



Transitions

A Publication of the Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance

this month in...

Transitions

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From the Commissioner

Dear Fellow Employees,

As you know, welfare reform has been a tremendous success in helping TAFDC recipients find employment and become self-sufficient. As this shift has occurred, the Department has put more energy and resources into post-employment services and ensuring that former recipients sustain their independence. We have added a substantial post-employment support component to our contracted employment and training services and you have worked hard to inform recipients of the range of these services. But before we can help someone to maintain independence, we must help them to achieve it.

The most important factor in helping former recipients maintain self-sufficiency, of course, is a job that lifts them and their families out of poverty. Since the first jobs that our recipients get as they transition off cash assistance may be at the lower end of the pay scale, it is crucial that these jobs be full-time (at least 35 hours per week). When the earned income tax credit and other supports such as food stamp benefits are considered, a full-time job at minimum wage is sufficient to lift most families above the poverty level. Equally important is the value of establishing a history as a reliable employee, which can open opportunities for advancement. The value of a full-time job will be pushed even higher in 2001, as a result of planned expansions of the state's minimum wage (to \$6.75 per hour) and earned income tax credit (to 15 percent of the federal credit). In addition, full-time jobs are more likely to include benefits such as health insurance, sick

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From the Forms File

New Forms

02-280-0800-05

02-281-0800-05 (S)

TES-TR-3 (8/2000)

Notice of Transfer Due to Shelter Termination

The TES-TR-3 is used when the Emergency Assistance AU's placement has been terminated by the shelter or hotel for violating rules or posing a threat to health or safety. See *EA Reference Guide* Chapter 4 for more information.

Revised Forms

02-202-0800-05

02-204-0800-05 (S)

TES-TR-1 (Rev. 8/2000)

Notice of Shelter Transfer

This revised notice will be sent to an Emergency Assistance AU being transferred to another shelter for a reason other than violating rules or posing a threat to health or safety. Refer to the *EA Reference Guide* Chapter 4 for more information.

13-170-0700-05

JOBLink-8 (Rev. 7/2000)

JOBLink Section 8 Housing Referral

This form has been revised to provide additional information about the recipient to the JOBLink Project Coordinator. See Field Operations Memo 2000-21 for more information.

02-177-0700-05

02-178-0700-05 (S)

FHRN (Rev. 7/2000)

Notice of Request for a Fair Hearing

This revised notice now lists two additional exceptions to the 90-day time limit on hearing requests; Schrafft's will distribute copies of the Department's new appeal forms with the revised language to local Transitional Assistance Offices. DTA appeal forms with the old language should be discarded.

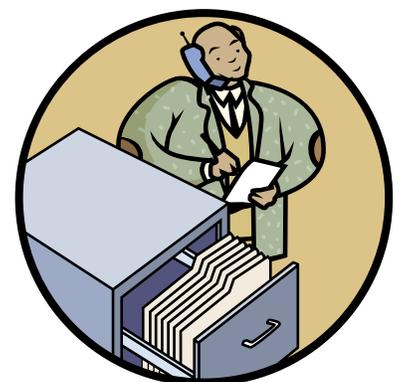
August 2000

Noncitizen Proration Calculation Workbook

FS/SSFSP

Field Operations Memo
2000-20

PACES automatically prorates the income and shelter/utility costs for most combination (FS/SSFSP) cases. However, due to systems limitations, there are currently situations in which the AU Manager must manually prorate the income and expenses of certain combination (FS/SSFSP) cases as well as any assistance unit containing a noncitizen(s) not legally residing in the U.S. The Noncitizen Proration Calculation Workbook is set up on the spreadsheet program, Lotus 123. The Noncitizen Proration Worksheets contained in this workbook will help AU Managers determine the prorated amount of income and/or expenses of certain noncitizens to be used in the calculation of food stamp benefits. The Noncitizen Proration Workbook was attached to a cc:Mail sent to Directors and Assistant Directors on July 6, 2000.



JOBLink Section 8 Housing Voucher Program

TAFDC, EA
Field Operations Memo
2000-21

This Field Operations Memo informs staff of the changes to the JOBLink Section 8 Voucher Program referral process.

- To be eligible for the program, the TAFDC recipient does not have to be subject to time-limited benefits.
- A critical housing need may be demonstrated by being in unstable or temporary accommodations; and
- Referrals are now faxed directly to the appropriate DHCD subcontractor (except referrals from Centralized Eligibility Operations).



Continued from Page 1

time and vacation time. These are invaluable to a single parent juggling multiple responsibilities.

The majority of our recipients are entering full-time jobs. Our placement and training vendors are already focused on guiding recipients into full-time work. To underscore the importance of placing recipients – especially time-limited recipients – in full-time jobs, the Department has modified its employment and training contracts. As of July 1, vendors who place recipients who are in their last three months of time-limited TAFDC benefits in jobs of less than 35 hours will receive only partial reimbursements. This change is a public recognition of the importance we place on a full-time job as the best way to achieve self-sufficiency.

