

This month we will discuss two shelter/SUA errors (one associated with Universal Semiannual Reporting (USR) and one direct child support error. Each could have been prevented.

Case # 1: Shelter/SUA Problems

On her application the applicant listed her shelter expenses as a mortgage of \$789 with additional expenses for insurance and utilities, including heat. The head of the household also reported receiving both child support and SSI income. Finally, there was a notation on the application that someone else pays the mortgage. There was no mortgage verification in the AU record. Quality Control determined that the recipient's ex-husband paid the mortgage and was listed as the sole owner of the house. The AU Manager should have questioned the recipient about the statement on the application that someone else paid the mortgage to determine if she was entitled to the mortgage payment as a deduction.

What can an AU Manager do?

The AU Manager should have noted the statement on the application that the recipient did not pay the mortgage. Food Stamp regulations at 106 CMR 363.220 (C)(3) should be referenced and applied appropriately. This section details the treatment of payments such a mortgage being paid by a former spouse. The critical information would be whether or not the payment is legally obligated.

Case # 2: More Shelter/SUA Problems

In the second case, the AU had income of TAFDC and SSI. Shelter expenses were rent and telephone only, according to the recipient's statement and the most recent landlord verification form. During the Quality Control interview, the recipient stated that she had received a fuel assistance (LIHEEA) payment this past year. In fact, she had been receiving fuel assistance for the last few years that she had not reported.

What can an AU Manager do?

The AU Manager should question the recipient during the recertification about any fuel assistance received, even if the recipient indicates that he or she does not pay for heat. Since the November 2003 revision of the Food Stamp Application clearly stipulates that no deductions will be allowed for expenses that are not claimed and verified, the AU would not have been in error. However this rule was not effective at the time she was last recertified, so the AU was entitled to the heating /cooling standard heating allowance of \$425 and since she receives LIHEEA payments.

Case # 3: Child Support Directly from DOR

In a recent TAFDC AU whose FS recertification was overdue, the case record shows that at the last recertification (14 months earlier), the recipient reported that she was receiving child support from the absent parent of a Family Cap child. According to DOR, this ended two months prior to the review date. Since the recertification, the recipient had also moved and her heating expenses had changed. These changes combined to result in a large QC error.

What can an AU Manager do?

When conducting an application or recertification, the AU Manager should remind recipients to report changes based on the type of reporting requirements the AU is subject to. It is also critical to review the DOR screens for all NPA FS AUs, and PA FS AUs with a Family Cap child. Because Family cap children do not receive TAFDC, they are more likely to receive child support payments directly from DOR. Avoiding overdue recertifications also avoids errors; an AU's circumstances may change during the course of a year and Quality Control loses some flexibility in determining eligibility once the certification period is expired.

[▲ Back to Top](#)

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