



Transitions

June 2013

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Dear Colleagues,

On June 12, I joined Secretary John Polanowicz, Congressman Jim McGovern, and dozens of lawmakers and advocates in participating in the SNAP Challenge. The Challenge, while only a week, was developed to help bring attention to an important program that helps millions of families across the country. As you know, the Department serves one in seven people across the Commonwealth, the majority receiving SNAP assistance.

The SNAP program is a vital tool to fight against hunger for millions of families in the United States. In late June, the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives took up a farm reauthorization bill. While the proposals varied, one constant was a cut to the SNAP program. These cuts, especially those in the House version, would have resulted in hundreds of thousands of families losing their benefits in Massachusetts.

I took the SNAP Challenge to become a better advocate for our programs. While a week on the Challenge doesn't truly represent what families face every day, it helped raise awareness and brought perspective to the general public. Following the lead set forth by those who took the challenge in early June, Senator Ben Downing and a group of western Massachusetts legislators have decided to take the Challenge. I have also heard from many of you who have chosen to take the Challenge as well. Thank you.

It is important to tell the stories of our clients, advocate for assistance to fight hunger, for healthy food options, and for SNAP. The truth is, the SNAP program works. Unfortunately, here and across the nation, it is looked upon negatively. We should be praising a program that is keeping people from starving and in many cases, allowing children to focus on their education and not worry about an empty stomach or where their next meal will come from. We should be strengthening it and making it work better, not slashing it.

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From the Commissioner *(Continued from Page 1)*

During my time, first as interim Commissioner and now as Commissioner, I have been fortunate enough to have visited all 22 of our offices. While in each office, I have met with staff and shadowed caseworkers and what I have seen is an overwhelming desire to help our most vulnerable residents. I want to thank you for your hard work and dedication to helping those who need it the most.

Sincerely,



Stacey Monahan
Commissioner

Quality Corner

This month we will review an error related to the processing of an Interim Report and a negative error related to an invalid denial.

Information Reported at Interim Report

This Non Public Assistance (NPA) SNAP household included the client and two children ages 4 and 17. The case was certified as Annual Reporting with a certification period from August 5, 2012 to August 4, 2013. The case record indicated that the client received an average monthly gross earned income of \$2558. An Interim Report (IR) was sent to the client on December 21, 2012 and was returned on January 4, 2013. On the IR, the client had checked the No Change box. However, later in the IR, in *Section 10: Additional Information*, the client had also reported that she had had a change in income. She attached her four most recent wage stubs, which showed a considerable decrease in earned income. The case manager processed the IR without including the verified change in income. Quality Control (QC) determined that the change in income should have been used in the SNAP benefit calculation for the subsequent certification period. The new wages totaled \$1809. This caused an underissuance error of \$190 for the review month.

What's a Case Manager to Do?

Case managers must carefully review an IR and any proofs the client submits with the IR to determine if there are any changes. Some clients check the No Change box and later in the document indicate that there are changes. A careful review of the IR would reveal this discrepancy. For more information on processing Interim Reports, see Operations Memo 2011-43.

Entering Pay Frequency

This NPA SNAP household included two adults and one child. The case was certified as Annual Reporting from August 10, 2012 to August 09, 2013. The income on the case was \$217 in weekly unemployment benefits. Subsequent to recertification, the client reported that the other adult in the household was employed. The client also provided two pay stubs which showed total gross earnings of \$1988 and that the pay frequency was biweekly. When the earned income was entered into BEACON, the pay frequency was incorrectly selected as weekly instead of biweekly. When combined with other income in the household, the entry of new earnings resulted in the client being notified that the case was to be closed because the household's countable income exceeded the limits of the program for the household size. This caused an invalid closing or negative error for the review month.

What's a Case Manager to Do?

Case managers must be careful when selecting the frequency of payments or expenses from the dropdown list. An incorrect selection will cause an inaccurate calculation of income or expenses, which impacts both eligibility and benefit amount. It is also good practice for case managers to look at the Results tab and review the transaction that was just processed to see if the countable income and deduction(s) are consistent with the entries made.

Training Corner

Resources You Should Know About

TRAINING UNIT

Training questions

PACE • SNAP • TAFDC •
UPCOMING TRAININGS •
MANDATORY TRAINING REPORTS •
OUTLOOK

CALL 348-5555
OR EMAIL
DTA.TRAININGUNIT@MASSMAIL.STATE.MA.US

DTA ONLINE

General resource for common questions

GO TO- [HTTP://DTAONLINE/](http://DTAONLINE/)
ON YOUR WORK COMPUTER

SYSTEMS HELP DESK

BEACON issues

CALL 367-5500 OR EMAIL
SYSTEMSUPPORTHELPDESK@MASSMAIL.STATE.MA.US

POLICY AND PROCEDURES

Questions on policy or procedures

ASK YOUR SUPERVISOR FIRST.
UNANSWERED QUESTIONS WILL BE
DIRECTED TO THE POLICY HOTLINE
BY YOUR LIAISON. CALL 348-8478.

From the Hotline

If you have any questions on this column or other policy and procedural material, please have your Hotline designee call the **Policy Hotline at 617-348-8478**.

