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From the Commissioner

Dear Colleagues,

It is no secret that more people are having trouble meeting their basic needs. Increases in the price of fuel and food make our services even more necessary as individuals and families have a tougher time trying to make ends meet. Seniors on fixed incomes are particularly at-risk: as a result, we have been conducting outreach through a series of Senior Benefits Expos across the state.

These Expos have taken us to Pittsfield, Lowell, Peabody, Bourne, Boston, Taunton, Springfield, and Worcester. At each event, our TAO staff members were present to help seniors apply for Food Stamps and to answer questions. Bringing services directly to seniors has done wonders to dispel the myths about government assistance, and to distribute information about nutrition, fuel and utilities, health and safety, housing, and more. An average of 200 seniors attended each Expo, along with at least 30 government and nonprofit agencies. I am proud of our collaboration with the Executive Office of Elder Affairs, the Department of Public Health, and the Department of Veterans Services to plan these important events.

Along with the Senior Benefits Expos, this month our Food Stamp Program has implemented a number of the 2008 Farm Bill changes – including changing the name. From now on, both federally and here in Massachusetts, Food Stamps will be known as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). Details for the implementation of this new name will be forthcoming.

Program revisions are aimed at improving overall health and nutritional standards for our clients:

- The limit on dependent care expense deductions has been eliminated
- We now require less verifications when determining SNAP eligibility (this was implemented by DTA several months ago)
- The period unused SNAP benefits will remain available to clients has been extended.

Each of these changes will help increase participation and the average monthly benefit amount.

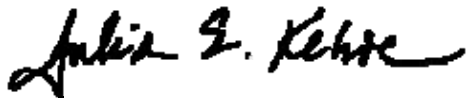
(Continued on page 2)

From the Commissioner *(Continued from page 1)*

SNAP caseloads are on the rise. Over the past few years, the Department has balanced a loss of staff and rising caseloads. Although this is a difficult situation, we continue to be efficient in the processing of all SNAP cases. In fact, we recently learned from USDA that Massachusetts is ranked number one in the country for the timely processing (99.34%) of SNAP applications, resulting in a bonus award of \$1,056,941. This is a remarkable achievement, and I offer my congratulations to everyone who works in the SNAP Program!

Throughout this busy season and these difficult economic times, I am grateful to all of you for your consistent commitment to our Department and the clients we serve. Thanks for all of your help in promoting the Senior Benefit Expos and ensuring a smooth transition for this year's Farm Bill changes.

Sincerely,



Julia E. Kehoe

Quality Corner

This month we will discuss an error that was caused by the inappropriate removal of the H-EAT allowance.

H-EAT Utility Error

This NPA case consisted of a client who had recently moved in with her daughter. The daughter was not a part of the food stamp household. When the case was recertified, \$100 was correctly entered as the new shelter amount. The case manager also updated the Standard Utility Allowance window by selecting No in the Use Standard Utility Allowance field. However, prior to moving in with her daughter, the client had received H-EAT benefits which made her continue to be eligible for the heating/cooling SUA for a period of one year. The untimely removal of the heating/cooling SUA caused a large underissuance for several months.

What's a Case Manager to Do?

H-EAT benefits are good for one year so the client should have been allowed to retain the heating/cooling SUA despite an address changes or changes in living arrangement. A client who is a recipient of traditional LIHEAA benefits could possibly lose the heating/cooling SUA after an address change, but a client who is a recipient of H-EAT benefits can retain the heating/cooling SUA for a one-year period. For more information on H-EAT benefits, see Field Operations Memo 2007-31 and the Policy Hotline Q &A in *Transitions*, October 2007.

From the Forms File

New Brochure

09-450-1008-05

09-451-1008-05(S)

FSP-INFO – Seniors (10/2008)

How to Apply for Food Stamp Benefits: Information for Seniors

The *How to Apply for Food Stamp Benefits: Information for Seniors* brochure was developed as an outreach and marketing tool for seniors. It explains special rules for senior households and highlights recent changes to the application process that make it easier for seniors to apply.

Revised Forms

09-375-1008-05

09-376-1008-05 (S)

FS-USR-2 (Rev. 10/2008)

Universal Semiannual Reporting (USR) Income Guidelines Form

The Categorical Eligibility USR AU Gross Monthly Income Standards have been revised to reflect the increased Maximum Gross Monthly Income Standards due to the Food Stamp Cost-of-Living Adjustment (COLA).