As always, you play a vital role in emphasizing the importance of full-time jobs. I encourage you to complement the work of our vendors by continuing to remind recipients that full-time employment is the surest way to secure self-sufficiency, and that we can help with transportation, child care, health insurance, and other supports needed to retain a full-time job. Our success is the success of our recipients. Their success is best assured by a full-time job.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Claire McIntire".

Claire McIntire
Commissioner



COMMUNICATION is the KEY

Quality Corner

For the past few months this column has been focusing on errors caused primarily by AU Managers who fail to act correctly or who misinterpret policy. This month that focus will continue because these errors can most easily be corrected.

LANDLORD VERIFICATION: In the first instance, an AU Manager failed to question the information on a landlord verification form. The landlord verification in the case record was somewhat poorly handwritten and “400” could have been read as “9.00.” Without questioning this the worker used \$9.00 as the rent, with heat included. Nine dollars is an extraordinarily low rent. To have it include heat is even more unlikely. By looking at the most recent recertification first, the worker could have seen that the previous rent used was clearly \$400.

The worker should have called the landlord and questioned the rent amount, with heat, of \$9. By calling the landlord, she would have learned that the rent was \$400. By more accurately reading that heat was not included, or by realizing that oil heat, as indicated by the landlord, is rarely included with the rent, the food stamps could have been determined accurately.

If the recipient/applicant or collateral contact presents information that is not clear, or is at least questionable, the best practice is to question the source. After clarifying the situation, the worker needs to document the information, including how and when it was obtained. This will help ensure that the Quality Control reviewer’s finding will validate the accuracy of the benefits. A thoughtful, closer reading of the landlord verification form, and questioning/documenting could have avoided this error.

ANTICIPATING INCOME: At a recertification the worker used information from the most recent six weeks – five with earnings and one with no earnings because the recipient was sick and did not work. The worker divided the total of the five weeks of earnings by six, converted to a monthly amount and recertified the case.

There is no hard-and-fast rule for the number of weeks used to anticipate income. In this instance, however, unless we can assume that the recipient will be sick one sixth of the time, this was not the most reasonable way to anticipate income. Instead, the worker should have EXCLUDED the week with no pay from the averaging, divided the total by five, converted to a monthly figure, and used that amount.

It is important to note that you can (and MUST) use as many weeks’ income as you need to make the most accurate determination of the recipient’s likely income you can. If the income fluctuates frequently, more weeks are required; if it is stable, fewer are necessary. In any case, as with the landlord verification, document why you used the number of weeks you did, and the chances of an error will be reduced.



EA Shelter Transfer Notices

EA Emergency Assistance Reference Guide Update 003

When an EA AU's shelter placement is being changed from one shelter or hotel to another shelter or hotel, the EA recipient must be provided with written notice of the transfer.

- Use the TES-TR-3 to notify the recipient of a shelter transfer when the current shelter terminated the EA AU's placement due to violating rules or posing a threat to health or safety.
- Use the TES-TR-1 to notify the recipient of a shelter transfer for a reason other than violating rules or posing a threat to health or safety.



FYI

Authorization for Reimbursement of Emergency Aid to the Elderly, Disabled and Children Benefits from the SSI Retroactive Payment (AP-SSI-1) form

To become or remain eligible for EAEDC, anyone 65 or older, or anyone with a physical and/or mental impairment expected to last a year or more, must sign a new AP-SSI-1 form at application and each eligibility review. Since this form is valid for only one year, it is imperative that a new form be signed at least once per year. The AP-SSI-1 form authorizes reimbursement to the Department for EAEDC benefits received pending the SSI approval. The Department will receive the individual's SSI retroactive check, deduct any EAEDC benefits and forward the balance, if any, to the individual.

A copy of each AP-SSI-1 must remain in the case record. Do not replace the previous signed form with the newly signed form. Retaining all AP-SSI-1 forms will ensure proper reimbursement if an SSI application is filed and approved.

If an SSI application is denied, be sure to have another AP-SSI-1 signed; the previous one is no longer valid once a decision has been reached. However, it must remain in the case record.

If an SSI application is approved, the individual is ineligible for EAEDC.

For more detailed information refer to 106 CMR 702.710(B).



FYI

Recipient Mailing for Meals/Milk Program for Children in School or Child Care

The notice shown below is being mailed during the month of August to all TAFDC and Food Stamp assistance units with a child(ren) age 19 or under. Enclosed with the informational card will be a systems-generated verification of eligibility for TAFDC or food stamp benefits. The purpose of this mailing is to promote access to the free meals/milk program, if the child's school or child care program provides one.

If a recipient contacts you because he or she did not receive this mailing or if the card was lost, have the recipient call the Income Verification Unit at 1-800-632-8095 and ask for the *School Meals Verification Form*.

All children age 19 and under receiving TAFDC or food stamp benefits (PA or NPA) are eligible for the meals/milk program.

