

# Transitions

September 2000

Vol. XV No. 9



A Publication of the Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance

## this month in...

## Transitions

From the Forms File	2
FYI - Changes to Policy Online	3
Quality Corner	4
Emergency Hotel Placement and Single EA Eligibility Standard	5
FYI - Division of Medical Assistance (DMA) <i>Medical Benefit Request</i> Application Form	5
FY 2001 State Budget Changes	6
Clothing Allowance September 2000	6
<i>Smith v. McIntire</i> Lawsuit	6
FYI - Program Brochures	7
<i>The Online Update</i> 034	7
FYI - Fuel Assistance 2000	7

## From the Commissioner

Dear Fellow Employees,

For many of us, September has always seemed a sort of “new year” opportunity. For those with school-age children this month is marked by new clothes and shoes, notebooks and teachers and a settling back into a more structured day-to-day routine. For all of us, it marks the end of summer (even a cold and rainy summer like the one we are experiencing!), a tapering-off of vacation plans, trips to the beach and long hours of daylight. Like the children returning to school, September is a time for all of us to refocus our energies on what is important and where we are going.

I certainly know that despite summer vacations and other distractions, you have continued to balance a myriad of issues and assignments. But, like people everywhere, we should use September as an opportunity to be sure that those things which are truly important are the ones on which we zero in. And so, what are those things? Well, when you really think about it, all of our efforts as an agency are focused not on many things, but on one thing—helping the families we serve achieve an end to their dependency and become self-sufficient.

This is not to say that we do not do many things—but all of those things are on our list because in one way or another they support this main goal. Post-employment services have been developed to assist families who have found employment but who may need some specific transition help. We work hard to lower the food stamp error rate because it is important that our programs have integrity and

Continued on Page 3

# From the Forms File

## New Form

13-220-0800-05

*TES-EPR-1 (8/2000)*

*Emergency Placement Request*

This form is used to request emergency hotel placement from the Central Office Housing Division for an Emergency Assistance AU. Refer to *EA Reference Guide* Chapter 3 for more information.

## New Brochure

04-040-0800-05

*EAEDC-PB (8/2000)*

*Emergency Aid to the Elderly, Disabled and Children Program*

This brochure explains the requirements particular to the EAEDC program and is an extension of the *Your Right to Know* brochure.

## Revised Form

13-001-0800-05

*EA-1 (Rev. 8/2000)*

*Authorization for Emergency Assistance Benefit*

This form was revised to reflect the policy change to EA by deleting the Shelter Standard Used block.

## Revised Brochures

02-211-0800-05

*YRTK-E (Rev. 8/2000)*

*Your Right to Know*

The revised YRTK brochure for TAFDC, food stamp benefits and EAEDC explains the rights and responsibilities of the applicant/recipient and includes new sections about the:

- availability of benefits,
- third party contacts,
- use of facial image cards, and
- noncitizen status.

02-169-0800-05

*FS-PB (Rev. 8/2000)*

*Food Stamp Program*

The FSPB is an extension of the *Your Right to Know* brochure. The FSPB explains the requirements specific to the FS program, as well as the rights and responsibilities of the applicant/recipient. The highlights include:

- a new section entitled Categorical Eligibility,
- a change in the Food Stamp Work Requirements language, and
- changes in the noncitizen rules.

02-210-0800-05

*TAFDC-PB (Rev. 8/2000)*

*Transitional Aid to Families with Dependent Children Program*

The revised TAFDC Program brochure, an extension of the *Your Right to Know* brochure, now includes a section entitled Intentional Program Violations.

## Obsolete Form

16-019-0496-05

*Image-5 (4/96)*

*Your Right to Know How the Department Will Use Facial and Finger Images*

This form has been incorporated into the revised *Your Right to Know* brochure.

## FYI

### Changes to Policy Online

Effective September 1, 2000 the format of Policy Online is being changed to make it more user friendly. The following is a list of enhancements that have been made:

- the navigation for the main screens has been redesigned,
- the list of Memos, State Letters, Products Sent to Print and FYIs has been broken down to independent screens,
- all issues of year 2000 *Transitions* have been added,
- the 2000 FYIs have been linked to the corresponding issue of *Transitions*,
- when you click on the heading of a sub page, you will navigate to the main screen,
- the Policy section is now listed as Regulations, and
- the Procedures section is now listed as Systems Procedures.

