



T Transitions

A Publication of the Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance

this month in...

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From the Commissioner

Dear Fellow Employees,

I have tried over the last few months to keep you informed of budget issues and of the personnel ramifications of those issues. Despite a variety of efforts to reduce spending, it is clear that the funding level of the Department's administrative accounts will require issuing layoff notices. On August 27 and August 30, I sent you memos outlining some of the details of those layoffs. I am using this opportunity to restate some of the information in those memos because it is critically important that all DTA staff are fully informed on this issue.

We have taken a number of steps to reduce spending. The Northampton office closed in August and the Roslindale office is scheduled to close in September. All offices, including central office, are being reviewed to determine if additional savings can be achieved either through closings or reductions in the amount of leased space. A second voluntary layoff incentive program was offered. But it is clear that these, and other savings efforts, will not be sufficient. Personnel costs account for \$96 million of the Department's \$121 million administration appropriation from the FY '03 budget. While we have taken steps to reduce spending, and will continue to explore other possibilities, it is unfortunately unavoidable that we will have to significantly reduce our personnel costs.

Layoffs will be Department-wide. Every unit in the Department has been reviewed and the entire Department will be impacted. The Department has received approval of its layoff plan from the Executive Office of Health and Human Services. The Commonwealth's

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Hotline Focus

September's Hotline Focus addresses policy revisions associated with the FY 03 budget changes.

Q. A family came into our office applying for TAFDC and EA benefits last week. It was determined that the entire AU was ineligible for TAFDC as none of the AU members met the TAFDC noncitizen requirements. Since each AU member has a PRUCOL status, how does the elimination of the STAFDC program impact this AU's eligibility for EA benefits?

A. Noncitizen requirements for TAFDC benefits are more restrictive than noncitizen requirements for EA benefits. To be eligible for EA benefits, a noncitizen must be lawfully admitted for permanent residence or permanently residing under color of law. In other words, any former STAFDC AU, if otherwise eligible, may apply for and receive EA benefits. For the family described above, as long as at least one member of the EA AU has PRUCOL status, the entire EA AU is eligible for benefits.

Q. A mother and child came in to my office to apply for Emergency Assistance. They were requesting payment of their rent arrearages. I explained that our Department no longer covers this benefit but the mother insisted that I take her EA application. Can we continue to take applications for a benefit we are no longer providing?

A. Yes. An individual applying for EA rental arrearage payments must be informed that these benefits have been eliminated and cannot be authorized. However, everyone has the right and must be afforded the opportunity to apply for any Department benefit. If an individual insists on applying for this benefit, you must take the application and deny the request by completing the NFL- 9 (Rev. 8/2001) using 106 CMR 309. et. seq. as the manual citation and "Rental arrearages are not an EA benefit" as the reason for the denial.

Q. I know disaster benefits have been eliminated but a family applied for EA shelter benefits today because they are victims of a fire. Can I authorize shelter benefits?

A. As long as this EA AU has not received EA benefits in the previous 12 months, they may be approved for shelter, if otherwise eligible. If they have received EA benefits, whether for shelter or rental arrearages or disaster benefits, in the previous 12 months, their request would

have to be denied. The elimination of disaster benefits removed the special provision that allowed families to receive EA benefits twice in a 12-month period if the second instance was the result of a disaster.

Also, an SSI recipient continues to be eligible for SSI Special Benefits in the event of a natural disaster or fire.

FYI

Food Stamp Benefits for Disabled Recipients

Effective October 1, the Food Stamp Farm Bill makes certain noncitizens who are disabled eligible for FSP benefits rather than SSFSP benefits, regardless of their date of entry into the U.S. MIS will automatically convert SSFSP recipients identified as disabled on the BEACON Disability window to FSP. AU managers should make every effort to update the Disability Window for any recipient who meets disability criteria. Some SSFSP recipients who are elderly also meet disability criteria and should be identified as disabled on the Disability Window.

