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From the Commissioner

Dear Colleagues,

Happy Holidays! Please accept my deepest thanks for all that you do during the year to meet our mission to assist low-income individuals and families to meet their basic needs, increase their income, and improve their quality of life. I am particularly appreciative for your continuing to reach out to those in need during such difficult economic times, even when caseloads are so high and rising.

As you know, the family shelter caseload has increased steadily over the past few years due to a number of factors, including increasing unemployment, foreclosure, and costs for food, fuel, and housing.

To improve the situation, we are in the process of completing the re-procurement of the EA shelter system. This will allow us to ensure equity and accountability in the provision of shelter services, and will position the Department for future systems changes that focus on prevention, housing, and economic stability – instead of shelter.

We hope to remedy the disparity between shelter capacity and towns of origin for homeless families. By purchasing shelter units across nine regions, we intend to place families closer to their home communities. In addition, we are purchasing units that reflect the diverse and changing needs of families, including those that require wheelchair-accessible units, units without carpeting for children with severe breathing issues, and units to accommodate the growing number of very large families in our shelter system.

We expect to complete the smooth transition to new contracts by February 1, 2009. Thank you to Stephanie Brown, the Housing and Homeless Services Unit, staff in the field, and all of the volunteers who helped to facilitate this process. Thanks too to those of you who have worked in the DHCD/DTA Command Center to rapidly transition families from motels and shelter into permanent housing. Your commitment and long hours are greatly appreciated!

Also appreciated are those of you who helped out with the National Hunger and Homelessness Awareness Week, Boston Can Share, and Toys for Children

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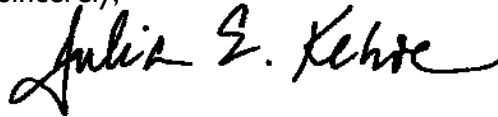
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From the Commissioner (Continued from page 1)

in Hotels drives. With your assistance, generosity, and creativity, we are successfully providing necessities and making the holidays brighter for our clients and their children.

In closing, please know that my thoughts are also with you and your families. I want to wish you all a joyful holiday season and a happy new year.

Sincerely,



Julia E. Kehoe

Quality Corner

This month we will review two errors that occurred in NPA cases. The first error was caused by child support income that was attributed to the mother and also to one of the children. In the second case, the error was caused by the Department's failure to count shelter expenses. Both of these errors were agency-caused and probably could have been prevented.

Double-Counting of Child Support

The household included the client and her three children. The oldest child received SSI. The other two children had no income. The mother had been employed prior to her last application.

QC discovered the error by reviewing the *Other Income* window on BEACON which showed \$270 in child support income that was attributed to the mother and also to the child that received SSI. DOR screens confirmed that the child support of \$270, in fact, belonged to the child that received SSI.

Through a DOR inquiry, QC also found \$190 in child support income that was being paid for the youngest child. This second child support income was not used in the BEACON calculation of the household's SNAP benefits. The second child support error lessened the previous error that involved the doubling of child support income. Because each error had an opposite impact on the case, this resulted in a smaller underpayment error.

What's a Case Manager to Do?

At the time of the last certification, the child support income being received for the child who received SSI benefits was attributed to the child, as it should have been. The case manager did not realize that this income was also attributed to the mother.

After a case is wrapped up in BEACON, it is good practice to review the Financial tab on the *Interview Wrap-up EBC Results* window to see the income and expenses that have been used in the SNAP benefits calculation. Performing this review could have alerted the case manager of the doubling of income on the case.

Reported Move and Change in Shelter Expenses

The SNAP household was recertified in April 2008 as a Change Reporting Household. In May of 2008, the household reported a change of address and subsequently submitted a new verification to the TAO. Quality Control found a completed *Landlord Verification* form in the case record. The household's address had been changed in BEACON but shelter costs had not been changed. Failure to update the household shelter expenses caused an underissuance error.

What's a Case Manager to Do?

