeal will be subject to recoupment of the cost of shelter at the Department rate of \$100 per night. This information has been added to the NFL-9 and NFL-ST. AU Managers must advise the EA AU of the recoupment procedures should an appeal be filed and denied.

A rule has been added to the HM-NT form regarding pets. No pets may be in the room at any time except when needed as an accommodation for a disability, such as but not limited to, a seeing-eye dog or another animal trained to assist the person with his or her disability.

FYI

BEACON Help

The following is a list of Help windows that have been added or revised.

Added:

Add, Change or Update Business Expenses

Add, Change or Update Garnishment

Assign an AU

Modify Existing Domestic Violence Information

Process a Benefit Issuance

Process a Closed Extension Request

Process a Denied Extension Request

Process a Reevaluation

Process an Approved Extension Request

Process Application/Reevaluation Print Information

Process Dependent Care Expenses

Process Medical Expenses

Process Monthly Reporting Information

Process New Domestic Violence Information

Process Prior Assistance Information

Process Program Change Information

Process Residential Facility Information

Process Standard Utility Allowance Information

Process Support Expenses Information

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Process Teen Parent Outreach
Information

Process Teen Parent Referral/
Assessment Information

Process Utility Expenses

Revised:

Application/Reevaluation Print
AU Assignment

Benefit Issuance Mechanism

Business Expenses

Dependent Care Expenses

Domestic Violence

Extension Request

Garnishment

Medical Expenses

Monthly Reporting

Prior Assistance

Program Change

Reevaluation

Residential Facility

Standard Utility Allowance

Support Expenses

Teen Parent Outreach

Teen Parent Referral/Assessment

Utility Expenses



FYI

Recipient Mailing for Meals/Milk Program for Children in School or Child Care

A notice was mailed during the month of August to all TAFDC-only and food stamp assistance units with a child(ren) between 4 and 18 years of age. Enclosed with the notice was a system-generated verification of eligibility for TAFDC-only or food stamp benefits. The purpose of this mailing is to promote access to the school meals/milk program, if the child's school or child care program provides one.

Food stamp AUs (PA and NPA) living in **14 school districts across the state** did not receive this mailing if the AU was active for food stamp benefits on July 3, 2003. **These 14 school districts participated in the Pilot Child Nutrition Access Project along with the Department, USDA, DOE and Project Bread.** As part of the pilot, the Department electronically provided the names of children eligible for food stamp benefits to the 14 school districts. Children in these school districts were automatically certified for the meals/milk program by the schools.

All children between 4 and 18 years of age receiving TAFDC-only or food stamp benefits are eligible for the school meals/milk program.

Department Obligations under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)

All

Field Operations Memo 2003-19

This memo:

- reviews and expands procedures for ADA-related issues including requests for ADA accommodations;
- introduces TAO Accommodation Teams and a Central Office Accommodation Appeal Committee; and
- obsoletes Field Operations Memo 98-50.

NOTE: The Central Office Accommodation Appeal Committee Review Form shown as Attachment B of the memo does not reflect the final version. The final version will have the Division of Hearings appeal form on the reverse.

From the Forms File

New Forms

15-200-0803-05
ADA-1 (8/2003)
Request for an ADA Accommodation

15-202-0803-05
ADA-2 (8/2003)
Central Office Accommodation Appeal Committee Review Form

The above two forms are used when an Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) request is made or reconsidered. Please refer to Field Operations Memo 2003-19 for more information.

18-842-0903-05
EBT-9 (9/2003)
EBT Card Fee Collection Form

This form is used to authorize the collection of the EBT card fee from a recipient's next EBT benefit issuance.

Revised Forms

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

18-831-0903-05
EBT-4 (Rev. 9/2003)
Request for EBT Voluntary Deduction

This form has been revised. Please refer to the *BEACON User's Guide* Update 045 for more information on the use of this form.

13-200-0903-05
13-201-0903-05(S)
HM-NT (Rev. 9/2003)
Notice to Recipients of Emergency Assistance (EA) Staying in Hotels/Motels

This form now includes language regarding pets, which may **not** be in the room at any time except when needed as an accommodation for a disability.

13-039-0903-05
13-042-0903-05 (S)
NFL-ST (Rev. 9/2003)

Notice of Termination of Temporary Emergency Shelter

02-035-0903-05
02-157-0903-05 (S)
NFL-9 (Rev. 9/2003)

Notice of Approval, Denial or Termination for Emergency Assistance or Other Financial Services

The appeal rights section on these two Emergency Assistance (EA) forms has been revised with new language regarding the shelter cost recovery for aid pending when the hearing decision is denied. Please refer to *EA User's Guide* Update No. 014 for more information.

