

Transitions

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this month in...

Transitions

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From the Commissioner

Dear Fellow Employees,

A year ago we looked toward a new century and millennium. Our fascination with that once-in-a-lifetime event was tempered by concern about potential Y2K computer issues. Twelve months later the world's computer systems are still humming and we take the year 2000 in stride. As an agency, we have continued to juggle a wide range of issues and concerns. It has not always been easy, but we are moving in the right direction. Our direction is based on the Department's FY 2001 goals which you received in late summer. Those six goals continue to be our primary focus.

Today many of you are engaged in activities supporting the implementation of BEACON Release 2.0. I recognize that these activities are not without problems and issues. But I also know that these activities, and resolving the issues which they may raise, are critical to the implementation of BEACON. And that implementation is critical to our overall mission and our future success.

Expanding support services to working families to ensure a successful transition off welfare continues to be a cornerstone of our work. Post-Employment Services, Access to Jobs, FOR Families and continued food stamp and child care eligibility are some of the programs to assist these families. In many ways, our greatest success is measured by those who no longer need us. These programs lead the way in that area.

Meeting federal work participation targets and achieving program accuracy goals in the Food Stamp Program may sound somewhat dry and technical but are one of the key public measures by which we are judged. This has not been our best year in the area of food stamp accuracy. But I believe that the aggressive steps we have

From the Hotline

- Q. A TAFDC assistance unit consists of a grantee/mother, her 16-year-old daughter who is a teen parent, and the teen parent's baby. DOR states the teen parent did not furnish accurate information on the baby's father/absent parent. Who is sanctioned, the grantee/mother or the teen parent?
- A. The teen parent is sanctioned. See 106 CMR 203.700(D) and 203.700(E).
- Q. A recipient is home schooling her children. She has a schooling plan which has been approved by her local school board. Does this meet her TAFDC Work Program requirements? Does it meet the Learnfare requirements?
- A. As long as the recipient is meeting the requirements of the approved schooling plan, home schooling meets the Community Service requirement of the Work Program. Children meeting the requirements of an approved home schooling plan meet the Learnfare requirements.
- Q. Is a TAFDC teen parent over the age of 18 with a child over age two living in a TLP exempt or nonexempt?
- A. The teen parent is exempt. See 106 CMR 203.100(A)(1)(f).
- Q. When would an exception to the Family Cap date apply?
- A. A child born after the Family Cap date may be included in the TAFDC assistance unit if: (1) the child is born at least 20 months after the date the grantee's case closed, and (2) the grantee remained ineligible for at least 12 consecutive months from the closing date, and (3) the grantee received TAFDC for no more than 10 consecutive months immediately preceding the child's birth. Also, a child born as a result of rape, sexual assault or incest is not subject to the Family Cap provisions. See 106 CMR 203.300(C)(2). An example is given in *The TAFDC Procedural Guide*, Chapter 6, page 16.
- Q. Is a child born after the Family Cap date and not included in the TAFDC assistance unit eligible for the crib and layette or the clothing allowance?
- A. No. A child born after the Family Cap date and not included in the assistance unit is ineligible for a crib and layette or the clothing allowance. See 106 CMR 705.600.

From the Forms File

New Form

The following form is now available in Spanish.

02-753-1100-05

24-EX-AR (S)(11/2000)

Additional Extension Request

Revised Brochure

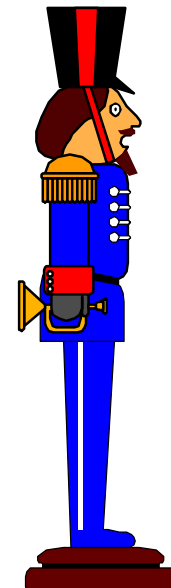
02-740-1100-05

02-741-1100-05 (S)

TAFDC-EXTB (Rev. 11/2000)

TAFDC Extensions Beyond the 24-Month Period

This brochure has been revised to reflect policy and procedural changes due to the Smith lawsuit, specifically: 1) there is no longer a special financial test of eligibility before processing extension requests; and 2) the 35-hour per week participation rule is no longer an eligibility requirement.



FYI

Reminder: Helping Applicants and Recipients Verify Eligibility

When establishing eligibility or continued eligibility for Department programs, AU Managers must remember to help applicants and recipients obtain required verifications if they are unable to obtain verifications for reasons beyond their control. Also, if a verification is unavailable to an applicant or recipient, the AU Manager should notify the person of alternative methods of verifications, including self-declaration and collateral contacts. Refer to 106 CMR 702.310 and 106 CMR 702.311 for more details on verifying eligibility in Transitional Cash Assistance Programs (TAFDC and EAEDC).

The Food Stamp Program requirements similarly state that if a household has difficulty presenting sufficient documentation, the AU Manager should help the household obtain the verification(s). Collateral contacts are also an acceptable method of verification. Refer to 106 CMR 361.650 for more information on verification responsibilities in the Food Stamp Program.

