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From the Commissioner

Dear Colleagues,

Thank you for your continued hard work and dedication toward serving individuals and families across the Commonwealth. During these difficult economic times, we are faced with significant challenges and it is apparent that we need to continue to do things differently. There has been unprecedented demand for SNAP, due to our conscious efforts to increase program access as well as the declining economy. More than 620,000 individuals – or, nearly one in 10 residents of Massachusetts – now receive SNAP. Over the past five years, Massachusetts has moved from 49th to 18th in the country in the access rate to SNAP.

The tremendous growth in the SNAP caseload, combined with a decrease in DTA staffing, has resulted in record high caseload-to-worker ratios. The total SNAP caseload has increased by more than 173% since the beginning of FY02, while total Department staffing levels have decreased 30% in that same time period. We realize the importance of sufficient staffing to continue making access improvements and processing applications in a timely manner.

The Department also faces reductions in our administrative account. Although this account does not fund direct caseworkers, it does support critical local office support staff and provides for important resources to allow our workers to serve our clients effectively. DTA administrative funding has only increased \$1.7 million from FY05 to FY 09, despite collective bargaining cost-of-living increases and inflation in the fixed costs of conducting business, such as Electronic Benefits Transfers (EBT) and leases.

Recently, advocates have expressed concerns that we are unable to keep pace with demand for SNAP. We wanted to share our response with you. We are committed to doing all we can to support you in meeting our shared goals. The House and Senate have passed their budgets and are proceeding into Conference Committee deliberations. We are advocating for the highest possible funding in these accounts:

- 4400-1000: Administration—funding at House amount of approximately \$53 million.

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- 4400-1100: Caseworkers—funding at the House amount of approximately \$56 million.

As you know, we have taken a number of steps to make operations more efficient in response to the dramatic growth in the caseload over the past several years. This memo outlines many of these changes. We have received requests for information on our efforts to respond to this increase from other parties (i.e. EOHHS and advocacy organizations) and as part of our response, we have shared the following information:

- Business process improvements are underway to address customer service and maximize efficiencies such as the centralization of certain cases, including web applications, EAEDC rest home cases and funeral and burial payments. In addition, we are developing procedural standards designed to ensure consistency and uniformity across all of our local offices including:
 - Changing the way cases are assigned to workers and developing a specialized case management system.
 - Incorporating waiting area coordinators to orient and assist clients entering DTA’s local offices.

These initiatives will allow us to streamline processing and assist clients more quickly. In addition, we are pursuing various changes that will further reduce the strain on our current SNAP resources, including:

- *Changing the Department’s eligibility system to extend the certification period for Retirement Survivors Disability Insurance (RSDI) cases to 24 months.*
 - It is expected that this will reduce the number of cases that need to be processed by approximately 1,800 per month.
- *Extending Universal Semi-Annual Report (USR) cases from six months to 12 months.*
 - It is anticipated that this change will reduce the number of cases processed on a monthly basis by approximately 3,000.
- *Developing “SNAP Processing Centers” in Boston and Springfield.*
 - The Department is developing a new initiative in Boston and Springfield to improve our ability to process the significant increase in SNAP applications.

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From the Commissioner (Continued from page 2)

You will soon hear more about this concept, which will transition our Springfield-State Street and Newmarket Square offices into “SNAP Processing Centers.” These offices will be responsible for all SNAP-only cases within the Springfield and Boston local office service areas, allowing the Springfield-Liberty Street and Dudley Square offices to concentrate on serving individuals and families receiving cash assistance and SNAP. Please note that the SNAP Processing Centers will retain a number of cash workers available to assist walk-in applicants requesting these benefits. Meetings will be held this week in these offices to further discuss this initiative.

- *Improving the documentation of verifications.*
 - o In the Brockton office, several business process changes have been implemented to better handle client paperwork. Clerks are now required to log all applications and recertifications when they arrive. This system provides a record of documents received and allows supervisors and case managers to better prioritize their workloads. Local office supervisors are being trained to monitor the tracking system to ensure the timely processing of incoming verifications. We anticipate that this system will be expanded statewide in the coming months.

The Department is also pursuing other initiatives to improve efficiency within the SNAP program. The Food Stamp/SNAP Improvement Coalition and Massachusetts Law Reform Institute (MLRI) recently made several recommendations to DTA to ease the administrative burden of rising caseloads, including potential federal waivers. In reviewing each of MLRI’s suggestions, the Department was careful to consider the resources necessary to implement each recommendation and the level of impact it would have on the Department and our clients. We are mindful of the need to eliminate burdensome requirements but we need to balance this with our current financial resources. Below is the status of the federal waivers that the Department is currently pursuing:

- *Waiver request to reduce interview requirements at recertification.*
 - o This waiver request would allow case managers to waive the interview requirement if:
 - The required verifications are provided to the local office by the established deadline date; and
 - The household’s continued eligibility for SNAP is confirmed.