- Q. 1.** A client and her son are receiving SNAP benefits. The client's son turned 18 in January of this year. His mother verified that the son is scheduled to graduate high school after first attending summer school and then completing this upcoming fall semester. Last month, her son also began working part-time. Do I count her son's earnings?
- A. 1.** Yes. This income is countable for SNAP. As a SNAP household member who is 18 years of age or older, the son's earned income is no longer excluded. For more information, see 106 CMR 363.230 (H).
- Q. 2.** If the same client described in Question 1 above was also receiving TAFDC for herself and her son, what would I do with her son's earnings?
- A. 2.** It depends.
- As a full-time high school student receiving TAFDC, this dependent's part-time earnings would not be counted for six months in the 185% test of financial eligibility, never counted in the second test of financial eligibility and never counted in the grant calculation.
 - As a part-time high school student, this dependent's part-time earnings would be counted in the 185% test of financial eligibility, but never counted in the second test of financial eligibility and never counted in the grant calculation. For more information, see 106 CMR 204.260 and 106 CMR 204.500.
- Q. 3.** A household receiving SNAP benefits includes a mother, father and one child. The couple received an income tax refund last year and this year reported receiving an earned income tax credit. How are these counted?
- A. 3.** For SNAP benefits, state and federal income tax refunds are considered nonrecurring lump sum payments and are therefore excluded income. See 106 CMR 363.230(I) for details. In SNAP households that are not categorically eligible, lump sum payments are considered an asset in the month received. See 106 CMR 363.130(D) for details. Earned income credits (EIC) are also excluded as income and are not counted as an asset in the month of receipt and the following month. For households that are not categorically eligible the remaining portion of the EIC is a countable asset in the third month.
- Exception:** Federal income tax refunds, including any portion due to over withholding or EIC, received between December 31, 2009 and December 31, 2012 are noncountable assets for 12 months from the month of receipt. See 106 CMR 363.140(G) for details.

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From the Hotline *(Continued from Page 5)*

Q. 4. If the same household described in Question 3, above, was also receiving TAFDC, how would I count their income tax refund and EIC?

A. 4. In the TAFDC Program, state and federal income tax refunds as well as the EIC are noncountable as income. Also:

- State and federal income tax refunds are a countable asset.
- EIC is a noncountable asset in the month of receipt and the following month, but is a countable asset in the third month.

Exception: Federal income tax refunds, including any portion due to over withholding or EIC, received between December 31, 2009 and December 31, 2012, are noncountable assets for 12 months from the month of receipt. See 106 CMR 204.120(I) for details.

From the Forms File

Reissued Poster

TAO Courtesy Poster (Rev. 12/2012)

The *TAO Courtesy Poster* has been reissued. Effective immediately all previously distributed versions of the *TAO Courtesy Poster* must be removed from all TAO Waiting areas and replaced with the reissued version. Schraffts will send 2 color, laminated copies to each TAO shortly.

Reissued Form

Request for Authorized Representative – Authorized Agency-Authorized Payee

16-020-0905-05

16-022-0905-05(S)

IMAGE-10 (Rev. 9/2005)

This form replaces the AR-P-I.



Operations Memos

TAFDC, EAEDC and SNAP – Harper, et al. v. Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA): Posting of Proposed Settlement

All

Operations Memo 2013-25

Harper is a class action lawsuit brought by disabled clients alleging that the Department violated the Americans with Disabilities Act by failing to provide disabled clients with equal access to Department benefits.

This Operations Memo informs TAO staff that as part of the settlement agreement, effective immediately, the Summary of Settlement Notice must be posted in the waiting room of each TAO until further notice. The Operations Memo also informs TAO staff where questions about the lawsuit may be directed.

External Agency Data Matches: Lottery, County Prisons, Department of Corrections and Death

All

Operations Memo 2013-27

This memo informs TAO staff that as of June 14, 2013 the Department's Fraud Investigation and Data Match (FIDM) unit began automatically processing matches with the Massachusetts Lottery Commission (MLC) and county prison system. The following matches will be implemented at a date in the immediate future: Department of Corrections (DOC) and a Death Match with the Department of Public Health, the U.S. Department of Commerce, and the Social Security Administration (SSA). The memo explains the automated process to be used by the Fraud Investigation and Data Match unit when processing these matches for all department programs and that no case manager action will be required.

Department of Unemployment Assistance Screen Unavailable

SNAP

Operations Memo 2013-28

The purpose of this memo is to:

- inform staff of the impending shutdown of the current DUA system; and
- provide interim procedures for verifying DUA information until DTA staff are able to access the new DUA screen.



FYI

Participation and Attendance Form Data Entry Online Guide

The Department sends *Participation and Attendance* forms to clients on the first business day of the week (Monday, unless Monday is a holiday) before the last Saturday of the month. These forms must be returned by the client no later than the 10th of the following month (or the first business day after the 10th of the month if the 10th is a weekend or holiday). Case managers *must* enter the forms on the Monitor Participation page *no later than the 18th of that month* (or the first business day after the 18th of the month if the 18th is a weekend or holiday) to prevent a participation sanction from being created. Case managers may enter the prior participation month's returned *Participation and Attendance* forms up until the Friday before the last Saturday of the current month.

A *Participation and Attendance Form Online Guide* (listing the last day of the month that *Participation and Attendance* forms may be entered on the Monitor Participation page for the previous month's participation) can be found at http://dtaonline/reference/curpol/guides/tafdc_attendance_guide/tafdc_participation_attendance_guide.pdf in late June.

Diversity Quote

“I love the diversity of America. I love the plain, normal sense of humor Americans have. It is not wicked, like in some countries. And I also love how new America is.”

Antonio Banderas

TAO Meeting Notes