In this case, the case manager should have changed the address and shelter expenses at the time the client reported the change because the reported change was expected to result in an increase in SNAP benefits or the case manager should have waited on the verification to be submitted before processing the reported change because the change was not expected to result in an increase in SNAP benefits. In either situation, once a *Landlord Verification* is received the case manager must make the change(s) that have been verified. For more on the Department's responsibility to take timely action, see 106 CMR 366.120 (D)(1).

From the Forms File

New Form

13-340-1108-05

EA-NDR (11/2008)

Noncompliance Determination Request

This form is completed by shelter and HAP providers when submitting information for a noncompliance determination. Refer to Field Operations Memo 2008-59 for more information.

Revised Forms

13-273-1108-05

Ref-4F/PR (Rev. 11/2008)

Project RISE Referral/F.O.R. Families Program Referral

13-030-1108-05

EA-NI (Rev. 11/2008)

EA Noncompliance Referral

13-200-1108-05

13-201-1108-05 (S)

HM-NT (Rev. 11/2008)

Notice to Emergency Assistance (EA) Families Placed in Hotels/Motels

The above three forms have been revised due to the changes in the process of making referrals for determination of EA shelter noncompliance. Refer to Field Operations Memo 2008-62 for more information.

09-017-1108-05

09-012-1108-05 (S)

SNAP-NFL-2 (Rev. 11/2008)

Notice of Denial/Notice of Pending Status

The SNAP-NFL-2 (formerly the FSNL-2) has been revised. Refer to Field Operations Memo 2008-59 for more information on the use of this form.

09-160-1208-05

09-161-1208-05 (S)

09-159-1208-05 (P)

SNAP-App-Elderly (Rev. 12/2008)

Simplified SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) Application for Elderly Applicants

The *Simplified SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) for Elderly Applicants* has been revised based on comments received from TAOs and from the advocate community. The most significant change is the addition of a cover sheet that gives information about the application process and generally advises about the types of proofs one should expect to provide.

Obsolete Form

13-310-0906-05

STR-1(9/2006)

Shelter Transfer Request

This form has been obsoleted. Refer to Field Operations Memo 2008-66 for more information.

Dates to Remember

December 12, 2008	Deadline for contacting Housing and Homeless Services Unit to participate in toy drive
December 25, 2008	Christmas
December 31, 2008	New Year's Eve

From the Hotline

If you have any questions on this column or other policy and procedural material, please have your Hotline designee call the **Policy Hotline at 617-348-8478**.

Q. My client is applying for SNAP benefits because he was recently laid off. His net Unemployment Compensation (U.C.) payment includes a tax deduction. Do I consider the gross or net U.C. payment amount when calculating my client's SNAP benefits?

A. In this situation, use the gross U.C. amount when calculating the SNAP benefits. Your client's tax deductions are not considered excluded income for SNAP purposes. Whenever a client reports a job loss, remember to consult the Division of Unemployment Assistance's (DUA) Unemployment Insurance Information Inquiry Screen to determine the accurate and countable U.C. payment amount.

Q. I have a client who is applying for SNAP benefits. He has been receiving earnings from the Title V, Older Americans Act. According to SNAP regulations at 106 CMR 363.230(K), these funds are considered excluded earned income and as a result, we will not be counting these funds when calculating his SNAP benefits.

However, this client is also receiving U.C. payments and these payments include a deduction for a portion of his Title V earnings. As a result, his \$200 gross U.C. payment includes a \$75 deduction for these earnings. For SNAP purposes, what is the amount of my client's countable unearned income?

A. Your client's countable unearned income amount is \$125.

(Remember to consult DUA's Unemployment Insurance Information Inquiry Screen for additional information when determining the accurate and countable U.C. payment amount.)

Q. My client who is applying for SNAP benefits was recently laid off and is collecting Unemployment Compensation. He is separated from his wife and is currently living alone. The DUA's online system indicates a deduction for child support obligations. Do I make this same deduction when determining my client's countable U.C. payment amount?

