

T Transitions

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this month in...

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From the Commissioner

Dear Fellow Employees,

When I wrote to you last month I gave you a broad overview of the issues facing the Department because of the current fiscal situation. Since then I have corresponded with some of you individually by e-mail and most recently with all of you on January 18. I want to take this opportunity to bring you up to date on where we stand today.

During the week of January 22, layoff notices were issued to Unit 8 staff. On January 18, I believed the number of required layoffs would be 220. When the notices were issued the number had been reduced to 160. One of the reasons this reduction was possible was anticipated savings from Unit 8 staff who have already applied for the Early Retirement Incentive Program. Eligible staff have until February 15 to apply for early retirement. I remain hopeful that the number of layoffs can be reduced further once the final early retirement numbers are known.

But even with these reductions, the DTA world will change dramatically. The closing of the Athol office on January 25 resulted in shifts of staff and cases to the Worcester, Greenfield and Fitchburg offices. We continue to review other lease commitments to determine if additional office consolidations, resulting in administrative savings, are possible. If these occur, there will be corresponding shifts of staff and cases. But even without office consolidations, every employee must understand that it is highly unlikely their job in February, March or April will be identical to the job they had in October or November. No agency can absorb staff losses of this magnitude and not make adjustments to the way it operates.

From the Hotline

- Q What is the difference between abandoning a shelter placement and refusing shelter placement?
- A. Abandoning a shelter placement occurs after the family is already staying in a shelter, hotel or motel and the family disappears or doesn't return to the shelter. Send an NFL-9 terminating shelter benefits due to abandoning placement AND having feasible alternative housing (the family is living somewhere else).

Refusing shelter placement can occur for an initial placement or as a transfer from one shelter, hotel or motel to another.

- At application, the applicant is found eligible for EA and is given the NFL-9 approving EA benefits. A shelter placement is found for the EA applicant, who then refuses to go to that shelter. The family has been approved for EA benefits but refuses to accept, and therefore must be sent an NFL-9 terminating the EA benefits due to refusal to accept shelter placement.
- A new shelter placement has been found for the EA AU. The Shelter Transfer notice (TES-TR-1) has been sent/given to the EA AU but the recipient refuses to go. The recipient must be sent an NFL-9 terminating the EA benefits due to refusal to accept shelter placement.

Note #1 In the above examples, the 12-month eligibility rule will apply if the EA AU reapplies for EA benefits.

Note #2 If the recipient is sent on an interview for another shelter placement and refuses to go to the interview without good cause, send the documentation into the Noncompliance Committee for review.

- Q. Is a food stamp recipient's babysitting income considered "self-employment" income and, if so, would she be exempt from Quarterly Reporting?
- A. Yes.



- Q. I have a TAFDC applicant whose car has a fair market value of \$14,800. She owes \$11,300. Is this applicant within the TAFDC asset limit?
- A. No. The fair market value of the car is \$14,800. The first \$10,000 of the fair market value is not countable. The difference (\$4,800) is a countable asset. Therefore the applicant's assets exceed the \$2,500 limit.

Note: The first \$5,000 of equity value is not countable. Since the equity value is less than \$5,000 (\$14,800 - \$11,300 = \$ 3,500), the equity value would not be a countable asset.

BEACON Todays Issued in January 2002

- BT 68 BENDEX/SDX COLA and Federal/State Clocks (01/15/02)
- BT 69 NPA Food Stamp and Timely Case Closings (01/25/02)
- BT 70 BEACON Release 2.0.12 (01/25/02)
- BT 70A BEACON Release 2.0.12 (01/28/02)

FYI

Family Cap Exception/ Waiver Request (EX/WVREQ-1) Form

This form (listed in January 2002 *Transitions* Forms File) has been revised to request more information about the custodial parent. Currently, a TAFDC assessed person can request that a child born after her family cap date be added to her grant through two different processes, each requiring a different form: 1) a waiver or exception, approved or denied at the TAO level; or 2) a waiver due to domestic violence, approved or denied at the Central Office level. The form revises the EX/WVREQ (02-602-0497-05 (Rev. 4/97)) used to request the former, to obtain more thorough information, and to reference the domestic violence process as a reminder that it is also available as an option. The Spanish version will be available soon.