Households who fail to provide the required verifications, or who appear to no longer be eligible, will still be required to participate in an interview as part of the certification process. It is important to note that this would apply only for those clients re-certifying for the program and not those applying for the first time. The Department submitted the request for this waiver to USDA on April 21, 2009.

- *Waiver request to waive the face-to-face interview requirement for all Non-Public Assistance (NPA) cases, including at application.*

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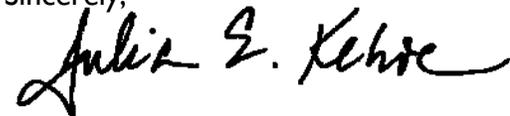
From the Commissioner (Continued from page 3)

- o The Department currently has a waiver from USDA that allows us to conduct telephone interviews (versus face-to-face), without documenting a hardship reason, at recertification only. The Department would like to extend this provision by applying this standard to the interview required at initial application. By implementing this provision, it will reduce foot traffic at our local offices, streamline case processing, and provide improved customer service. An amendment to the current waiver was filed on April 21, 2009, and adds the request to waive the face-to-face interview at initial certifications.

In addition, as a result of funding from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA), DTA is in the process of hiring up to 100 new staff members to process SNAP applications and provide administrative support and service center supervision. These new full-time employees, in conjunction with other efficiencies currently underway, will help to reduce the average SNAP caseload, and make it easier to deliver a high level of customer service. As mentioned above, we are closely monitoring the budgets released by the Legislature to determine if this new federal funding will be needed to address any reductions to our caseworker account.

The road ahead is not an easy one, but I am confident that we will continue to succeed through our dedication, teamwork, and creativity. Thank you for your efforts to meet our mission to assist low-income individuals and families to meet their basic needs, increase their incomes, and improve their quality of life.

Sincerely,



Julia E. Kehoe

Quality Corner

This month we will review an error caused by not counting RSDI income.

RSDI Income Not Counted

This case was certified as Universal Semiannual Reporting (USR) for a household of six – the client and five children. Two of the children belonged to the client, and in addition, she had custody of two nieces and a nephew. The case record indicated the following income: RSDI of \$401 for the nephew and RSDI of \$401 for one of the nieces; SSI of \$73.39 for the client and TAFDC of \$531 for the client's two children. At the time of certification, the household also had the following income that was not used in the SNAP benefit calculation: RSDI of \$698 for the client and RSDI of \$45 for each of the client's two children. This omission of the otherwise countable RSDI income caused an error of \$116 for the review month.

What's a Case Manager to Do?

Case managers must be alert and double-check income information being put into BEACON. A BEACON narrative entry on this case clearly indicated that the case manager was aware of the RSDI for the client and her children. Unfortunately, this same income was later overlooked. This resulted in an over issuance of both TAFDC benefits and SNAP benefits.

When reviewing a case for sign-off, supervisors must be diligent, particularly with the income-related portion of the case. As this case was error-prone, with income being received by five out of the six household members, both the case manager and supervisor should have carefully reviewed the *Other Income* window to ensure that all income received by all household members has been attributed correctly in BEACON.

Dates to Remember

June 11, 2009

Fundamentals of Investing Seminar for Massachusetts Deferred Compensation SMART Plan, One Ashburton Place, 21st Floor Conference Room, Boston, 11 AM. Go to the [SMART website](#) for more information.

June 17, 2009

Bunker Hill Day (Suffolk County)

From the Forms File

Revised Forms

The following forms have been revised for ease of use by applicants, clients and the UMASS/Disability Evaluation Services (DES). Please discard old versions and use the revised versions of these forms.

Emergency Aid to the Elderly, Disabled and Children Disability Supplement

04-200-0509-05

04-201-0509-05 (S)

EAEDC-DS (Rev. 5/2009)

Transitional Aid to Families with Dependent Children Disability Supplement

02-710-0509-05

02-711-0509-05 (S)

TAFDC-DS (Rev. 5/2009)

Emergency Aid to the Elderly, Disabled and Children Medical Report

04-012-0509-05

EAEDC-Med Rpt (Rev. 5/2009)

SNAP/ET Job Search

09-164-0609-05

09-165-0609-05 (S)

SNAP/ET-JS (Rev. 6/2009)

The *SNAP/ET Job Search Declaration* form was revised to reflect the Food Stamp Program name change to Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).

The following brochure is now available in Spanish.