A. Whether or not you exclude child support payments from your client's countable unearned income amount depends on the circumstances of the obligation. Any legally obligated current child support or child support arrearages paid for a child not living in the household must be treated as an income exclusion in SNAP.

For more information on legally obligated child support payment income exclusions, refer to 106 CMR 363.230(O).

Q. My client's U.C. benefit had included a dependency allowance of \$25, which is considered countable SNAP income. This same client is now collecting *extended* U.C. benefits, but when I check the Unemployment Insurance Information Inquiry screen there is no dependency allowance displayed. Is this screen correct?

A. Yes. The extended U.C. benefit amount displayed includes the weekly benefit rate plus the most recent dependency allowance, all in one payment.

Field Operations Memos

Family Self-Sufficiency (FSS) Program Expansion: Public Housing Authority (Brockton) While Continuing in Somerville and Framingham

TAFDC

Field Operations Memo 2008-30A

Field Operations Memo 2008-30 provided TAO staff information related to the expansion of the existing DTA/FSS initiative to the Somerville and Framingham Public Housing Authorities. The goal of this expansion was to give nonexempt clients who are public housing residents or whose Section 8 housing is administered by the public housing agency and who are not participating in a work program activity, an additional resource to meet the work program requirement and become self-sufficient.

This memo added the Brockton Housing Authority to the list of Housing Authorities offering the FSS Program to its tenants. This portion of the DTA/FSS initiative began December 1, 2008 in Brockton. The existing DTA/FSS initiative continues in the Somerville and Framingham Public Housing Authorities.

Orientation Presentation Changes

TAFDC

Field Operations Memo 2008-46A

This Field Operations Memo details the following changes made to the Orientation Presentation:

- The “Job Search/Job Readiness” slide is being changed to “Employment Activities” for the English and Spanish Orientations only.

- The “Work Pays” slide, showing examples of how the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) and the State Income Tax Credit benefits clients who are working, has been updated with Tax Year 2008 information.
- The final slide of the Orientation presentation referring to “Vendor Forums” has been removed.

Division of Career Services (DCS) Participation and Attendance Forms for October and Transportation Issues

TAFDC

Field Operations Memo 2008-56B

Field Operations Memo 2008-56A told TAO staff how to process *Participation and Attendance* forms for October and how to process transportation requests for clients impacted by the changes at DCS. Field Operations Memo 2008-56B obsoleted Field Operations Memo 2008-56A, which had an incorrect e-mail address.

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program: Dependent Care Expense Clean-up Report

SNAP

Field Operations Memo 2008-61

Since the implementation of the 2008 Farm Bill provisions on October 1, 2008, the cap has been lifted on the dependent care deduction. Entering dependent care expenses into BEACON could now become error prone if individual dependent care expenses are not carefully entered for each household.

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Field Operations Memos (Continued from page 6)

This memo informed TAO staff about the *Dependent Care Expense Clean-up Report* and issues procedures for processing the report.

EA: Referrals for Noncompliance Determination

EA

Field Operations Memo 2008-62

This memo notified TAO staff that:

- the referral and the referral outcome reports for support services as part of the noncompliance determination process are no longer required;
- all supporting documentation will be directed to and from the Homeless Shelter Outreach Liaison in the TAO;
- timelines have been established for the flow of noncompliance requests and decisions;
- there are three revised EA forms and a new EA form that shelter and HAP providers complete to describe the noncompliance situation; and
- breaking hotel/motel rules may result in noncompliance.

DTA Internship Program Renamed “DTA Works” and Change in Referral Procedures

TAFDC

Field Operations Memo 2008-64

The DTA Internship Program began March 24, 2008 in the following TAOs: Dudley Square, Malden, Newmarket Square and Revere. DTA Works will be expanded statewide by January 2, 2009 and will place one intern in each of the remaining TAOs statewide.

This memo informed TAO staff:

- about "DTA Works"; and
- about the Intern Supervisor's and case manager's responsibilities.