Revised Brochure

09-070-1008-05

09-079-1008-05 (S)

FSP-INFO (Rev. 10/2008)

How to Get Food Stamp Benefits

The Income Standard for households without children under 19 or without elderly or disabled

(Continued on page 4)

From the Forms File *(Continued from page 3)*

household members has been revised to reflect the increased Maximum Gross Monthly Income Standard due to the Food Stamp COLA.

Revised Posters

26-006-1008-05

26-007-1008-05 (S)

AAEO Poster (Rev. 10/2008)

Policy of Nondiscrimination Programmatic Access and Affirmative Action/Equal Opportunity

18-400-1008-05

18-401-1008-05(S)

ADA Poster (Rev. 10/2008)

Public Notice

02-655-1008-05

02-656-1008-05 (S)

DV-Poster-1 (Rev. 10/2008)

You Deserve to Be Safe

18-875-1008-05

18-876-1008-05 (S)

GC-Poster (Rev. 10/2008)

Good Cause

26-400-1008-05

26-401-1008-05 (S)

OCR-Poster-1 (Rev. 10/2008)

Do You Have a Disability?

02-815-1008-05

02-816-1008-05 (S)

RBP-Poster (Rev. 10/2008)

Are you a teen parent, a client of TAFDC or an EAEDC Family?

26-112-1008-05

26-113-1008-05 (S)

Recipient Services Poster (Rev. 10/2008)

Do you have questions, concerns, problems relating to your case?

02-701-1008-05

02-702-1008-05 (S)

Time Limit Poster (Rev. 10/2008)

Time is running out!

The above posters have been revised and reformatted. Posters are to be displayed in TAO waiting areas visible to all. **Old versions of these posters must be removed and replaced with the revised versions.** Refer to the FYI in this issue of *Transitions* for more information.

Do you know...?

The new federal mileage rate is 58.5 cents per mile, as indicated in last month's FYI in *Transitions*.

Use the new rate when calculating:

- transportation-related medical expenses for eligible elderly and/or disabled food stamp clients; and
- transportation-related dependent care expenses.

Refer to 106 CMR 364.400 for more information on Food Stamp Program expense deductions.

For any future adjustments in this rate, continue reading upcoming *Transitions* FYIs.

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**.

The questions below concern new education and training options available to DTA clients. More information on this topic can also be found in Field Operations Memo 2008-42 and Field Operations Memo 2008-50.

- Q.** Can TAFDC clients meet their work program requirement by participating in an educational program beyond the associate's degree level?
- A.** Yes. A client may participate in either a four-year or advanced-degree program in order to meet his or her TAFDC work program requirement, as long as the 12-month education and training limit has not been reached. To determine whether or not a client has used 12 months of education or training, review the Education/Training counter found on the TAFDC tab of the Work Requirements window.
- Q.** I have a TAFDC client who is reapplying for cash benefits. I noticed on BEACON that she has already used 12 months of training and education as an ESP component activity. Can this client still continue with her four-year college course of study?
- A.** Yes. Your TAFDC client who has used 12 months of training and education must enroll and participate in another ESP activity(ies)

to meet her work program requirement, but continue to pursue her current course of study.

- Q.** My TAFDC client has already used her 12 months of training and education, but is still attending classes and plans to continue taking additional courses towards her four-year degree. She has a 20-hour work program requirement and is currently employed 22 hours each week. Can I refer her for child care services to cover both her employment activity and her college class hours?
- A.** Yes. In addition to referring your client for child care services that cover her work program required hours of employment, you may also refer your client for child care services to cover the additional hours she needs for other component activities that support her Employment Development Plan (EDP) goal, including four-year college classes.

For more information on the EDP, refer to 106 CMR 207.110. Additional information on ESP support services is located at 106 CMR 207.210.

- Q.** Now that my TAFDC client is enrolled and participating in a four-year college, do I need to make sure she meets the Food Stamp Program's definition of a qualifying student?
- A.** No. As stated in 106 CMR 362.410 (E), a client who is receiving TAFDC complies with the Food Stamp Program's student eligibility requirements.

Field Operations Memos

Food Stamp Program: 10/1/2008 Cost-of-Living Increases

FS
State Letter 1340
FO Memo 2008-48

State Letter 1340 and Field Operations Memo 2008-48 implement the annual cost-of-living changes in the Food Stamp Program.

Maximum Benefit Levels - The maximum food stamp benefit levels for all household sizes have increased.

Minimum Benefit Level - The minimum benefit level for eligible one-and two-person households has increased to **\$14**.

Gross, Net and 165 Percent Income Eligibility Standards - The Gross, Net and 165 Percent Income Eligibility Standards have increased.

Standard Deduction - The standard deductions for all household sizes have increased.

