

Transitions



A Publication of the Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance

this month in...

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From the Commissioner

Dear Fellow Employees,

A number of exciting projects are underway in the Department's Housing and Homeless Services Unit. Improving the Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) approval rate is just one example. While all of us seek to promote long-term independence for our clients, at times the best option for those suffering from mental or physical illnesses is SSI and/or SSDI.

Although our Department requires that certain clients apply for SSI/SSDI, the Housing and Homeless Services Unit has recently been working towards making these benefits more accessible. When a medical condition is either chronic or requires intensive treatment, SSI/SSDI can provide essential benefits. Aside from providing higher monthly payments and health care coverage, SSI/SSDI can move homeless individuals closer to their goal of finding stable housing.

Since the advantages available through SSI/SSDI go beyond the cash incentives, our Commonwealth has taken the lead in increasing SSI/SSDI application approvals. As a member of the federal Homeless Policy Academy, Massachusetts has been chosen along with fourteen other states to participate in a federally sponsored technical assistance initiative called SOAR (SSI/SSDI Outreach, Access and Recovery). The goal of this new initiative is to improve access for applicants and increase the rate of successful SSI/SSDI applications in our state. Although not targeted exclusively to the homeless, a complementary initiative soon to be implemented by the Cash and Full Engagement Unit will help clients who have been denied Social Security benefits by assisting them

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through the reapplication/appeal process. This project is scheduled to start up during the second week of December in five local offices.

A national study estimates that only 11 percent of those who are homeless are actually receiving SSI/SSDI, as opposed to the more than 40 percent of this population who are eligible. Massachusetts is hoping to significantly increase this rate.

Our Central Office Housing staff kicked off the SOAR initiative at a planning session this past July. Along with a number of other organizations, DTA developed an action plan to gain greater access to SSI/SSDI for the homeless population in Massachusetts. In addition to this two-day planning session, our partners at Policy Research Associates conducted a four-day intensive, statewide Train the Trainer class in late September to provide ongoing training and technical assistance to organizations in Massachusetts that assist homeless applicants with their SSI/SSDI applications. Next month, targeted training and technical assistance will take place for organizations in the Worcester area. As this work continues, we'll be reporting on its future progress.

In an effort to increase permanent housing outcomes for homeless *families*, the Housing and Homeless Services Unit is drafting revisions to the EA Family Self-Sufficiency Plan. The newly revised form will include a focus on re-housing our homeless families as quickly as possible by identifying barriers to self-sufficiency and then creating a goal-oriented, outcome-based process for overcoming these barriers. This step-by-step approach will also rely on strengthening our clients' connections with existing mainstream services such as child care, transportation and employment services.

With the holiday season approaching, I want to close this letter by turning my thoughts gratefully to all of you who have made our past year's progress possible. Your dedication to the clients we serve is the foundation of that progress. I want to wish you all a peaceful and joyous holiday and a happy New Year.

Sincerely,



John Wagner, Commissioner

From the Hotline

- Q.** Instructions in Field Operations Memo 2006-41 say that an Assessed Person (AP) with a Caring for the Disabled exemption must verify this exemption every six months. The *Returning an Up-to-Date Verification of Caring for the Disabled* notice and a TAFDC-4 will be mailed to the AP 45 days before the end of the six-month-period. If the AP fails to return the TAFDC-4 within 21 days, BEACON will send out a warning notice and another TAFDC-4. If the AP fails to respond to the warning notice within 10 days, the AU Manager must schedule an appointment with the AP for an interview to explain the work program requirement, and/or determine whether another exemption applies. What if the AP fails to appear at the appointment?
- A.** In this situation, the entire AU should be closed for failing to keep an appointment for a review. The AU cannot continue as an exempt AU without verifying an exemption.

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The question and answer that appeared here have been deleted because of an error in the answer. Please see *Transitions* for February 2007 for the correction.

- Q.** With the holiday season approaching, what is the Food Stamp Program's policy concerning gift cards? Are they considered a countable asset or income?
- A.** No. Although gift cards can be used to purchase goods and services, they are not cash and their use is restricted to the establishment offering the card. Gift cards are excluded when determining eligibility and/or benefit level.

