



Transitions

March 2013

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

Quality Corner	3
Diversity Quote	4
Training Corner	5
From the Hotline	7
From the Forms File	8
SNAP: Replacement of Food Lost Due to Winter Storm (Nemo)	9
TAFDC – Extension Forms and Procedures Revised	9
TAFDC: DTA Client Survey	9
Department Interpreter Services Procedures	10
FYI: New Voter Registration Forms and Agency Workbook	10

Dear Colleagues,

We have had a busy few weeks and I want to update you on everything that has been going on across the Commonwealth.

On March 11, we kicked off the “Bridge to Stability” listening tour in Framingham, where we were joined by State Senator Michael Barrett of Lexington, Representative Chris Walsh of Framingham, Representative Carolyn Dykema of Holliston, Representative Tom Conroy of Wayland, and Framingham Town Manager Bob Halpin, as well as residents, current and former clients, and community stakeholders who shared their ideas, stories and experiences with the Department. Deputy Commissioners Birgitta Damon and Iva Comey joined me at the front table and our Chief of Staff Stephanie Everett moderated the event. The [Metrowest Daily](#) covered the event and shared some of the stories and comments we received.

On March 13, we held a listening session in Holyoke to hear further ideas on how to improve client services and enhance program integrity. I was happy to have Stephanie Brown join me at the front table and Yasmin Otero moderate the event. We heard some great ideas and some heartbreaking stories. One client shared her story about how her mother had contacted the Department during her most troubled time. The Department worked with her mother to get her the vital support she needed to help improve her life and economic situation. She told us that the Department truly makes a difference in people’s lives. The [Springfield Republican](#) wrote an article about the Holyoke session and its success.

I have been lucky enough to visit 12 of our 22 offices and hold a few listening tour. I have seen the hard work that our Department does and heard from our clients about the life they and their children would have without benefits. I can say I am truly proud to be Interim Commissioner for the Department of Transitional Assistance and I want every one of our hardworking and experienced staff members to also be proud to work for DTA.

(Continued on Page 2)

From the Commissioner *(continued from Page 1)*

The “Bridge to Stability” tour will continue in Lowell on March 18, Taunton on March 25, Pittsfield on March 27, Worcester on March 29, and Springfield on April 8. I hope you can join us at one of these sessions and share your experiences with me. We will be announcing more listening sessions in the weeks to come.

As Interim Commissioner, one of my goals is to improve communication, both internally and externally. To help accomplish this goal, we have started using a few social media tools to keep you and the general public aware of what’s happening in the Department. We started a twitter account, @DTA_Listens, which will provide news, updated information on events and initiatives, and links to articles and stories of interest. I encourage you to follow us if you use twitter and if not, you can sign up for free at twitter.com.

We have also started a flickr account, www.flickr.com/massdta, to share photos from our listening tours, Transitional Assistance office visits and events moving forward. If your office has an event that you want to share photos of, please contact our Director of Communications Matt Kitsos, Matthew.Kitsos@state.ma.us.

Please feel free to contact me at any time by calling 617-348-8400 or by emailing Stacey.Monahan@state.ma.us.

Sincerely,



Stacey Monahan
Interim Commissioner

(Continued on Page 3)

Quality Corner

This month we will review two SNAP errors. The first was caused by an incorrect noncitizen calculation and the second error by an invalid closing.

Noncitizen Calculation

This Non Public Assistance (NPA) SNAP household included two parents and five children. At reapplication, the case was certified as Annual Reporting from January 11, 2012 to January 10, 2013. All household members had a noncitizen status of Legal Permanent Resident (LPR). At the time of reapplication, it had been less than five years since the family was granted LPR status. One of the children was 18 years of age, while the other two were under 18. The parents and the 18-year-old were appropriately excluded from the case as ineligible noncitizens.

The client reported that he and his spouse were working part-time, had received a total of \$1582 in gross earnings, and that the household was paying a monthly rent of \$800. The household had received H-EAT benefits within the previous year so was eligible to continue receiving the heating/cooling SUA.

Quality Control (QC) determined that at reapplication, the case manager incorrectly changed the answer to the Legal FS Disqualified indicator on the INS Designation page to *No*. This change was made for each parent and for their 18-year-old child. Since BEACON did not recognize the parents or their 18-year-old child as legal noncitizens ineligible for SNAP, the system used the incorrect SNAP calculation. This caused an underissuance error of \$195 for the review month.

What's a Case Manager to Do?