Domestic Violence Specialist Personal Identification Numbers (PIN)

Field Operations Memo 2000-19

- The Department has recently changed paging services. New PINs for the DV Specialists were included in this Field Operations Memo.
- To page the DV Specialist, call 1-800-347-2574, enter the PIN of the specified DV Specialist and give your message to the operator.

Information Regarding Meals Program for Children in School or Child Care

The Department of Transitional Assistance is sending you the enclosed form to help you enroll your child in the meals/milk program, if your child's school or child care program provides one. As shown on the form, your child is eligible for the meals/milk program because he or she receives TAFDC or food stamp benefits. The information on this form is confidential. The school or child care program may only use this information to enroll your child in the meals/milk program.

If you choose to participate, please:

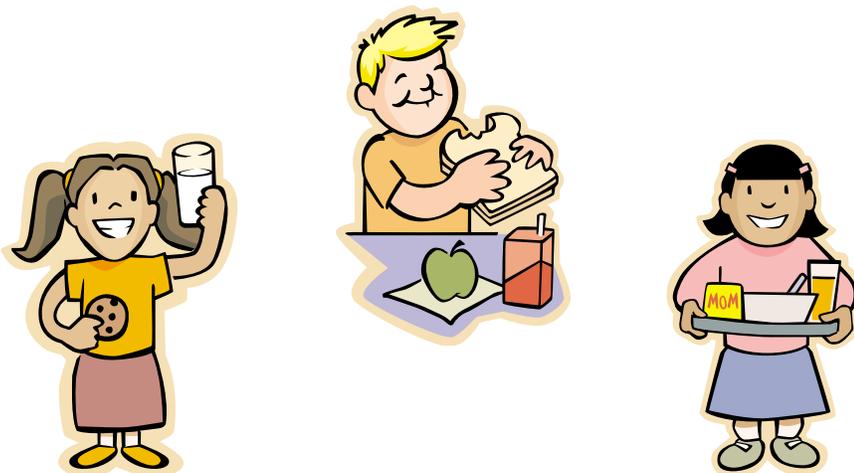
- Sign the enclosed form; and
- Immediately take or send it to the school or child care program your child will attend.

If your eligibility for TAFDC or food stamp benefits stops, you must tell your school or child care program. Your child's eligibility may continue, depending on your income.

If your child's school or child care program does not accept the enclosed card, you will have to fill out a separate application form. If you have questions, please call your child's school or child care program.

No child may be discriminated against because of race, sex, color, national origin, or handicap in the operation of Child Nutrition Programs. If you believe your child has been discriminated against, write immediately to the Secretary of Agriculture, Washington, DC 20250. sch-meal (8/00)

Every
Job
is
a
Good
Job



FYI

TAFDC COLA

The State FY2001 Budget which the Legislature has passed and the Governor has signed, contains language for a 10 percent cost of living increase for all TAFDC recipients effective July 1, 2000. In addition, the current EA Shelter Standard will be used to determine eligibility for all EA services. Regulations, systems work and procedures are currently being finalized to implement these changes. It is anticipated that the changes will take place during August, retroactive to July 1, 2000. You will be notified prior to any changes occurring.

All active and closed TAFDC cases closed on or after July 1, 2000 will have their retroactive TAFDC payments calculated automatically by Systems. In most instances, the system will also automatically recalculate food stamp benefits. All TAFDC cases denied for income-related reasons on or after July 1, 2000 until the date of implementation of the COLA will need to be reviewed by TAO Staff. Lists of these denied cases will be provided to TAOs. Therefore, TAO Staff are reminded that ALL TAFDC applications must be established on PACES in an "03" status as soon as the application is taken to track denied applications. TAO staff will also receive lists of certain food stamp cases where action will need to be taken to

manually adjust food stamp benefits for September due to the new TAFDC amounts.

Additionally, TAO Staff are asked to keep a log of all EA applications, except temporary emergency shelter applications, denied for financial reasons on or after July 1. These cases will need to be reviewed for eligibility under the new standards.

There is no increase in the EAEDC PNA.

FYI

Educational Assistance Income for Cash and Food Stamp Benefits

Educational assistance income (scholarships, loans, grants, etc.) after exclusions must be averaged over the period which it covers. **However, educational assistance income is not counted until it is actually available to the student (received or credited on account).** A Quality Control error will result if educational assistance income is counted before it is available to the student.

Example:

A student is granted \$1000 from a non-Title IV source for housing which is determined to be countable for cash and/or food stamp purposes. The EDUC-1 indicates that this grant covers the period of September 2000 through December 2000. The grant must be averaged over the four months it is intended to cover: $\$1000/4 = \250 . On October 13, 2000, the student notifies you that she received payment. Begin adverse action to deduct the \$250 monthly countable average. The \$250 countable monthly average affects cash and food stamp benefits beginning in November 2000 and continues through December 2000. The \$250 countable average is disregarded for the months of September and October.

September	\$250	Disregarded
October	\$250	Disregarded
November	\$250	Countable
December	\$250	Countable

The student must notify you within 10 days of receipt of educational assistance income.