From the Forms File

New Form

25-180-1106-05

25-181-1106-05(S)

FS/SPI-E (11/2006)

Food Stamp Signature Page Instructions

This form has been created to be used in the interim procedures for processing the old paper Food Stamp Application. Refer to Field Operations Memo 2006-53 for more information.

Revised Form

25-170-1106-05

25-171-1106-05

FSA-1(Rev. 11/2006)

Food Stamp Benefits Application

This form has been revised with the following changes. Part 1 of the paper FS application, including the signature line originally used to set the start date, has been eliminated; the RR/FSP-1B language has been added to the back of the paper FS application, followed by a signature line. Other changes to the form include a note added in the earnings section to remind the applicant to list self-employment income, if applicable to the AU, and technical changes made throughout the document to improve the format, readability and overall ease of use of the application form.

As soon as supplies of the new paper FS application are received from Schraffts, TAOs must discard current supplies of the old paper FS application form. In addition, TAO Directors are urged to send a supply of the new paper FS Application form to outreach partners and organizations in the TAO community that issue paper FS application forms. This will reduce the use of the old paper FS application form and ease the administrative burden associated with processing two different FS application forms during the interim period. Please refer to Field Operations Memo 2006-53 for more information.

02-035-1106-05

02-157-1106-05 (S)

NFL-9(Rev. 11/2006)

Notice of Approval, Denial or Termination for Emergency Assistance or Other Financial Services

This form has been revised to capture additional information about the EA AU's temporary emergency shelter placement.

Quality Corner

This month we will review an error related to household composition.

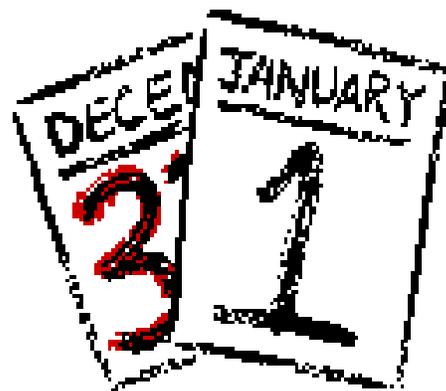
Household Composition

A twenty-year-old client applied for TAFDC and FS benefits for himself and two children. The twenty-year-old client and his two children live with the client's mother and the client's two younger siblings. The client's mother has an active FS AU that includes herself and the twenty-year-old's two younger siblings.

A combined TAFDC and FS AU was subsequently approved for the twenty-year-old client and his two children. Establishing a separate FS AU for the twenty-year-old and his children caused an overpayment error. Additionally, the application decision was untimely for FS because there was no eligibility determination by Day 30.

What's an AU Manager to Do?

When determining food stamp eligibility, household composition is of primary importance. Based on the age of the client, it was mandatory that he and his two children be included in his mother's FS AU. Although the client was entitled to separate household status under the TAFDC Program, this does not automatically qualify him for his own FS AU. There are differences in the household composition rules of the TAFDC and FS Programs. For more on FS household composition, see 106 CMR 361.200 (A). AU Managers are also reminded that whenever there is a combined TAFDC/FS application, the FS portion of the application must be processed in accordance with the FS application processing time frames outlined in Field Operations Memo 2006-30.



TAFDC - ESP Component/Activity: Job Search/Job Readiness and A New BEACON Counter

TAFDC
Field Operations Memo
2006-51

The Department has made changes to the TAFDC Program to meet revised TANF guidelines. As part of these changes, Basic Job Search and Structured Job Search activities were combined into one activity: Job Search/Job Readiness (described in Field Operations Memo 2006-39). Effective with BEACON Increment 2.1.21, a counter was added to the Monitor Participation and Work Requirements windows on BEACON to track the recipient's six weeks of participation in the activity of "Job Search/Job Readiness." The counter will monitor the six weeks used per Federal Fiscal Year.

This Field Operations Memo gives an overview of BEACON functionality changes and AU Manager responsibilities as they relate to the Job Search/Job Readiness counter.