Shelter Deduction - The maximum shelter deduction (for households not containing an elderly or disabled member) has increased to **\$446**.

Standard Utility Allowance (SUA) – All SUAs have increased. This includes the Bay State CAP SUA which has increased to **\$375**.

Homeless Shelter/Utility Deduction - The Homeless Shelter/Utility Deduction remains at **\$143**.

Farm Bill of 2008: Provisions Affecting the Food Stamp Program

FS
Field Operations Memo 2008-49

The Farm Bill of 2008 contains several provisions that affect food stamp eligibility and program administration. Field Operations Memo 2008-49 implements the Farm Bill changes affecting the Food Stamp Program effective October 1, 2008:

- the federal Food Stamp Program has been renamed the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP);
- the dependent care deduction cap has been eliminated;
- certain assets have been designated as noncountable; and
- the period unused food stamp benefits will remain available before being expunged has been extended.

Work Program Requirement Changes

TAFDC
State Letter 1339
Field Operations Memo 2008-50

As a result of changes to federal work participation rules, effective October 1, 2008 the Department is changing how it counts clients' work program participation in the following areas:

- homework/study time will count towards overall participation in certain education and training activities;

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Field Operations Memos (Continued from page 6)

- post-secondary education beyond an associate's degree (including bachelor's and graduate degree programs) will meet the work program requirement (provided the client has not already exceeded the 12-month limit on education or training activity to meet the work program); and
- child support will count in the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) calculation when determining community service participation limits.

The Field Operations Memo informs case managers about policy and procedural changes as they relate to work program participation.

The State Letter transmits the following change regarding the Work Program Requirement: enrollment in a degree program other than an associate's degree program will meet the TAFDC Work Program requirement.

NewMMIS – New MassHealth Cards: Temporary MassHealth Cards and Replacement MassHealth Cards

All
Field Operations Memo 2008-51

The Medicaid Management Information System (MMIS) will be replaced with a new application entitled NewMMIS. NewMMIS is scheduled for deployment on January 5, 2009.

Field Operations Memo 2008-29 stated that MassHealth Cards would begin to be mailed out between July and September 2008. The mailings have been delayed as a result, mailings of these cards are now scheduled to begin October 3, 2008.

This Field Operations Memo gives TAO staff:

- information about new REVS functionality;
- procedures for replacing MassHealth cards; and
- procedures for issuing Temporary MassHealth cards.

State Letter

Food Stamp Program: No Available FS Community Service Site

FS
State Letter 1341

Based on comments received during the public notice period for State Letter 1337 that implemented the Able Bodied Adults Without Dependent (ABAWD) waiver and eliminated the former good cause reason *No Available FS Community Service Site*, the Department is issuing a clarification to regulations stating that DTA will continue to provide community service slots for ABAWDs.

Diversity Quote

“We may have different religions, different languages, different colored skin, but we all belong to one human race.”

Kofi Anna

FYIs

Changes to DTA Online

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

- All references to the Falmouth TAO have been removed from the **Field Operations** tab and associated city and town cross references have been updated;
- All references to the Falmouth TAO have been removed from “Related Systems Information” accessed through the **Policy Online** side-bar option and associated city and town cross references have been updated;
- A TAO Emails – Special Procedures Memo on the TAFDC Clothing Allowance has been added and is accessible through the **Policy Online** side-bar option;
- A letter from Commissioner Kehoe concerning the 2008 Performance Recognition Award Winners has been added and is accessible through the **Recognition/Awards** side-bar option;
- A change was made to the “Noncountable Assets – Retirement Accounts” Food Stamp Program Job Aid accessible through the **Policy Online** side-bar option;
- Changes were made to the “Overview” page on the **Policy and Program Management** tab; and
- Changes were made to the “Who We Are” page on the **Administration & Finance** tab.

Changes to the EOHHS mass.gov DTA Homepage

Changes to the EOHHS mass.gov DTA Homepage include:

- Updates to our Homeless caseload information which can be accessed by selecting “Homeless” beneath the **Research & Statistics** side-bar;
- The August 2008 Facts and Figures Report which can be accessed by selecting “DTA Facts and Figures” beneath the **Research & Statistics** side-bar;
- Removing all references to the Falmouth TAO from “DTA Office Locations” beneath the **Key Resources** side-bar and updating associated city and town cross references; and
- The Food Stamp Eligibility Charts and Issuance Tables have been included as a separate option along with Food Stamp Program regulations which can be accessed by selected DTA Regulations beneath the **Key Resources** side-bar.