*"Life is short, we
get old so fast.
It doesn't make
sense to waste
time on hating."*

Muhammad Ali

Continued from Page 1

I have instructed central office staff, with the input of local office staff, to review programs and practices to determine if there are ways we can meet our primary responsibility, providing benefits to eligible Massachusetts residents, in new and more efficient ways. In particular I am focused on fundamental changes in the Food Stamp Program. I have met with officials from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and informed them of the issues we face. I have told them that I want to pursue elimination of all face-to-face interviews, use of mail and phone interviews and other administrative simplifications. With fewer staff, we must operate more efficiently. Office interview time should be focused on recipients who truly need to be in the office, not those who are there merely to fill out forms and drop off verifications. We all must think differently and utilize what we know to figure out new, streamlined ways to do our business. My initial focus is on the Food Stamp Program, but we will review all programs-TAFDC, EAEDC, EA, ESP-to seek efficiencies and to determine that reduced staff resources are used appropriately.

None of this is easy. Reducing layoffs from 220 to 160 is little comfort if you are in the 160. I know that some staff have felt that the Department, and I personally, have not done everything possible to prevent this. This is simply not true. Nothing in my career in this Department has been as personally devastating to me as this layoff action. If anything more could have been done to avoid it, I would have done it. I will also continue to work to reduce the number of required layoffs. At the same time, I will work hard to determine new and more efficient methods to do our job.

Sincerely,



Claire McIntire
Commissioner



COMMUNICATION is the KEY

Quality Corner

The following analysis of three recent Quality Control errors may help AU Managers identify and correct problems.

Riverside Sanction

A mother was sanctioned and removed from the TAFDC case early in May 2001. Under the "Riverside" rules, the AU Manager entered an amount of unearned income in the food stamps unearned income section (to avoid increasing the food stamp benefits when sanctioned for a cash assistance reason). Two weeks later, the sanction was lifted for the cash case, but the amount of unearned income was not removed for the food stamp benefits. This resulted in an underissuance error since the food stamp benefits were not increased after the sanction was removed. A recent *BEACON Today* (#64, December 12, 2001) noted: after removing the sanction from the AU Composition Results window, the AU Manager must indicate that the FS Attributed Amount no longer exists.

What Can an AU Manager Do?

When removing the sanction and restoring the cash benefits for Riverside cases, the AU manager must be sure to remove the unearned income from the food stamps portion of the case. If there is more than one source of unearned income, be sure to remove only the sanction-related amount.

Noncitizen, Legal Permanent Resident

A food stamp assistance unit consists of a mother and her child. The mother had entered the country in 1982 at age nine. To be eligible as a noncitizen she needed to be disabled (she was not), to be under 18 (also not) or to have 40 quarters of work. Since she did not have sufficient quarters, she was determined ineligible for food stamp benefits. Under food stamp policy, however, she can use the combined quarters that her parents worked before she was 18. Since together they had worked sufficient quarters before her 18th birthday, she is eligible for federal food stamp benefits.

What Can an AU Manager Do?

If the noncitizen is over 18, is not disabled, and has insufficient work experience, check the parents' work histories. Even adults who entered the country as children can use quarters worked by their parents before the child is 18. For noncitizen cases that don't meet the other eligibility criteria, a parent's work quarters may help establish eligibility.

February 2002

New TAFDC 60-Month Period

TAFDC

A User's Guide: Transitional Assistance Programs and BEACON Update 020

This BEACON Update adds information about the impact of a new 60-month period on TAFDC AUs. The sections updated are: applications, work requirements, disability, domestic violence, extensions and time limits.

FYI

Division of Hearings (DOH) Address Change

On January 9, 2002, DOH moved to DTA Central Office. The new address is 600 Washington Street, 2nd floor, Boston, MA 02111. The new phone numbers are:

Main # 617 348-5321

Fax # 617 348-5311

TTY # 617 348-5337

The 800 number remains the same, 1-800-882-2017. The mailing address remains P.O. Box 167 Essex Station, Boston, MA 02112-0167. Supplies of the appropriate appeal forms with the revised Notice of Request for a Fair Hearing (FHRN) (Rev.1/2002) have been shipped to TAOs.