"In looking for people to hire, look for three qualities: integrity, intelligence and energy. And if they don't have the first, the other two will kill you."

Warren Buffett

TAFDC: New Five-Year (60-Month) Period

TAFDC
Field Operations Memo 2006-52

On December 1, 1996, the Department instituted a five-year (60-month) period for all recipients. Nonexempt TAFDC recipients could receive up to 24 months of time-limited benefits within this 60-month period. As of November 30, 2006, the second five-year period ended for some recipients. These recipients began another five-year period. This memo reminds TAO Staff about procedures for continuing to process these AUs.

Eliminating the Rights and Responsibilities Penalty Warning Form (RR/FSP-1B) as a Separate Signature Page for Food Stamp Applications

FS
Field Operations Memo 2006-53

The Department is eliminating the RR/FSP-1B form as a separate signature page for most FS applicants. The use of the RR/FSP-1B form as a signature page for the USR Prefilled Report is also being eliminated. These changes will bring the Department into compliance with recent state legislation prohibiting the request for more than one signature from a FS applicant.

The RR/FSP-1B form will remain a separate signature page to complete the application process when the source of application is SSA or the method of application is Internet and the applicant is subsequently interviewed by phone.

2007 Social Security/SSI COLA for TAFDC, EAEDC and FS

TAFDC, EAEDC and FS
Field Operations Memo 2006-54

The Social Security and SSI Cost-of-Living Adjustments (COLA) have been scheduled. Effective January 2007, Social Security benefits will increase by 3.3 percent. The basic Medicare Part B premium will increase from \$88.50 to \$93.50 per month.

This memo:

- Describes general BEACON activities for processing the 2007

Social Security/SSICOLA;

- Informs TAO Staff that all terminated income from the SDX record, except RSDI, will be automatically removed from AUs beginning January 16, 2007; and
- Identifies AU Manager and Supervisor activities required to prepare for the 2007 Social Security/SSI COLA.

TAFDC - ESP Human Services Vocational Education and Training Program (HS-VET) - New Initiative

The Department and the Community College System (Massachusetts Community Colleges Executive Office) have partnered with Tewksbury State Hospital, Western Massachusetts State Hospital in Westfield, and the Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS) Health Cluster - Human Resource Division to develop a new ESP training program.

The training program is called the Human Services Vocational Education and Training Program (HS-VET). This New Initiative Memo informs TAO staff about where this new program is being offered, the minimum entrance requirements and what certification the recipient will have at the end of the program.

EAEDC and TAFDC Social Security Appeals Project - New Initiative

DTA and the University of Massachusetts Medical School (UMMS) have designed a program to help certain EAEDC and TAFDC recipients appeal the denial of their application for Supplemental Security Income (SSI). This new initiative is called the Social Security Appeals Project, and will be implemented on December 11, 2006 in five TAOs: Brockton, Former Davis Square, Malden, North Shore and Revere.

UMMS will provide services to approximately 100 randomly selected EAEDC and TAFDC recipients to help them through the SSA appeal process. These services are expected to result in more recipients receiving favorable disability appeal decisions and Social Security benefits. Central Office will monitor and evaluate the Social Security Appeals Project, with the expectation of expanding the UMMS services statewide if the project is successful.

Food Stamp Education and Training for Food Stamp Work Required Individuals Who Are at Risk of Losing Their Food Stamp Benefits - New Initiative

The Department has contracted with a number of nonprofit agencies to assist certain Able Bodied Adults Without Dependents (ABAWDs). The purpose of this program is to serve ABAWDs who must meet the Food Stamp Work Program Requirements and are considered at-risk of losing food stamp benefits unless they are engaged in education, skills training, paid employment and/or community service activities. The program is called Education and Training for ABAWDs. The providers selected and areas to be served are: Jewish Vocational Services (JVS) and Action for Boston Community Development, Inc. (ABCD) serving Dorchester and Newmarket Square; and Training Resources of America, Inc. (TRA) serving Holyoke/Springfield, New Bedford, North Shore and Worcester.