Continued from Page 1

that benefits are paid only to those who are eligible. The Emergency Assistance shelter system and the housing search services are being reviewed and revamped to make them more responsive to the needs of homeless, or potentially homeless, families. The implementation of BEACON Release 2.0 is moving forward and will automate tasks and the collection of information, freeing you to spend time on issues directly related to helping people find jobs or appropriate training. We have hired more Domestic Violence specialists because, unless we can help people live without fear, we can not expect that they can become self-supporting.

All of these things—and the hundreds of others that people throughout the Department work on every day—in reality support that one all-important goal, a family independent and self-supporting. Sometimes we get so caught up in the task at hand that we lose sight of that goal or forget that the many things we do all contribute to achieving that goal. September provides us the opportunity to refocus on that end. As we move toward the last quarter of 2000 we must renew our commitment to assisting the families we serve and must also recognize that all of the tasks we perform, no matter how removed they may seem, are truly supporting that goal. As always, thank you for your continued commitment and professionalism in assisting the families we serve.

Sincerely,



Claire McIntire  
Commissioner



**COMMUNICATION is the KEY**

## Quality Corner

For the past few months our focus has been almost exclusively on agency caused errors. The primary reason is that these errors continue to be the majority of the error rate. They are also the errors most under our control, and would be the hardest to explain to the outside world if we faced food stamp error rate sanctions from the federal government. If we could cut the agency caused errors in half, we would not face such a potential sanction; it is that simple. This month we will also examine recipient caused errors. As you will see, we can help lower even recipient caused errors with minimal effort.

All the errors this month will involve child support. This is one of the areas growing most quickly as a percentage of the food stamps error rate.

### Recipient Caused Errors

There have been six Quality Control recipient errors found in the first seven months of the current year. In general they are more difficult to eliminate because recipients must come forward with information that may then result in lowering their benefits. Four of these errors, however, could have been eliminated by the worker looking at the case as a whole and/or acting properly on the known information.

Half of the cases had child support information available through Viewdirect showing child support. In another case the worker requested recent bank statements from the recipient that showed income (deposits) higher than her known income. When asked by the Quality Control reviewer, she admitted the income was child support paid directly to her.

In these instances, while the recipient did not report the information, a careful review by the worker could easily have identified the income and have prevented the error.

### What Can an AU Manager Do?

The single most important step is treating the case as a whole. That is, look at ALL the income, ALL the expenses, ALL the people who live in the household. Using the food stamp policy, treat the information correctly. When in doubt, be sure to document what you have done and why.

Certain child-support-related actions can help reduce these errors:

- Make sure that child support arrears payments are included correctly when anticipating income.
- Child support is for particular children and is NOT prorated when all these children are members of the federal food stamps household.
- In Non-Monthly Reporting households weekly income should be converted using 4.333 weeks per month. This includes child support income paid directly to the recipient.
- Remember, the first \$90 of income for family cap children is disregarded for TAFDC purposes, but ALL income for family cap children is counted for food stamps.
- The \$50 TAFDC “pass through” (the amount recipients can keep when the Department of Revenue receives child support from the absent parent) can be a problem. For TAFDC cases that are closing and converting to NPA, the pass through must be counted if received in the previous month, then

Continued on Page 5

must be eliminated when no longer received.

Whenever you are working on a case, such as at certification or address change, you should take the opportunity to check the various sources of income known to the Department including Viewdirect, the case record (one case had bank accounts in the case record), and other sources (HUD recertification) and then act accordingly.

## **Emergency Hotel Placement and Single EA Eligibility Standard**

### **EA EA Reference Guide Update 004**

- This update instructs staff on the procedures and form used when requesting emergency hotel placement from the Central Office Housing Division.
- It also provides information about the new EA Eligibility Standard that replaces the EA Non-Shelter and EA Shelter Standards. The one standard removes the need to identify an EA AU eligible for shelter due to the 130 percent standard (code B) and is retroactive to July 1, 2000.