EA Shelter Transfer Request

EA

Field Operations Memo 2008-66

This memo informed TAO staff that due to the increase in homeless families across the state, and the decrease in the availability of shelter beds, Field Operations Memo 2006-42 and the *Shelter Transfer Request* form are now obsolete.

Transportation Changes

TAFDC

Field Operations Memo 2008-67

The Franklin Regional Transit Authority provided a variety of services to our clients in the following cities and towns: Athol, Bernardston, Charlemont, Deerfield, Erving, Gill, Greenfield, Hatfield, Northampton, Orange, Shelburne Falls, Sunderland, and Whatley. Due to increased usage and budget shortfalls, effective December 31, 2008, this service will no longer be available to our clients for the remainder of FY '09. Beginning January 1, 2009 Transaction Associates will be responsible for providing Transportation service payments for eligible clients.

This memo also informs TAO staff that until further notice, no referrals to the Car Donation Program should be made.

Field Operations Memos

Interagency Housing Solution Team Command Center

EA

Field Operations Memo 2008-69

This memo informed TAO staff that the Interagency Housing Solution Team Command Center has been established to address the increase in EA hotel/motel placements. Representatives from the Department of Housing and Community Development and the Department of Transitional Assistance are working together to expedite housing opportunities for families in shelters as well as families in hotels and motels.

State Letter

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Farm Bill Changes

SNAP

State Letter 1343

This State Letter transmitted the following changes to SNAP resulting from implementation of the federal 2008 Farm Bill:

- the dependent care deduction in the SNAP benefit calculation is now the actual cost of monthly dependent care expenses;
- tax-preferred retirement plans and certain tax-preferred education savings accounts are now considered to be noncountable assets for SNAP; and
- when SNAP benefits have not been accessed for a total of 365 days, they will be permanently purged from the EBT system.

These changes became effective October 1, 2008.

Diversity Quote

“Diversity is the one true thing we all have in common. Celebrate it every day.”

Author Unknown

FYIs

Changes to DTA Online

This month, the following changes have been made to **DTA Online**:

- A TAO E-Mail – Special Procedures entitled *Update - Verifying Unemployment Compensation Benefits* has been added and can be accessed through the **Policy Online** side-bar option;
- A Drug-Free Workplace Policy Memo has been added and can be accessed through the **Administrative Memos** side-bar option;
- Updates have been made to the TAO Liaison Listing and the Field Operations Region Listing accessible through the **Field Operations** tab; and
- A new form has been added to the Human Resource Management Listing accessible through the **Administration and Finance** tab.

Changes to the EOHHS mass.gov DTA Homepage

Changes to the EOHHS mass.gov DTA Homepage include:

- Updates to our caseload information which can be accessed by selecting the appropriate Department program (EAEDC, FS, Homeless, SSI, TAFDC) beneath the **Research & Statistics** side-bar.
- Updates to DTA Food Stamp Outreach Centers which can be accessed through the **Key Resources** side-bar option.

Do You Know...?

The Elderly Nutrition Program is a federal- and state- funded nutrition program, administered by the Executive Office of Elder Affairs. The program provides nutritious meals to senior citizens (age 60 or over) at congregate sites and through home-delivery. Certain disabled individuals may also qualify for the congregate meals. Each meal contains at least 1/3 of the current daily Recommended Dietary Allowance of nutrients and is meant to help meet the special dietary needs of the elderly.

In addition to providing meals, the Elderly Nutrition Program also provides access to social and rehabilitative services. The congregate meals are available at senior centers, churches, schools, and other locations. The congregate setting provides opportunities for socialization and companionship as well as programs related to nutrition education, exercise activities, health promotion and disease prevention. Some locations also offer meals on weekends.

For interested clients, especially those who are ineligible for SNAP benefits, more information is available by contacting the Executive Office of Elder Affairs at 1-800-882-2003.

TAO Meeting Notes