From the Forms File

Revised Forms

The TES-EPR-1 form has been revised by removing the section on physically challenged and replacing it with "Special Circumstances Affecting Placement," which includes physical disabilities and other special circumstances. Also, the authorization period may now be up to 14 days.

13-220-1201-05

TES-EPR-1 (Rev. 12/2001) Emergency Placement Request

The following two forms have been revised, to give the new phone numbers for the Division of Hearings.

02-148-0102-05

02-147-0102-05 (S)

DOH-10 (Rev. 1/2002) Request for a Fair Hearing

02-177-0102-05

02-178-0102-05 (S)

FHRN (Rev. 1/2002)

Notice of Request for a Fair Hearing

Revised Flyers

These Earned Income Credit (EIC) flyers have been updated to reflect the year 2001 tax information. They should be placed in TAO reception areas.

18-300-0202-05

18-301-0202-05 (S)

18-302-0202-05

EIC-1 Give Your Paycheck a Boost!

Revised Poster

This poster explains the Earned Income Credit (EIC). Posters should be displayed in Transitional Assistance Office reception areas.

Give Your Paycheck a Boost!

FYI

Earned Income Credit (EIC)

The notices shown below are being included in TAFDC Monthly Reports mailed during February and with Food Stamp Quarterly Reports for earnings cases mailed during February and March. The purpose of the mailing is to inform recipients of both the federal EIC and the Massachusetts EIC for earnings during the year 2001. In addition to the notices, federal EIC posters and flyers are being sent to the Transitional Assistance Offices and should be placed in the reception areas and made available to all recipients.

Give Your Paycheck a Boost! Claim Your Tax Credits

You could be eligible!

Did you work in 2001? You may be eligible for the Earned Income Credit. If so, you'll save less in taxes and you could get cash back. Even if you don't owe income tax, you can get the EIC!

- Were you raising one child in your home in 2001? Did your family earn less than \$28,281? You can get an EIC up to **\$2,428**.
- Were you raising more than one child in your home in 2001? Did your family earn less than \$32,121? You can get an EIC up to **\$4,008**.
- If you weren't raising a child, did you earn less than \$10,710 in 2001? Were you between the ages 25 and 64? You can get an EIC up to **\$364**.

Here's how you get it:

- If you were raising children in 2001, file federal tax return Forms 1040 or 1040A, not Form 1040EZ. Be sure to attach Schedule EC.
- If you weren't raising children in 2001, just file any federal tax return.

Boost your take-home pay! Eligible workers with children can get Advance EIC in their paycheck. Get Form W-5 from your employer, or call 1-800-TAX-FORM.

New! Extra Credit if you earned more than \$10,000! Many families may now qualify for the Child Tax Credit — up to \$600 for each dependent child under age 17! See your tax instructions and get Form 8812.

Want more information? Want to find out how you can get your tax forms filed out for free? Call the IRS toll-free at 1-800-829-1040.

Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance
Massachusetts Earned Income Credit

A refundable Massachusetts Earned Income Credit is available to certain taxpayers who have earned income for 2001 and meet the requirements of the federal Earned Income Credit (EIC). The Massachusetts Earned Income Credit is equal to 15 percent of the federal EIC.

To qualify for the Massachusetts Earned Income Credit: (1) You must qualify for and claim the federal EIC for 2001; (2) You must file a Massachusetts tax return even if you do not owe any tax; (3) Your total taxable and nontaxable earned income must exceed \$1 and (4) Your total taxable and nontaxable income must be less than \$10,709 if you do not have a qualifying child, less than \$28,280 if you have a qualifying child, or less than \$32,120 if you have more than one qualifying child. There are some other rules you must meet to get the Massachusetts Earned Income Credit.

If you need information or have any questions about the Massachusetts Earned Income Credit or need other assistance on your state tax filing, please call the Massachusetts Department of Revenue (DOR) at (617) 887-MDOR or toll-free in Massachusetts 1-800-392-6089.