The following forms are now available in Spanish.

13-161-0903-05
EA-15 (S) (Rev. 9/2003)
EA Self-Sufficiency Plan/Agreement – Phase 1 Goal: To Obtain Permanent Housing

13-151-0903-05
EA-Plan/PT 1(S) (Rev. 9/2003)
EA Self-Sufficiency Plan – Phase II – Part 1

13-153-0903-05
EA-Plan/PT 2 (S) (Rev. 9/2003)
EA Self-Sufficiency Plan – Phase II – Part 2

13-162-0903-05
EA-Plan/PT 3 (S) (Rev. 9/2003)

EA Self-Sufficiency Plan – Phase II – Part 3

Revised Brochure

*04-040-0803-05
04-041-0803-05 (S)
EAEDC-PB (Rev. 8/2003)
Emergency Aid to the Elderly,
Disabled and Children Program*

This brochure was revised to delete reference to the eligibility category of EAEDC Student as a result of legislative changes for FY04.

Obsolete Forms

*18-830-0298-05
EBT-3 (Rev. 2/98)
EBT Food Stamp Benefits
Conversion Request

18-833-1198-05
EBT-6 (Rev. 11/98)
Request to Release Inactive Food
Stamp Benefits*

As part of the Statewide EBT Plan, the above forms are now obsolete.



FYI

Changes to Policy Online

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

FMCS Codes Window

The phrase “eliminated 7/03” appears after the following EAEDC code descriptions:

- Category Type – EAEDC – Eligibility Reasons
Category Type H – Student Under 21
- Ineligibility Action Reasons
Ineligibility Action Reason 55 – EAEDC
- Group Codes (GRP CD) – EAEDC
Group Code G – Detoxification center

The phrase “rent allowance eliminated 7/03” appears after the following EAEDC code descriptions:

- Group Codes (GRP CD) – EAEDC

Group Code definitions: AP, HP, AQ, HQ, AR, HR, AT and HT

NOTE: We are annotating the codes with the elimination date rather than deleting the codes because AU Managers may be looking at historical information on an AU and may need to know the code and the definition in use at a specific time.



Eligibility of Strikers for Cash or Food Stamp Benefits

TAFDC, FS, EAEDC
Field Operations Memo 2003-20

In light of a possible Verizon strike, this memo highlights for local TAOs striker eligibility policy for the TAFDC, FS and EAEDC programs and provides instructions for processing applications containing a striker(s).

Quality Corner

This month we will discuss three errors involving inaccurate payments to AUs receiving food stamp benefits and two errors involving incorrect denials of applications. In each instance, the error could have been prevented.

Teen-Age Child Returns Home

In February, the grantee's 16-year-old son returned home. She did not inform her AU Manager until March 28th. The AU Manager did not add the son until the May issuance. Since the AU was reviewed for April, an underpayment occurred.

What Can an AU Manager Do?

If the AU Manager had acted immediately, the cut-off date might have allowed a change before the April 8th issuance. If she or he could not, a supplement should have been issued in April. In that instance, there would have been no Quality Control underpayment error.

Reading the Pay Stub

In a two-parent family, the husband's pay stub from Home Depot had two columns – one with the earnings (regular hours, overtime, etc.) and one with deductions. A closer review of the earnings column, however, revealed that deductions for medical and dental insurance were reported there, since they were pre-tax deductions. In determining the gross earned income, the AU Manager used the figure at the bottom of the column which was not the real gross income because the medical and dental insurance were already subtracted from this figure. Using the incorrect gross income resulted in an error.

What Can an AU Manager Do?

When reading a pay stub, be sure to see if any deductions were taken out before using the amount listed as the "gross" amount. Whenever deductions are taken out, be sure to add them in to realize the real gross income.

New Income

The recipient started a new job where she is paid every two weeks. She received a check on February 14th for her first week of work. The AU Manager entered the earnings on BEACON as though it repre-

sented two weeks of work. This was an underestimate of her income that resulted in a food stamp overpayment.

What Can an AU Manager Do?

When reading a pay stub, give careful attention to the week ending dates to determine the period the pay stub represents. Whenever it is difficult to determine the pay period (common in the case of the first pay stub) the AU Manager must contact the recipient for additional verification. If there is sufficient time to process the AU within program guidelines, the AU Manager may also choose to wait for the next pay stub. Once the pay period is identified (i.e. weekly, biweekly, monthly), the AU Manager may use income averaging as outlined in 106 CMR 364.340 to determine the monthly income of the AU.