Food Stamp Program: Racial-Ethnic Data Collection

FS
State Letter 1320

This State Letter transmits a regulation change that is a result of new federal requirements for collecting racial and ethnic data, including new categories and the capturing of multiracial data.

Reference to specific categories is being eliminated for ease of implementing future changes.

This material was effective December 1, 2006.

Related systems changes are in progress. Procedures will be issued when the changes are in production.

FYI

Attributing Shelter Costs in BEACON

Due to different policies in the cash and food stamp programs administered by the Department, it may be necessary to attribute shelter costs to different members of an Assistance Unit. One instance may be an NPA household with a teen parent member receiving TAFDC. In this circumstance, the grantee is entitled to the shelter costs of the household but, in order to prevent an income-in-kind deduction from the teen parent's TAFDC grant, a shelter cost may

also be attributed to the teen parent. This could potentially lead to a calculation error, by combining the shelter costs, if the AU Manager fails to input the information correctly into BEACON.

For example, an NPA grantee Mary Smith pays \$400.00 rent but verifies, with a Shared Housing form, that her 19-year-old teen parent daughter Sally pays \$200.00 towards the rent. The full rent of \$400.00 should be entered in Mary's Shelter Expenses window. The AU Manager must also select Sally from the member list, open Sally's Shelter Expenses window, enter the \$200.00 rent cost for Sally, ensure that the "Yes" radio button at the "Countable TAFDC" prompt is activated and activate the "No" radio button at the "Countable FS" prompt. This prevents the combination of both shelter expenses in an erroneous \$600.00 deduction at the EBC results.

Supervisors can always double-check the benefit calculation for all determinations by completing a manual calculation to determine if there is a discrepancy between what has been entered into BEACON and the EBC results.

FYI

BEACON Online Help Updates Issued in November 2006

BEACON Online Help Update Issue # 3 (11/21/06)

FYI

Changes to DTA Online

This month you will see the following changes to DTA Online:

Home Page



The Department's new positioning line *Believing you can.* and logo, as displayed above, appear above the **Feature Story**. Both the positioning line and logo will eventually be added to documentation and correspondence issued by the agency.

Latest News/Photo Gallery

A new memo entitled *The Dot is Back* (11/13/06) has been added to the list of available options. When selected, the memo issued by Commissioner Wagner introducing the new positioning line and logo appears. In addition, the memo includes the following link, which provides additional messages that are part of the positioning line statement: www.causemedia.com/clients/DTA/index2.htm

FYI

Food Stamp Work Study Income

AU Managers are reminded that, although participation in a work study program meets student eligibility requirements as defined in 106 CMR 362.410, federal work study earnings must **never be counted** when calculating the food stamp benefit amounts (see 106 CMR 363.230 (D)). However, non-title IV (non-federal) or state work study income not used for educational expenses **is countable**, as well as earnings from a graduate fellowship or assistantship with a work requirement not used for educational expenses. (see 106 CMR 363.220(A)(3)).

Remember that work study income sources must be listed in the Employment Status window of BEACON when the recipient has work study earnings; when work study income is non-countable the AU Manager must be sure to check “No” at the “Countable FS” radio button on the Employed tab.

FYI

Residential Facility Window

Two additional Exit Reasons have been added to the Exit dropdown box on the Residential Facility window. The Exit Reasons record why the family is leaving the shelter facility. The new reasons are:

- “*Shelter Interruption - TESI:*” used when the family's shelter placement is being interrupted temporarily for up to 30 days because the family has been granted permission to leave the shelter for feasible alternative housing. The family has completed the *Temporary Emergency Shelter Interruption (TESI)* form; and

- “*Shared Housing:*” used when the family is leaving the shelter and will be living with others (sharing the housing), in either subsidized or unsubsidized housing.

Select the Exit reason “*Perm Placement - Sub Housing*” (*subsidized*) or “*Perm Placement - Unsub Housing*” (*unsubsidized*)” when the family is leaving the shelter and will not be living with others.

Season's Greetings

from Policy and

Program

Management