Continued from Page 1

taken, including the desk review of food stamp cases conducted last summer, will help us to achieve our accuracy goals.

The EA program and the families it serves continue to be a major concern. In October the Housing Assistance Program (HAP) began providing prevention services to families at risk of losing their housing. In January, HAP will expand and provide more services to families in shelters. Contracts with shelters are also being redone. The goal of these activities is to provide more direct and appropriate services to these families in crisis.

Collaborating with other agencies to provide work opportunities for recipients is something we have done successfully for a number of years. This year we are expanding that collaboration to focus on employment opportunities for recipients with significant barriers. A recent agreement with the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission will develop a special program to assist disabled recipients who want to work. I am very excited about this program and will share more details about it with you in the near future.

Increasing efficiency and the delivery of services through the use of technology is very important. This new century will see technological changes not yet dreamed about. For some of us this technological change is overwhelming, for some, exciting. However, technology is here and we must use it to our advantage. We have made progress—our Department web site has been well received and is visited frequently, the Department intranet is being piloted, offices are now able to order forms online from Document Production, Policy Online continues to be expanded to offer easy access to information, e-mail is a quick way to communicate the same information to a large number of people. This is progress but we need to do more—and we will.

Together we have worked hard and have achieved a great deal. But the “to-do” list has no end. Through hard work we will continue to do our best for those we serve. Thank you for that continued hard work during this past year. I also wish you and your families the happiest of holiday seasons.

Sincerely,



Claire McIntire
Commissioner

FYI

A User's Guide: Transitional Assistance Programs and BEACON

During November you received a draft of *A User's Guide: Transitional Assistance Programs and BEACON* (November 2000). This guide has been developed by Policy and Procedure to provide combined program and BEACON procedures for TAO staff. Copies of the August 2000 draft sent to some TAOs should be discarded.

A User's Guide follows the flow of work in BEACON and will be divided into 20 chapters. It integrates existing programmatic procedures with BEACON function. This material often combines current policy and procedures along with an explanation of BEACON Release 2.0 processes, because you must be able to navigate through the BEACON windows with the Department's programmatic rules in mind. This draft was issued to TAOs to help in that process and to be used with the Pilot Activities described in Field Operations Memo 2000-31. The *Guide* will be finalized before full BEACON implementation.

We welcome your input on all aspects of *A User's Guide*. Is the layout practical and helpful? Are there additional areas which you believe need to be included? Have we provided too much or too little detail? Your comments, questions and ideas are welcome. Please forward your comments to the BEACON Action Center.

***Smith v. McIntire* Lawsuit**

TAFDC

Field Operations Memo 2000-25 D

This Field Operations Memo informs TAO Staff about the Court order instructing the Department to send out an additional mailing about the *Smith v. McIntire* Lawsuit. The mailing also includes a separate notice from the Massachusetts Law Reform Institute. Finally, the Field Operations Memo gives instructions for processing recipients and former recipients who receive this mailing and request an extension.

BEACON Release 2.0 Pilot Activities

All Field Operations Memo 2000-31

- During this phase of the pilot, AU Managers, TAO Supervisors and Implementation Managers began performing pilot activities on November 13, 2000 and will continue through December 22, 2000.
- AU Managers will continue to process their casework activities by entering information on PACES, PRISM, ARTS and BEACON Release 1.0. All payments will continue to be issued from FMCS based upon information received from PACES.
- At the same time, AU Managers will enter specified casework activities in the BEACON Release 2.0 pilot environment. This activity will exercise all functions of the system.

FYI

Eliminating Paper Copies of the Case Processing Schedules

Beginning with the first quarter of 2001, paper copies of the Case Processing Schedules which have been previously transmitted by *The Online Update* will no longer be issued on paper. All new Case Closing and Reduction Schedules which revise the Food Stamp Cyclical Month Schedules and provide payment schedules for each of the four quarters will be available from Policy Online.

This change standardizes the distribution of this information and eliminates the need for staff to maintain paper documents.

In the future, paper copies of additional appendices will also be eliminated and the information will be available through Policy Online.

FYI

State Verification Eligibility System (SVES) - RSDI/SSI Income Inquiry

The SVES on-line individual Inquiry System is an invaluable tool to TAO staff to get the most updated information available from Social Security on RSDI/SSI income. Refer to *Systems User's Guide*, Volume 5: *Subsystems*, Chapter VI for more information.

TAO inquiry requests are batched and sent nightly to SSA with responses generally provided the next morning. Since this information represents a "snapshot in time" of SSA file data, it is subject to change. TAO staff should submit a new inquiry to obtain the most current data available.

Accessing SVES and using current information on RSDI/SSI benefits received by AUs can be instrumental in correctly determining eligibility and benefits, thereby reducing the Department's statewide Quality Control error rate.

SEASON'S GREETINGS

FROM
POLICY, PROCEDURE
AND
PROGRAM MANAGEMENT