The Food Stamp disability reasons are found at 106 CMR 361.120 and are also identified on the BEACON Disability Window. They include:

RR Disability Recipient

RSDI Disabled Recipient/
Certified

SSI Disabled Recipient/Certified

Aid to Blind Recipient/Certified

MassHealth Disability

Disabled Child Deceased
Veteran/ Certified

Disabled Spouse Deceased
Veteran /Certified

Totally Disabled Veteran/
Certified

Government Disability
Retirement Recipient

***New FS/SSFSP
Calculation and
Retroactive Benefits:
Nguyen v. Wagner
Settlement***

FS, SSFSP
Field Operations Memo
2002-9E

On July 1, 2002, in accordance with the settlement agreement of ***Nguyen v. Wagner***, the Department changed the way benefits are calculated for AUs with both FS and SSFSP benefits. The Department reviewed SSFSP recipients' noncitizen status to determine eligibility for federal food stamp benefits. The settlement mandated that FS/SSFSP AUs receive retroactive federal food stamp benefits if the federal benefits increased as a result of the new calculation. Retroactive benefits were issued August 5, 2002 to FS/SSFSP AUs eligible for these additional benefits.

Office of Employee Relations has informed SEIU Local 509 and NAGE of cost-savings initiatives that also include issuing layoff notices to bargaining unit employees. In addition, there are plans to layoff employees who are not in a bargaining unit. Where employees are part of a collective bargaining unit, we have begun to discuss the impact of these decisions with the appropriate union. As part of the effort to mitigate the number of employees who must be laid off, we discussed with the unions a proposal for voluntary furloughs, and have reached tentative agreement with them for such a program.

It is anticipated that layoffs will be effective as soon as September 27 with the final round taking place on October 4. This means that employees will be given written notice during the week of September 9. As you are aware from my August 30 memo, both the Civil Service statute and collective bargaining agreements recognize the right of certain employees to "bump" into other positions. If more senior employees exercise their "bumping" rights it is possible that employees who are not scheduled for layoffs may lose their jobs.

I regret that these actions are necessary and I realize that this is a very difficult time for those who are facing loss of their job, as well as for those who do not know if they will be affected. We will continue to work with your collective bargaining representatives to reduce the number of employees who must be laid off. As we achieve savings through any approved furlough program or through other options we will be able to reduce the number of affected employees. I assure you that I will provide you with information as soon as I am able, and will continue to explore feasible alternatives that would minimize the impact of these painful actions.

Sincerely,



John Wagner
Commissioner



Remember

FYI

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

A notice was mailed during the month of August to TAFDC-only and Food Stamp Assistance Units (AUs) with a child(ren) between 4 and 18 years of age. Enclosed with the notice was a system-generated verification of eligibility for TAFDC-only or food stamp benefits. The purpose of this mailing is to promote access to the free meals/milk program, if the child(ren)'s school or child care program provides one.

Food stamp AUs (PA or NPA) living in Boston and Springfield did not receive this mailing if the AU applied for or was reevaluated for food stamp benefits on or after August 14, 2001. ***Boston and Springfield participated in the Pilot Child Nutrition Access Project along with the Department, USDA, DOE and Project Bread.*** As part of the pilot, the Department electronically provided the names of children eligible for food stamp benefits to Boston and Springfield schools. Boston and Springfield schools will automatically certify these children for the free meals/milk program.

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 between 4 and 18 years of age receiving TAFDC-only or food stamp benefits are eligible for the meals/milk program.

FYI

Importance of Computer Matches

This FYI reminds AU Managers of the importance of reviewing and acting on computer match information. Computer matches are important because they stop errors and ensure that recipients are receiving accurate benefits.

As part of its error reduction strategy, the Department matches specific AU data with AU data from other agencies. Match data provide AU Managers with important information necessary for determining an AU's continued eligibility. AU Managers are notified of computer match data from two sources:

- BEACON Views (DSS, Earned Income, Unearned Income and SSN Verification); and
- paper-issued matches (for example: Potential to Terminate, DOR New Hire, DIA Recipient, Prison, Interstate, New Hampshire Registry, Federal Veteran's, DOR Bank, DYS, Lottery) for computer matches not yet developed in BEACON.

For all computer matches, AU Managers must review the match data and take the appropriate actions on the AU. This may include scheduling an eligibility review appointment, requesting verifications or updating BEACON with new or changed information.

BEACON Todays Issued in August 2002

BT 94 BEACON Release 2.0.17
(8/12/02)

BT 94A BEACON Release 2.0.17
(8/14/02)

"In world history, those who have helped to build the same culture are not necessarily of one race, and those of the same race have not all participated in one culture."