Incorrect Denials

In the last month, Quality Control has noticed an increase in the number of incorrect denials, specifically denials for failure to appear for a scheduled interview. Generally, an incorrect denial does not mean that the person should have been approved. Instead, it generally means the proper procedure was not followed.

According to 106 CMR 361.700, the AU Manager must wait until

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the 30th day to deny an application for failure to appear for a scheduled interview. However, a case may be denied before the 30th day in cases where the interview was conducted and all verifications requested on the same day, and the AU fails to submit all requested verification by the 10th day. The AU still has the opportunity to submit the required verifications by the 30th day, at which time the AU Manager must accept the verifications and determine eligibility based on the original date of application.

Also, remember that when the 30th day falls on a weekend, do not send the denial until the first work day after the weekend.

EAEDC Living Arrangement H

EAEDC Field Operations Memo 2003-22

A recent review of EAEDC AUs has found the following error: EAEDC recipients receiving a Living Arrangement H budget do not have a correct Mandatory/Responsible role with an associated (Spousal) EAEDC AU.

This Field Operations Memo gives TAOs procedures for correcting these budgets.

FYI

Fuel Assistance 2003

Mailing Regarding the Fuel Assistance Program

The fuel assistance mailing will take place in September. TAFDC, EAEDC and FS recipients will receive a brochure about the Fuel Assistance Program. This brochure provides an overview of the program and explains how to apply for fuel assistance. It also includes a list of agencies statewide where applications can be filed.

TAFDC and EAEDC recipients will also received a system-generated notice with verification of their grant amount. Food stamp benefit recipients will receive the brochure about the Fuel Assistance Program but will not receive verification of their benefit amount. The brochure tells food stamp benefit recipients that if (1) they receive food stamps, (2) they receive fuel assistance and (3) their heat is included in their rent, then they may be entitled to more food stamp benefits.

For the 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.***



Food Stamp Program Changes: EBT and Food Stamp Disaster Program

FS

State Letter 1260

This State Letter transmits the following changes to Food Stamp Program policy:

EBT Changes:

- The Department no longer requires finger imaging of the individual authorized to transact the household's food stamp benefits.
- Food stamp benefits will no longer be inactivated after 90 days but will remain in the EBT account for 270 days after which time benefits will be permanently purged.
- Food stamp benefits will no longer be converted to cash when recipients move out of the state.

Food Stamp Disaster

- The Food Stamp Disaster Program Maximum Gross Monthly Income and Asset Standard table has been added to regulations.

FYI

EAEDC Applicants/Recipients and the SSI Application Process

A recent review of EAEDC AUs found that some EAEDC recipients who may be eligible for SSI do not have a pending application/reapplication/appeal on file. Policy states that, as a condition of EAEDC eligibility, an applicant or recipient **MUST** apply for SSI and cooperate in the SSI application/reapplication/appeal process (see 106 CMR 320.200(B)).

If, at any time, the recipient fails to comply with the SSI application/reapplication/appeal process, action must be taken to close the recipient.

AU Managers are reminded:

- 1) to follow up with applicants/recipients who have an appointment to apply for SSI to ensure that the appointment has been kept and the application process has started;

- 2) to ensure that a recipient who has been disabled for a total of 12 months or more submits an application for SSI benefits. The 12 month disability period can be either a single 12 month disability period or separate disability periods that total 12 months;
- 3) to have the recipient verify that the SSI application has been denied and verify that an appeal has been filed;
- 4) to follow up with EAEDC recipients who were previously denied SSI due to their noncitizen status to see if there is a change in their noncitizen status or more up-to-date work history information which may make them currently eligible for SSI.

In addition to reducing Department costs, encouraging applicants/recipients to apply for and follow through with the SSI process ensures a greater cash benefit for the recipient once the SSI is approved.



SEPTEMBER

FYI

Change in Appearance of Checks

Starting in August, the format of recipient checks changed. The following explanation statement will appear on the remittance portion of the check:

IMPORTANT - The appearance of your check has changed.

The Department of Transitional Assistance will issue all future checks using this new check stock. The previous check stock is no longer in use.

A sample of the new check is displayed below.



⑈ 2 2000 1 26 ⑈ ⑆ 0 1 900 4 4 5 ⑆ 4 3 4 7 9 ⑈



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

IMPORTANT - The appearance of your check has changed. The Department of Transitional Assistance will issue all future checks using this new check stock. The previous check stock is no longer in use.

IMPORTANTE - El aspecto de su cheque ha cambiado. El Departamento de Asistencia Transicional emitirá todos los futuros cheques usando este nuevo tipo de cheques. Los cheques anteriores no van a ser usados más.