



DEVAL L. PATRICK
Governor

TIMOTHY P. MURRAY
Lieutenant Governor

Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Executive Office of Health and Human Services
Department of Transitional Assistance
600 Washington Street • Boston, MA 02111

JUDYANN BIGBY, M.D.
Secretary

JOHN A. WAGNER
Commissioner

Field Operations Memo 2007-16
March 15, 2007

To: Transitional Assistance Office Staff

From:  John Augeri, Assistant Commissioner for Field Operations

Re: The BEACON-Generated Food Stamp Application Appointment Letters and the Food Stamp Notice of Missed Interview

Overview

The 2006 Food Stamp Program Access Review conducted by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) focused on the application process. In a report of findings submitted to Central Office, USDA indicated that, when an applicant fails to appear for a scheduled interview, DTA does not send a Notice of Missed Interview. The other findings were addressed in Field Operations Memo 2006-33.

For many years, DTA had operated under a USDA-approved waiver that exempted the Department from notifying an applicant of a missed interview. USDA recently notified the Department that the waiver had expired and that we must now comply with the requirement to notify applicants when they miss the first scheduled application interview.

In response to USDA's Program Access Review findings and to be in full compliance with federal regulations, the Department has developed a *Notice of Missed Interview* (Attachment A) for use in all TAOs. This notice will be available as part of BEACON Increment 2.1.22 which will be deployed on March 26, 2007.

In addition, to further streamline the Food Stamp application process, the Food Stamp Application Appointment Letter for an In-Office Interview and the Food Stamp Application Appointment Letter for a Telephone Interview are being implemented as BEACON letters in this increment. These letters were previously transmitted by Field Operations Memo 2006-30 as manual forms.

Purpose of Memo

This memo provides AU Manager instructions for:

- sending the BEACON-generated Food Stamp Application Appointment Letters;
- sending the BEACON-generated Food Stamp Notice of Missed Interview; and
- scheduling an Appointment Interview after Day 30.

State Letter 1323 transmits the regulatory changes related to the Food Stamp Notice of Missed Interview.

Sending the Food Stamp Application Appointment Letter

When scheduling a Food Stamp application interview, AU Managers are reminded to contact the applicant on the day and time indicated by the applicant as most convenient to be reached by telephone.

The manual Food Stamp application form and the Web application collect information about the *Person Helping with Your Application*. Sometimes this person is a relative, friend or one of DTA's Food Stamp outreach partners. Outreach partners, like relatives or friends, are interested in helping the applicant obtain Food Stamp benefits. AU Managers should call the phone number listed under the *Person Helping with Your Application* section of the Food Stamp application if there is difficulty establishing contact with the applicant. The relative, friend or outreach partner is often able to assist DTA in connecting with the applicant. Establishing contact earlier in the application process enables timely screening, interviewing, and case processing.

Note: Outreach partners have been instructed to enter themselves as Emergency Contacts on the Assisting Person window of the Virtual Gateway Web application.

The Food Stamp Application Appointment Letter for an in-person or telephone interview must be sent to the applicant by Day 2 if the AU Manager is unable to speak with and screen the applicant on Day 1. AU Managers must:

- mail a *Food Stamp Application Appointment Letter for an In-Office Interview* if the applicant did not indicate a hardship waiver reason; or
 - mail a *Food Stamp Application Appointment Letter for a Telephone Interview* if the applicant indicated a hardship waiver reason on the Food Stamp application or if correspondence with the outreach partner or person helping with the application indicates a hardship reason.
-

**Sending the
Food Stamp
Application
Appointment
Letter
(Continued)**

Effective with Increment 2.1.22, the Food Stamp Application Letter for an In-Office Interview or Telephone Interview will be generated through BEACON. The AU Manager must:

- go to the *Schedule Appointment* icon on the *Transitional Assistance Office Group* window in the *Office Explorer* window;
- enter the SSN of the applicant (the window will populate with recipient and AU Manager information);
- select the appropriate appointment letter, (i.e. either *FS In-Office Interview* or *FS Telephone Interview*) from the dropdown list in the *Type* field;
- complete the *Date* and *Time* fields;
- enter additional free form text, if needed;
- select *Central Print*; and
- click on *Save*.

The Food Stamp Application Appointment Letters are also available as manual forms for use in instances when BEACON cannot be accessed, or when the RFA cannot be completed for the applicant.