Case managers must carefully consider the question before coding the Legal FS Disqualified indicator. The question asks: *Is this person a legal noncitizen who is ineligible to participate in the Federal Food Stamp Program?* The answer to the Legal FS Disqualified indicator drives the SNAP calculation, specifically how the income and expenses are to be used. The case manager should have answered *Yes* to the Legal FS Disqualified indicator for each of the LPR adults in this case. BEACON would then have calculated this household's income in accordance with 106 CMR 364. 600 (C). Indicating *Yes* to the Legal FS Disqualified indicator causes BEACON to use the calculation that was designed to maximize SNAP benefits for the remaining federally-eligible household members.

(Continued on Page 4)



Quality Corner *(Continued from Page 3)*

Invalid Closing

The second case was an invalid closing or negative error. It was an NPA SNAP case that included a 20-year-old client who was subject to the SNAP Employment & Training (SNAP/ET) requirements. At application, the client verified that he was employed. The case was certified from 6/2/2012 to 6/1/2013.

On July 19, 2012, the client reported that he had left his job. The termination letter he provided indicated that he had quit his job without good cause by not showing up to work and not calling to provide a reason for his absence. On July 23, 2012, a closing notice was issued to the client informing him that his case was being closed for not meeting the SNAP program household requirements.

QC determined that this was an inappropriate closing reason. On the AU Composition Results page, the case manager should have selected *Noncooperation* as the Reason Category and *Voluntary Quit Job (1st time)* as the Reason. This would have caused the client to receive the correct closing notice.

What's a Case Manager to Do?

When a household member who is subject to SNAP work requirements has voluntarily quit a job without good cause, he or she will be disqualified for SNAP in accordance with 106 CMR 367.800.

Supervisors and case managers must be careful to select the appropriate closing reason when closing a case. The notice of adverse action must clearly inform the client of the reason SNAP benefits are being terminated. In this situation, the correct closing reason on BEACON would also be an indication to the case manager that the three-month disqualification period had to elapse before the client could reapply and be certified for benefits.

Diversity Quote

“Ultimately, America's answer to the intolerant man is diversity, the very diversity which our heritage of religious freedom has inspired.”

Robert Kennedy



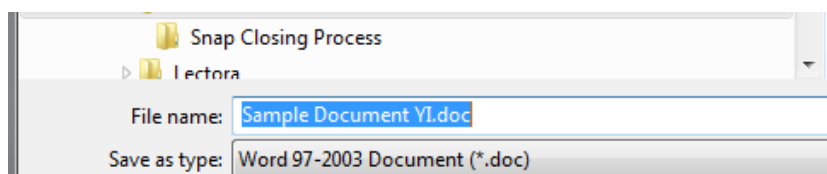
Training Corner

Tracking Changes in Word

When you are reviewing a document and returning it to the author with your comments and changes, using Track Changes is a very helpful way to keep things organized. See below for steps.

Steps:

1. Open the document that you want to review.
2. Click **File/Save As**, and rename the document to distinguish it from the original file sent out for review. For example, if the original file was named Sample Document, then save it as Sample Document YI (replacing the letters YI with your initials, which will also help the author keep track of whose changes they are looking at). Click **Save**.



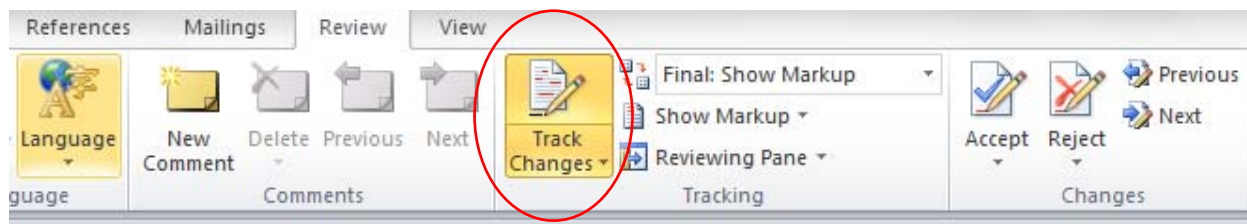
3. Click the **Review** tab.

Result: The Track Changes ribbon opens.



