Charles D. Baker
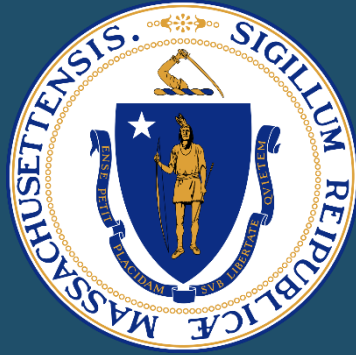Governor

Karyn Polito
Lieutenant Governor

Marylou Sudders
Secretary

Amy Kershaw
Commissioner

Report on Agency Paper Reduction Efforts

December 2020

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSITIONAL ASSISTANCE
REPORT ON AGENCY PAPER REDUCTION EFFORTS
DECEMBER 2020

OVERVIEW
Section 32 of Chapter 158 of the Acts of 2014 required the Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA) to "develop, implement and maintain a plan to reduce the use of paper records and documentation and to eliminate the sole reliance on such paper records for its operations."

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSITIONAL ASSISTANCE MISSION
DTA's mission is to assist and empower low-income individuals and families to meet their basic needs, improve their quality of life, and achieve long-term economic self-sufficiency. DTA offers a comprehensive system of programs and supports to help individuals and families achieve greater economic self-sufficiency, including food and nutritional assistance, economic assistance, and employment supports.

DTA serves one out of every eight people in the Commonwealth including working families, children, elders, and people with disabilities.

ELECTRONIC DOCUMENT MANAGEMENT CENTER
In 2014, DTA collaborated with MassHealth under the leadership of the Executive Office of Health & Human Services to implement an Electronic Document Management Center (EDMC). Located in Taunton, EDMC serves as the backbone of DTA's paper reduction efforts. In conjunction with DTA's business process redesign, EDMC was established with a focus on streamlining client case processing by DTA caseworkers throughout the Commonwealth.

Today, EDMC plays a vital role in the day to day operations of the agency. All physical mail sent to local transitional offices is rerouted to EDMC for digital scanning and indexing. DTA monitors the volume of documents handled by the EDMC each year. The following table displays annual volume of documents handled by EDMC by document source from 2015 to 2019, including documents received via the DTA Connect platform.

Received Documents by Source	2015 volume		2016 volume		2017 volume		2018 Volume		2019 Volume	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Mail	920,589	42%	572,786	25%	541,775	20%	392,258	15%	217,404	10%
Electronic Fax	607,960	28%	552,997	24%	452,561	17%	346,419	13%	237,925	11%
Multi-functional device scan from DTA local office	670,300	30%	1,186,082	51%	1,363,839	50%	1,190,791	46%	985,729	44%
DTA Connect mobile application	0	0%	0	0%	369,004	14%	651,109	25%	750,972	33%
DTA Connect web-based application	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	21,412	1%	51,296	2%
TOTAL*	2,198,849	100%	2,311,865	100%	2,727,179	100%	2,601,989	100%	2,243,326	100%

* Each document averages 7 page

Since 2015, there has been a significant shift in the type of documentation that is handled by the EDMC each year. The amount of paper-based documentation, like mailed and faxed documents, have decreased significantly. In 2015, paper-based documents accounted for about 70% of the documents received by EDMC. Paper-based documents accounted for just 21% of the documents received in 2019. Conversely, paperless documentation has become much more prevalent as the agency has continued to strengthen its access-on-demand service model, with almost 80% of the documents processed by the EDMC are received via paperless sources in 2019.

ADVANCES IN ELECTRONIC CASE MANAGEMENT

The significant decrease in paper-based documentation coming into the agency can largely be attributed to DTA's continued effort to build on the strength of the DTA Connect web portal and mobile application in recent years, which has provided more convenient and accessible ways for individuals and families to do business with DTA.

To expand the reach of the platform, the Department has strategically deployed 39 self-service kiosks to community partners across the Commonwealth, in addition to the kiosks in the agency's 22 local Transitional Assistance Offices (TAOs). The deployment of these kiosks provides people, some of whom may have limited or no access to the internet otherwise, with the ability to apply for benefits, get case information, or submit digital documents online while visiting other trusted service providers and without having to visit a DTA office.