Ruth Fulton Benedict

Elimination of the STAFDC Program

STAFDC
State Letter 1231
Field Operations Memo
2002-18

The FY 03 budget requires the elimination of the STAFDC Program. The elimination of this program for applicants was effective August 5, 2002.

Procedures to close current STAFDC AUs will be issued shortly.

Clothing Allowance

TAFDC
State Letter 1233
Field Operations Memo
2002-19

The Department paid a nonrecurring clothing allowance for September 2002 for certain TAFDC recipients. The clothing allowance is \$150 per recipient under the age of 19. The clothing allowance is prorated for recipients eligible in September 2002 but who have a start date after September 1, 2002. Payments were available August 29, 30 and 31, depending on the SSN and if the payment was made as a direct deposit or EBT.



FYI

Current and Future Changes to Policy Online

Last April, changes were made to Policy Online including the redesign of many windows, development of new windows and the elimination of data. Since these changes were implemented, there has been concern from TAO staff regarding the elimination of data essential to interpreting FMCS screens and reports that use FMCS data. To address these concerns, data identified as essential will be added back to Policy Online.

This month, you will see the following change:

- a new option, titled Region Number/TAO Number/TAO Name Listing, has been added to the Reference Documentation window. This information had been previously included in the Service Area Listing.

In addition, you will see the following:

- revisions to the Service Area Listing - City/Town and the Service Area Listing - TAO. These revisions are based on TAO closings and corrections to the spelling of the names of cities and towns.
- ZIP Codes listed for the sections of Boston and Springfield and the corresponding TAO.

Next month, more codes and the corresponding definitions essential to utilizing reports and interpreting FMCS data will be added to Policy Online.

Restoration of SSFSP Benefits: August, 2002

SSFSP
Field Operations Memo 2002-15A

- SSFSP AUs active as of August 13, 2002 received 85 percent of what their August benefit amount would have been had full funding been available.
- It is anticipated that this is the last time funding will be available for SSFSP benefits. In accordance with the FY 2003 budget language, SSFSP must be shut down no later than November 30, 2002.
- Notices were sent to all SSFSP AUs active as of August 13, 2002 informing them that these benefits are the last they will receive prior to SSFSP shutting down.

Quality Corner

This month we will review three recent Quality Control errors. The first two involve failing to properly add a new baby and the third involves failing to establish the correct SUA.

Adding a New Baby:

The first error involves a newborn. The baby was born in December 2001. In January 2002 the recipient provided the birth certificate and SSN to the AU Manager. Because the mother had been on TAFDC, the baby was born after the Family Cap date and was not eligible for TAFDC. As of May 2002, the baby had still not been added to the food stamp household.

The second error involves a family recertified on February 14, 2002 as an NPA household. The mother and two children were receiving voluntary child support. On March 1, two weeks later, the mother delivered a new daughter. The mother did not notify the AU Manager when the baby was born. Not including the new household member resulted in an underpayment.

What Can An AU Manager Do?

In the first error described above, it is important for the AU Manager to know that Family Cap children are eligible for food stamp benefits, even though they are not eligible for cash assistance. When the office was notified of the birth of the new baby, the AU Manager should have added the baby to the household in January and, if the baby was not included in the food stamp benefits for January, should have issued a food stamp supplement to provide food stamp benefits for the new baby. By not including the baby through May, the AU Manager increased the chances of the assistance unit's being selected for a QC review and the error being discovered. For MassHealth recipients (including TAFDC families), the NOB (Notification of Birth) process provides notification to the AU Manager that a child has been born. When adding a new household member, be sure to issue a food stamp supplement for the notification month, if appropriate. Training OnLine offers modules for adding a dependent and for adding a Family Cap child.

In the second error, it is important to note that the Department is responsible for errors even when the recipient does not report the information, unless the AU is subject to Universal Quarterly Reporting. While the AU Manager may not have thought it appropriate to ask

about the recipient's pregnancy, the AU Manager could have reminded the woman about the need to report any changes in her household. Based on the receipt of child support, this AU should have been placed on Universal Quarterly Reporting. Since reporting changes is not required for AUs on Universal Quarterly Reporting, no QC error would have occurred. Training OnLine has a module on Universal Quarterly Reporting to help with this.