4. Click **Track Changes**.

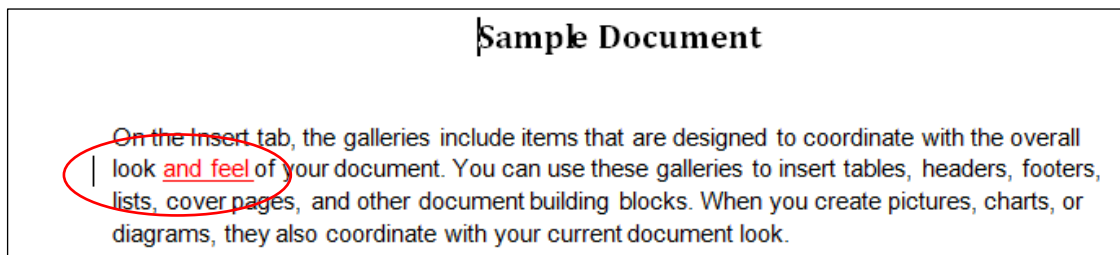
*Result: Any change you make will appear as underlined red text. A horizontal line will also appear in the margin to indicate a change was made to the original document. If your changes don't appear as underlined red text, or to see alternatives to how your changes appear in the document, go to **Track Changes/Change Tracking Options**.*



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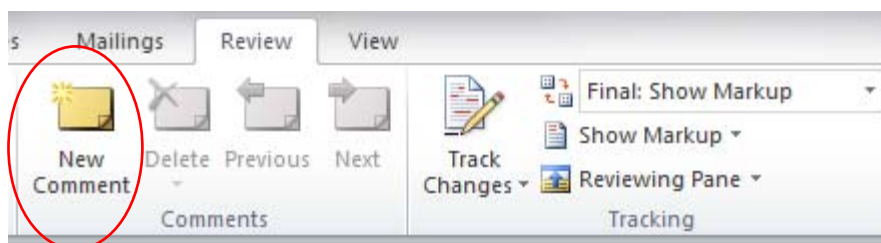
Training Corner *(Continued from Page 5)*

5. After Track Changes is activated, edit the document as you normally would (i.e. changing or adding text).

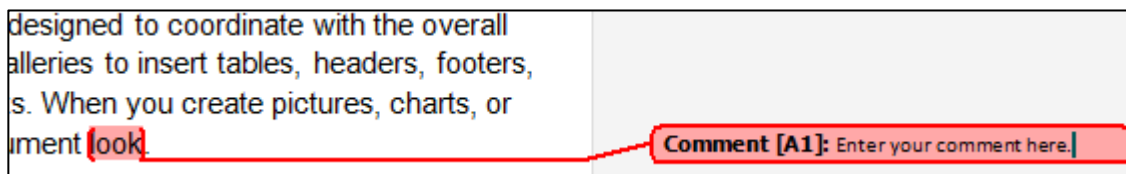


6. To add a comment to the document, put the cursor next to where you want add it. Click **New Comment**.

Result: A Comment bubble will appear in the margin of the document.



6. Enter your text in the Comment bubble*.



7. **Save** and send back your edited file back to the author.

*To have your initials appear in the Comment bubble, go to **File/Options/General/Personalize Your Copy of Word** and enter your name and initials.



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.** The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requires the Department to make reasonable accommodations, in order to avoid discriminating on the basis of a disability. Accommodations under the ADA are not reasonable if they fundamentally alter the nature of DTA's services, activities or programs. Recently, a client asked to waive the TAFDC asset limit, as an ADA accommodation. Is waiving the TAFDC asset limit considered a reasonable ADA accommodation?
- A. 1.** No. Waiving the TAFDC asset limit completely would fundamentally alter the TAFDC Program which is intended to provide cash assistance to financially needy families. For more information on ADA accommodations in the cash programs, refer to 106 CMR 701.390. Also see Field Operations Memo 2010-30 for further details.
- Q. 2.** I have a TAFDC client with a disability and she recently purchased a van to accommodate her disability. The value of her van exceeds the TAFDC asset limit because it is outfitted with special devices that help her to drive. Can I disregard the additional value in this vehicle and consider it a reasonable ADA accommodation to the TAFDC Program?
- A. 2.** Yes. While it would be inappropriate to waive the TAFDC asset limit in its entirety, it is reasonable and in keeping with the ADA to disregard the value of any adaptive devices added to a client's vehicle. For more information, refer to 106 CMR 701.390 as well as Field Operations Memo 2010-30.
NOTE: SNAP and EAEDC clients are also protected under the ADA and ADA regulations.
See 106 CMR 360.250, 106 CMR 701.390 and Field Operations Memo 2010-30.
- Q. 3.** If I have more questions concerning the ADA, who can I contact?
- A. 3.** If you are working with an applicant or client who might be impacted by ADA or could benefit from an ADA accommodation, you can contact Attorney Ruth Greenholz, in the DTA Legal Division, at 617-348-8520 for more information.
- Q. 4.** My client is employed at her local Senior Service Center. Her earnings are about \$160 each week. Are these earnings countable for SNAP purposes?
- A. 4.** It depends. When a senior applying for SNAP provides earnings verifications, remember to ask whether there are any public funding sources contributing to these earnings. The income may be excluded if it is derived from the Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCEP), also known as the Mature Worker Program. Clients are often unfamiliar with the source of their employers' funding. When in doubt, ask the client to contact the employer or assist the client in contacting the employer if he or she requests help. For more information, refer to 106 CMR 363.230 (K).