**Sending the
Food Stamp
Notice of
Missed
Interview**

When an applicant misses the first scheduled in-office or telephone interview, the AU Manager must send the applicant a *Food Stamp Notice of Missed Interview* (FS-NOMI). The FS-NOMI must be sent to the applicant **as soon as possible** but no later than two days after the date of the missed interview.

To generate a FS-NOMI, the AU Manager must:

- go to the *Schedule Appointment* icon on the *Transitional Assistance Office Group* window or in the *Office Explorer* window;
- enter the SSN of the applicant (the window will populate with applicant and AU Manager information);
- select *NOMI* from the dropdown list in the *Type* field;
- select *Central Print*; and
- click on *Save*.

Note: The AU Manager does not have to enter a date or time on the FS-NOMI. The date field will populate with a date that is **thirty days from the date of application**. This represents the date by which the applicant must complete the application interview.

The FS-NOMI is also available as a manual notice for use in instances when BEACON cannot be accessed, or when the RFA cannot be completed for the applicant.

**Scheduling an
Interview
Appointment
after Day 30**

If the applicant contacts the AU Manager on or before Day 30, to reschedule the application interview, the AU Manager must make every effort to conduct the interview by Day 30.

Remember: The interview may be conducted in-person or by telephone if the applicant is eligible for a waiver of the face-to-face interview.

If the AU Manager is unable to conduct the interview by Day 30, the applicant is entitled to Food Stamp benefits *retroactive to the date of application*, if ultimately determined eligible for benefits.

Note: AU Managers must remember that, after an FS-NOMI is sent, the applicant may establish contact through one or more methods. Some applicants will go to the TAO while others may call, fax, drop-off or mail a note. If the AU Manager knows that an applicant made contact on or before Day 30 to reschedule the missed interview, the Benefit Effective Date for the Food Stamp application is the date of application.

The following procedures must be used in instances when the applicant contacts the AU Manager before Day 30 but the interview is scheduled after Day 30.

Example: An applicant with an SSN ending in 2 applies for Food Stamp benefits on January 10. The applicant missed the application interview that was scheduled for January 15. On January 16, the AU Manager sends an FS-NOMI informing the applicant of the missed interview. The AU Manager does not hear from the applicant until February 8, when the applicant calls and speaks with the AU Manager about rescheduling the missed interview. The AU Manager is not able to interview the applicant before Monday, February 12. However, by Day 30 (February 9), the AU Manager must either approve or deny the AU on BEACON.

The AU Manager must:

- reschedule the application interview appointment;
- inform the applicant that, although they called to reschedule the application interview, a denial notice will be sent;
- on Day 30 (**February 9**), deny the AU on BEACON for failure to complete the application process;

Note: If the applicant does not keep the subsequent interview appointment, the AU will remain in a denied status.

**Scheduling an
Interview
Appointment
after Day 30
(Continued)**

- subsequent to the application interview, establish a new Food Stamp application on BEACON with a Benefit Effective Date of the first day of the AU's cyclical month (*February 4*);
Note: If the applicant makes contact before Day 30, the applicant is not required to sign a new application form.
- complete the BEACON workflow to process the AU;
- perform a *What If* calculation to determine the amount of FS benefits owed from the date of initial application (*January 10*) to the day before the Benefit Effective Date (*February 3*);
- issue this amount as an *FSP Supplemental/Immediate Issuance* on the Related Benefits window; and
- wrap-up the interview and authorize the AU.
Note: Future BEACON enhancements will allow AUs that have been denied for failure to complete the application process to be reinstated.

Questions

If you have any questions, please have your Hotline designee call the Policy Hotline at 617-348-8478.

Notice of Missed Interview

Name: _____

Date: _____

Address: _____

Telephone Number: _____

You did not keep your appointment for the food stamp application interview that we scheduled for you. You must be interviewed on or before _____ so that a decision can be made on your application.

Your request for assistance will be denied if you do not complete the application interview on or before the above date.

If you wish to complete the application process, you must contact your worker as soon as possible.

FOOD STAMP APPLICATION WITHDRAWAL

If your circumstances have changed and you no longer wish to apply for food stamp benefits, you should check the box below, sign your name, then mail, fax or drop off this notice at your Transitional Assistance Office.

I wish to withdraw my food stamp application _____

Signature of Applicant

Date

Worker

Telephone Number

TAO Fax Number