Federal Energy Assistance

A recent error involved an SSI recipient who has been receiving food stamps since October 1999. When she applied, the Landlord Verification Form was somewhat confusing in that the landlord did not answer the question about whether the rent included heat (using the Landlord Verification Form from 1995). The Landlord Verification Form did note that gas was used for cooking only. In an October 2000 recertification, the AU Manager did not use the new Landlord Verification Form (LL/VER (Rev. 2/2000), even though the form had been revised and made clearer regarding tenant's costs. The AU Manager gave the recipient a \$391 SUA, the SUA for someone who pays for his or her own heat. A recent gas bill indicated the billing rate as code 5 – residential assistance heating.

At no point did the recipient pay for heat. The recipient was not entitled to that SUA. The recipient did apply for LIHEAA in September 2001, but was denied. To be eligible for the heating SUA (\$391), the household would have to have received LIHEAA.

What Can An AU Manager Do?

The AU Manager should have verified with the recipient or the landlord that heat was or was not included in the rent, and provided the appropriate SUA. The revised Landlord Verification Form makes it easier to provide the correct SUA, but only if all the questions are answered. This is especially important now. In addition to the heating season approaching, Massachusetts was recently awarded \$4.2 million of LIHEAA funds to help low-income families pay electricity bills this summer.

CORI Regulations Finalization

State Letter 1232

State Letter 1232 transmitted the final revisions to the Criminal Offender Record Information (CORI) regulations. These regulations apply to candidates seeking employment with the Department or the Department's vendors that provide customer services when the position entails the potential for unsupervised customer contact.

EA: Eligibility Standard, Rental Arrearages and Disaster Benefits

EA

State Letter 1230

Field Operations Memo 2002-17

EA User's Guide: *Emergency Assistance, SSI Special Benefits* and *BEACON* Update 008

- State Letter 1230 transmitted the following changes to the EA Program:
 - the EA Eligibility Standard was lowered, and
 - rental arrearages and disaster benefits were eliminated as EA benefits.
- Field Operations Memo 2002-17 advised staff that until the EA Eligibility Standard in BEACON is adjusted to the lower amounts, AU Managers must determine the financial eligibility manually by using the new amounts for any new or pending EA application and deny the request as appropriate.
- The *EA User's Guide* has been updated to include information about which noncitizens are eligible for EA benefits (a noncitizen whose INS status is described in TAFDC 106 CMR 203.675 or who has been admitted for permanent residence or is permanently residing under color of law (PRUCOL)). Also, references to rental arrearage payments and disaster benefits have been eliminated.



From the Forms File

Revised Brochures

The following ***Your Right to Interpreter Services*** brochures have been revised. The brochures now list the correct mailing address and telephone numbers for the Division of Hearings (DOH).

18-115-0802-05

IS-E (Rev. 8/2002)

Your Right to Interpreter Services - English

18-116-0802-05

IS-S (Rev. 8/2002)

Your Right to Interpreter Services - Spanish

18-117-0802-05

IS-HC (Rev. 8/2002)

Your Right to Interpreter Services - Haitian Creole

18-118-0802-05

IS-F (Rev. 8/2002)

Your Right to Interpreter Services - French

18-119-0802-05

IS-P (Rev. 8/2002)

Your Right to Interpreter Services - Portuguese

18-120-0802-05

IS-V (Rev. 8/2002)

Your Right to Interpreter Services - Vietnamese

18-121-0802-05

IS-C (Rev. 8/2002)

Your Right to Interpreter Services - Chinese

18-122-0802-05

IS-L (Rev. 8/2002)

Your Right to Interpreter Services - Laotian

18-123-0802-05

IS-A (Rev. 8/2002)

Your Right to Interpreter Services - Armenian

18-124-0802-05

IS-C (Rev. 8/2002)

Your Right to Interpreter Services - Cambodian

18-125-0802-05

IS-R (Rev. 8/2002)

***Your Right to Interpreter Services
- Russian***

18-126-0802-05

IS-C (Rev. 8/2002)

***Your Right to Interpreter Services
- Croatian***

Obsolete Forms

The following forms are obsolete per the State FY 03 Budget which eliminated rental arrearages as an EA benefit.

13-032-1193-05

13-038-1193-05 (S)

EA-7R (11/93)

Agreement of Landlord to Terminate Eviction and Statement of Rental Arrearage

13-061-0301-05

13-062-0501-05 (S)

EA-10 (Rev. 3/2001)

Rental Information Form