From the Forms File

Revised Forms

In response to recommendations made by the Massachusetts Office of the Inspector General, the Department is modifying its Landlord Verification and Shared Housing forms to require that they be signed under penalties of perjury. Perjury language has been added to the existing forms where appropriate. Please discard all old versions of these forms and use the revised versions.

18-070-0313-05

18-185-0313-05

VLA (Rev. 3/2013)

Shared Housing Form

18-083-0313-05

LL/VER (Rev. 3/2013)

Landlord Verification Form

The new consolidated *Month 22 Clock Review and Month 24 Adjustment Sheet (TAFDC-12)* form is used during the Exit Conference to verify that the client's 24 month clock is correct. Refer to Operations Memo 2013-9 for more information.

02-760-0313-05

TAFDC-12 (Rev. 3/2013)

Month 22 Clock Review and Month 24 Adjustment Sheet

The new consolidated *24 Month Extension Request and Agreement (24-EXR/A)* form is used by the client to request an extension. Refer to Operations Memo 2013-9 for more information.

02-737-0313-05

02-738-0313-05 (S)

24-EXR/A (Rev. 3/2013)

24 Month Extension Request and Agreement

Obsolete Forms

The following Extension-related forms are now obsolete. Refer to Operations Memo 2013-9 for more information. Please discard all old versions of these forms.

24-Month Clock Adjustment Review

Month 22 Clock Review Sheet

Extension Request

24 Month Extension Agreement

Operations Memos

SNAP: Replacement of Food Lost Due to Winter Storm (Nemo)

SNAP

Operations Memo 2013-8

Winter storm Nemo passed through New England on February 8 and 9, bringing significant damage to a number of communities. SNAP policy at 106 CMR 364.900 allows for the replacement of food destroyed by household misfortune, such as loss of electricity or fire. This Operations Memo reminds staff of the eligibility for replacement benefits under household misfortune rules and provides details regarding the mass replacement of benefits to eligible SNAP households residing in certain cities and towns of Barnstable, Bristol, Norfolk or Plymouth counties.

TAFDC – Extension Forms and Procedures Revised

TAFDC

Operations Memo 2013-9

The Department has a process for nonexempt clients to request an extension of TAFDC benefits beyond the 24-month period.

This memo provides new instructions for processing extension denials or approvals without using forms generated by the Extension Tracking/Notice Application (ETNA). This memo also includes information from Operations Memo 2012-37 which advised staff that certain extension forms were being eliminated or consolidated because the forms requested information that could be found on BEACON or duplicated information already asked of the client.

The purpose of this Operations Memo is to advise TAO staff about the streamlining of current forms and new procedures relating to the extension process.

TAFDC: DTA Client Survey

All

Operations Memo 2013-10

DTA periodically conducts surveys with randomly selected active clients. In the previous surveys, clients were asked to tell us what areas in which we were providing satisfactory services as well as what areas we could improve. This Operations Memo advises staff about a survey that was mailed to TAFDC Work Program-required clients.

The current survey was mailed only to TAFDC clients who are Work Program-required, and is intended to evaluate this population's experiences:

- meeting the Work Program requirement;
- obtaining benefits;
- contacting DTA; and
- to assess potential barriers to employment.

Operations Memos

Department Interpreter Services Procedures

All

Operations Memo 2013-11

This memo informs TAO and Central Office staff about interpreter services procedures.

To comply with federal law, the Department must advise applicants and clients (hereafter referred to as clients) of the right to professional interpreter services regardless of language, national origin or noncitizen status and must provide interpreter services to clients whose primary language is not English. Interpreter services must be provided to clients with Limited English Proficiency (LEP) at the first point of contact. Clients with LEP must not be turned away or told to return with an interpreter. The Department will provide a professional interpreter free of charge.

FYI

New Voter Registration Forms and Agency Workbook

The Secretary of State has revised its voter registration forms to reflect changes in the political parties. Updated forms include the agency voter registration forms and mail in voter registration forms. Local offices will be receiving a shipment of new forms in the very near future. Once an office receives the new forms, the office **must** ensure that the old forms are no longer used. Old forms should be recycled.

The Secretary of State has also revised the Workbook for Agencies to reflect the changes that are on the new voter registration forms. The [Workbook for Agencies](#) has been posted on the [Voter Registration Information page](#) of Policy Online. Copies can be ordered through Document Production at Schraffts.

TAO Meeting Notes