## **FYI**

### **Division of Medical Assistance (DMA) *Medical Benefit Request* Application Form**

DMA has revised its *Medical Benefit Request* application form. This is the application form for people under age 65 who do not live in a long-term-care facility, i.e., families, children under age 18, pregnant women and disabled individuals.

In September, a supply of the revised *Medical Benefit Request* (MBRCL-1 (Rev. 08/00)) forms will be sent to Transitional Assistance Offices. When the revised *Medical Benefit Request* forms are received, discard the old forms. The revised forms may be reordered in the usual manner from Printing and Distribution.



## **FY 2001 State Budget Changes**

TAFDC, FS  
State Letter 1193  
Field Operations Memo 2000-23

State Letter 1193 transmitted the following policy changes:

- A 10 percent Cost-of-Living adjustment to the TAFDC Eligibility, Need and Payment Standards.
- An increase in the TAFDC Eligibility, Need and Payment Standards for the month of September 2000, to provide a \$150 clothing allowance to TAFDC recipients under the age of 19.
- A change to Emergency Assistance policy that the EA Shelter Standard (now called the EA Eligibility Standard) is also used to determine financial eligibility for all EA benefits. Note: The EA Eligibility Standard is separate from the TAFDC Standards and therefore there is no increase in the EA Eligibility Standard due to the TAFDC clothing allowance.

Additionally, Field Operations Memo 2000-23 issued procedures for:

- updating food stamp benefits resulting from the increased TAFDC Payment Standards effective with the September food stamp issuance;
- recalculating TAFDC AUs denied July 1 or later due to income, using the new TAFDC standards; and
- recalculating eligibility for Emergency Assistance AUs denied July 1 or later due to income, using the new 130 percent of the Federal Poverty Level EA Eligibility Standard.

### **Clothing Allowance, September 2000**

TAFDC  
State Letter 1193  
Field Operations Memo 2000-24

- A clothing allowance of \$150 per TAFDC recipient under the age of 19 has been approved in September 2000.
- A notice informing recipients of their clothing allowance will be sent. No actions need to be taken by AU Managers to have the payments issued.

September 2000

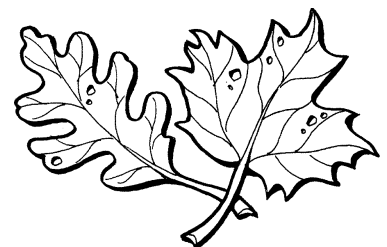
## **Smith v. McIntire Lawsuit**

TAFDC  
Field Operations Memo  
99-10 N  
Field Operations Memo  
99-10 O

Field Operations Memo 99-10 N states that:

- the Department may not require that an individual granted an extension be required to work or perform work-related activities for a total of 35 hours a week; and
- no current extension case may be closed for failing to meet the 35-hour requirement.

Field Operations Memo 99-10 O gives TAO staff interim instructions to process these cases on BEACON.



## FYI

### Program Brochures

The *Your Right to Know, Transitional Aid to Families with Dependent Children Program* and *Food Stamp Program* brochures have been revised and there is a new *Emergency Aid to the Elderly, Disabled and Children Program* brochure. These brochures have been revised with the goals of eliminating duplication, placing material common to all programs in the *Your Right to Know* and placing information unique to each program in the appropriate program brochure. Transitional Assistance Workers are reminded to give these brochures to applicants and recipients at initial applications and subsequent eligibility reviews. Other language versions will follow.

### **The Online Update 034**

#### Volume 1: *PACES User's Guide*

#### Appendix E: PACES Case Processing

- The new Case Closing and Reduction Schedule revises the Food Stamp Cyclical Month Schedule and provides the October, November and December 2000 payment schedules.

---

# THE GOAL OF TAFDC!



---

## FYI

### Fuel Assistance 2000

TAFDC, EAEDC, FS

#### Mailing Regarding the Fuel Assistance Program

During the first mailing cycle in September, recipients in categories 2, 4 and 9 will receive a brochure about the Fuel Assistance Program. Information on this brochure includes 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.

Recipients in categories 2 and 4 will receive a name and address card with verification of their grant amount. Food stamp benefit recipients will receive information about the Fuel Assistance Program but will not receive verification of their benefit amount. The program overview card notifies food stamp benefit recipients that if: 1) they receive food stamp benefits and 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) Transitional Assistance Workers 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.***