MISC (2002)

2002 Social Security/SSI COLA Update for TAFDC, EA, EAEDC and the Food Stamp Program

All

Field Operations Memo 2002-1

Effective January 2002, Social Security benefits and SSI payments increased by 2.6 percent. The basic Medicare Part B premium increased from \$50.00 to \$54.00 per month. The Medicare Part B penalty premium also increased. This memo identifies:

- general BEACON activities for processing 2002 Social Security/Supplemental Security Income (SSI) COLA;
- AU Manager and Supervisor-required activity to prepare for 2002 Social Security/SSI COLA; and
- a new View that was developed to identify all assessed persons receiving RSDI and/or SSI.

All

Field Operations Memo 2002-2

This memo:

- explains how BEACON updated assessed persons with the 2002 Social Security/SSI COLA amounts and recalculated eligibility for the active AUs containing the updated assessed persons;
- provides a description of the "Clients With RSDI and/or SSI" View and explains which AUs listed on the View require AU Manager action;
- gives procedures for AU Managers to update AUs with discrepant 2002 Social Security/SSI COLA amounts; and
- includes the 2002 Medicare Part B Surcharge Premiums as a separate attachment for those AUs not automatically adjusted from \$50.00 to \$54.00. AUs who pay the premium surcharge amounts must have those amounts entered by the AU Manager at the next reevaluation.

Hotel/Motel Revisions in Chapter IV

EA

EA User's Guide: Emergency Assistance, SSI Special Benefits and BEACON
Update 003

The ***EA User's Guide: Emergency Assistance, SSI Special Benefits and BEACON*** Update 003 issues the following changes:

- The hotel/motel and transfer information transmitted in Field Operations Memo 2001-36 is included in the *EA User's Guide*;
- The length of time for a hotel/motel placement authorization may be up to 14 days;
- The Emergency Placement Request form (TES-EPR-1 (12/2001)) collects information about "Special Circumstances Affecting Placement," such as an EA member in wheelchair, unable to climb stairs, DV perpetrator is living in the area, etc.;
- Completing another TES-EPR-1 and/or SSPS invoice to ensure continuation of the EA shelter benefits when the AU record is transferred to another TAO; and
- Calling COHD when the EA AU is transferred to another TAO.

EA Shelter Terminations

EA
State Letters 1215 and
1215A

EA User's Guide: Emergency Assistance, SSI Special Benefits and BEACON Update 004

This state letter and update
issues two EA shelter termination
clarifications by stating:

- that there must be reasonable cause to believe that a member of the EA AU engaged in or is engaging in criminal activity that threatens or threatened the health, safety and/or security of another shelter resident, staff person, guest or a member of the EA AU; and
- the shelter benefits will be terminated if the EA AU abandons the shelter placement.

Note: Due to a technical problem, State Letter 1215A obsoletes State Letter 1215.



FYI

www.gettingfoodstamps.org – Check it Out

www.gettingfoodstamps.org is a comprehensive web site designed to educate Massachusetts residents about the Food Stamp Program. Developed by Project Bread with funding from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), the site offers individuals an opportunity to learn about food stamp benefits and to use a simple calculation program to determine their probable eligibility and benefit level. The site also allows interested individuals to download a food stamp application and provides information on the types of verifications that will be needed to complete a food stamp application. The site clearly informs interested individuals that they must make their application at a DTA office and that only DTA can determine actual food stamp eligibility. It also encourages individuals to complete only the Request for Assistance and to simply review the balance of the application to familiarize themselves with the questions they will be asked when they apply. All DTA offices will be receiving posters and flyers for the waiting area which contain information about the web site.

The focus of the USDA grant is to determine if new and different outreach techniques can boost use of the site and increase participation in the Food Stamp Program. To promote use of the web site, Project Bread has partnered with computer access sites in Boston and Berkshire County, particularly the city of Pittsfield. The web site will be marketed by a variety of programs in these areas.

DTA has agreed to collect information statewide to determine how the web site is used. Requests for Assistance which are downloaded from the web site will have a special "Project Bread Web Site" box pre-checked in the section "Who is making the request?" When such an application is entered into BEACON, the AU manager should select "Other" in the corresponding "Who Made Request" section of the BEACON application and enter "Project Bread Web Site" in the appropriate box. This is particularly important in the Boston and Pittsfield offices and staff in these offices will be receiving more information on the web site project.