Holiday Gift Verification - Globe Santa Mailing

In October, active TAFDC, EAEDC, and Food Stamp recipients who reside in the Globe Santa geographical area received the “Boston Globe Santa – Holiday Gift Verification Notice.” Recipients may send this notice with their letter to Globe Santa requesting to participate in the Boston Globe Santa program.

This verification notice lists the name, date of birth and gender of all children ‘age 12 years or younger’. The age of children who can participate *in the Globe Santa program** changed from 14 years of age and younger to 12 years of age and younger.

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FYIs (Continued from page 8)

A second mailing will occur in the middle of November for new client families that were approved after the first mailing.

Families who did not receive the notice or need another Boston Globe Santa – Holiday Verification Notice, will contact either the Central Office Income Verification Unit at 1-800-632-8095 or their case manager. This notice is available from the Letter Request window in BEACON.

In the event a client requests replacement of his or her Globe Santa verification notice between October 13, 2008 to October 27th, 2008, do not generate it from the Letter Request window. Take the client's name and ask him or her to wait until after October 27th for the replacement letter. BEACON will be updated and will display only those children age 12 and younger who are eligible to participate in the program.

* Please note that there is no age limit on the generic notice—different organizations may have different age requirements. For example, Marine Corps Reserve units have authorized distribution of toys to children up to 17 years of age through their “Toys for Tots” program in the following areas: South/Southeast Plymouth, NorthEast Bristol, Norfolk and Worcester Counties. The program will also distribute toys to individuals older than 17 in special cases.

Revised Posters

In the coming weeks Transitional Assistance Offices will receive revised, reformatted and laminated posters. Posters are to be displayed in TAO waiting areas visible to all. **Old versions of these posters must be removed and replaced with the revised versions.** Please see the following list.

Required posters to display in TAO waiting areas:

1. *Policy of Nondiscrimination Programmatic Access and Affirmative Action/Equal Opportunity (AAEO Poster)* (English and Spanish)
2. *Public Notice (ADA Poster)* (English and Spanish)
3. *You Deserve to Be Safe (DV Poster -I)* (English and Spanish)
4. *Do You Have a Disability? (OCR-Poster-I)* (English and Spanish)
5. *DTA Mission Statement (DTA MS – 2008)* (English and Spanish)
6. *Good Cause (GC- Poster)* (English and Spanish)

Required posters already displayed in TAO waiting areas:

1. *And Justice for All (FS-USDA)*
2. *Do You Need an Interpreter? (Point to Your Language)*
3. *DTA Orientation Sessions (OS Poster)* (English and Spanish)
4. *Having Trouble Getting Verifications (VPoster)* (Multiple languages)
5. *File Your 2008 Tax (EITC Poster)* (English and Spanish)

Required posters to display in areas other than TAO waiting areas as space allows:

1. *Time is Running Out (Time Limit Poster)* (English and Spanish)
2. *Do You Have questions, concerns, problems relating to your case? (Recipient Services Poster)* (English and Spanish)
3. *Are you a teen parent, a client of TAFDC or an EAEDC family? (RBP Poster)* (English and Spanish)
4. *Branding Posters (English)*

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FYIs (Continued from page 9)**Verifying Extended Unemployment Compensation Benefits**

Unemployment compensation (UC) benefits were extended an additional 13 weeks in Massachusetts, beginning July 7, 2008. In the course of an application interview or at the time of the next client contact, case managers must advise clients who are nearing the end of their UC benefits or clients who have recently exhausted UC benefits to apply for an extension. Information about extended benefits can be found on the Division of Unemployment Assistance (DUA) website at www.mass.gov/dua.

Currently, the Unemployment Insurance Information Inquiry screen does not include extension information. A client's remaining balance might show zero, regardless of the fact that extension benefits are available or are currently being paid.

Note: UC extension payments do not include dependent allowances.

DUA is in the process of updating this screen. In the meantime, you may call DUA at (617) 626-6660 to ask about UC Extension benefit. Case managers may ask:

- if a client is actively collecting Extended Unemployment Compensation (EUC08) benefits;
- what the client's EUC08 benefit rate is; and
- what the client's EUC08 balance is.

You will be notified when the Unemployment Insurance Information Inquiry screen has been updated.

Dates to Remember

October 8, 2008	Senior Benefits Expo Taunton State Hospital, 60 Hodges Avenue 9:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.
October 10, 2008	Senior Benefits Expo Greenleaf Community Center, 1188 Parker Street 9:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.
October 13, 2008	Columbus Day
October 14, 2008	Senior Benefits Expo VETS, Inc., 69 Grove Street 9:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

TAO Meeting Notes