In 2019, the Department increased functionality on the DTA Connect platform by allowing households that receive Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits to submit their interim reports and recertifications via DTA Connect. These interim reports and recertification documents are essential for benefit maintenance and many households are required to submit these documents to DTA every six months. Prior to this new functionality, these processes were completed exclusively through paper forms. In addition to impacting the volume of paperwork, this functionality reduced the amount of time it took to receive and process the forms for benefit maintenance, reducing the risk of adverse actions.

AGENCY RESPONSE TO COVID-19 PANDEMIC

In March 2020, DTA began taking steps to respond to the unfolding COVID-19 public health emergency to promote the safety and wellbeing of the Department's clients and staff. The agency's response has included operational changes, modified temporary policies and procedures, and significant technological enhancements, all of which has had a dramatic impact on the amount of paper-based documentation used by the agency.

Operationally, By March 16th, DTA closed its 22 TAOs to in-person services and began transitioning towards fully remote operations, providing its core services over the phone and online. By April 24, the Department transitioned more than 1,600 employees to telework operations, providing laptops and cell phones to staff across the Commonwealth. With no staff

presence in the TAOs, all mail addressed to a specific TAO was forwarded for processing at the EDMC. Together, these changes effectively eliminated the amount of ancillary paperwork used in or produced through DTA staff's day-to-day work to process applications, conduct interviews, and provide clients with appropriate resources and referrals.

Throughout its response to the pandemic, DTA has been committed to mitigating impacts on clients and streamlining policies and procedures, where possible, to expedite application processing, reduce confusion, and promote benefit stability for the individuals and families receiving DTA benefits. To this end, with appropriate federal approvals, DTA implemented a number of temporary policy modifications. In March, the Department temporarily extended the certification periods for any SNAP clients and reevaluation periods for any TAFDC clients whose recertification and reevaluation documents were due before June 2020. Additionally, the Department took steps to hold clients harmless from adverse actions, which included temporarily suppressing targeted notices and easing restrictions on certain written verifications. These policy modifications led to a reduced number of notices being sent from the Department and verification documents

Lastly, the agency's transition to remote operations necessitated some technological innovations to continue providing services remotely. Most notably, the Department worked quickly to develop telephonic and online options for families and individuals to apply for its two economic assistance programs, Transitional Aid to Families with Dependent Children (TAFDC) and Emergency Aid to the Elderly, Disabled, and Children (EAEDC). Prior to the pandemic, the only way to apply for either program, with limited exception, was to complete paper-based applications and submit them to the agency by mail, fax, or visiting a local office.

As a result of these actions the year-to-date metrics regarding documents received by the agency reflect a continuation of the trend towards reduced paper-based documentation coming into the agency. Current available data indicates the Department will receive and process a considerably smaller number of documents as compared to previous years. However, the number of documents received via the DTA Connect mobile application and the web-based portal are on track to exceed the number of documents processed through these sources in the previous year. These two data points reflect the impact that the agency's changes and modifications have had on the incoming documents to the agency generally and by source. See the table below for year-to-date volume of documents handled by EDMC by document source.

Received Documents by Source	2020 YTD Volume*	
	Count	%
Mail	133,406	11%
Electronic Fax	124,246	10%
Multi-functional device scan from DTA local office	238,791	19%
DTA Connect mobile application	681,951	54%
DTA Connect web-based application	83,315	7%
TOTAL	1,261,709	100%

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*January 2020 through October 2020

RESULTS OF PAPER REDUCTION EFFORTS

DTA continues to make significant progress towards modernizing its business practices and reducing the Department's reliance on paper documentation. The agency is committed to exploring and pursuing innovative ways to build on its access-on demand model and leveraging new technologies that offer clients more convenient, accessible ways to submit documents to the Department from their home computers or mobile devices. As the agency looks towards the future, beyond the COVID-19 pandemic, it intends to consider maintaining many of the innovations and enhancements that have been implemented in recent months that improve the agency's service delivery, improve convenience for applicants and clients, and also continue reducing the Department's use of paper-based documentation.