Noncitizen Resource Brochure

25-411-0509-05

NCRB (Rev. 5/2009)

Obsolete Poster

The following poster is now obsolete. Please remove from TAO waiting areas.

Important Notice for Former TAFDC Recipients Who Are Caretakers of Disabled Children

Minnefield FP

Diversity Quote

“Be the change you wish to see reflected in the world.”

Mahatma Gandhi

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 and answers below address issues concerning disabled clients in the TAFDC and EAEDC programs. For more information on this topic in the TAFDC Program, refer to 106 CMR 203.530. For more information on this topic in the EAEDC Program, refer to 106 CMR 320.200. Also refer to *A User's Guide: Transitional Assistance Programs and BEACON*, Chapter XIII-H.

- Q.** My EAEDC applicant is receiving MassHealth Disability benefits. Is he still required to verify his disability with a *Medical Report* and a *Disability Supplement*?
- A.** No, as long as your applicant currently has an active MassHealth disability status. Call Disability Evaluation Services at the UMass Medical School (1-800-888-3420) to verify that a disability determination has been made. If the disability determination information is complete and finds the applicant to be disabled, remember to obtain the duration start and end dates.

As long as the determination indicates that the client's disability is current and complies with the EAEDC requirements, then you do not need to require an additional *Medical Report* or *Disability Supplement* from this client. (In this situation, select "MassHealth Disability" from the Determination Source dropdown box.)

The same is true for TAFDC clients. As long as the disability determination indicates that the client's disability is current and complies with the TAFDC requirements, then you do not need to require an additional *Medical Report* or *Disability Supplement*.

- Q.** My EAEDC applicant informed me that he is currently participating in a program through the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission (MRC). Is he still required to verify his disability with a *Medical Report* and a *Disability Supplement*?
- A.** No. An EAEDC applicant or client who has verified that he is actively participating in MRC is considered to have a physical or mental disability. A *Medical Report* and a *Disability Supplement* do not need to be completed. (In this situation, select "Mass Rehab Commission" from the Determination Source dropdown box.)
- Q.** My client's EAEDC *Medical Report* has been completed and signed by her nurse practitioner. Since this type of nurse is considered a "competent medical authority," per Field Operations Memo 2009-6 and State Letter 1345, is the nurse's signature acceptable even when the disability is a mental, rather than a physical impairment?
- A.** Yes. For the TAFDC and EAEDC programs, the nurse practitioner's signature is acceptable on your client's *Medical Report* concerning either physical and/or mental impairment(s).

For more information, refer to 106 CMR 701.600(H).

Field Operations Memos

Revised Spring SNAP H-EAT Report

SNAP

Field Operations Memo 2009-22A

On the weekend of 4/24/2009, MIS restored the Heating/Cooling SUA to approximately 10,000 SNAP households who received H-EAT benefits in November 2008. The Heating/Cooling SUA had been inadvertently removed. MIS recalculated May benefits for these households since H-EAT Program eligibility is for a one-year period.

A revised report listing these impacted households was e-mailed with this memo. The revised report includes the month that the Heating/Cooling SUA was removed. Case managers must review each household on the report for lost benefits.

NewMMIS: Implementation

TAFDC and EAEDC

Field Operations Memo 2009-25

Effective May 26, 2009, NewMMIS will replace the current version of MMIS. This memo gives TAO staff information about the implementation of NewMMIS.

DTA Youth Works/Summer Employment

TAFDC and SNAP

State Letter 1350

Field Operations Memo 2009-27

The American Recovery and Reimbursement Act of 2009 (ARRA), also known as the Economic Stimulus Package, was enacted in response to the extraordinary economic crisis the country is experiencing. It seeks to provide a variety of strategic investments aimed at improving economic conditions. As part of ARRA, more than 11,000 summer jobs for youth will be available in Massachusetts. The Department has developed the DTA Youth Works Program to help clients (both dependents and grantees) age 14 through 24 obtain these jobs during the summer months. This memo provides TAO staff with:

- client eligibility criteria;
- procedures for referring clients to the DTA Youth Works Program; and
- procedures for entering Youth Works income and other summer employment income into BEACON.

Field Operations Memos

Bay State CAP Outreach Plan, Phase Three

SNAP

Field Operations Memo 2009-28

In February 2005, the Massachusetts Combined Application Project (Bay State CAP) was implemented. Bay State CAP created a new and simple way for eligible Supplemental Security Income (SSI) applicants and clients to apply for food assistance. Currently, 31,000 individuals receive Bay State CAP food assistance benefits.

Approximately 29,000 SSI clients may be eligible for, but are not receiving SNAP benefits. Nutritional assistance in the form of SNAP benefits would be a vital benefit to this vulnerable population. As part of the waiver agreement with the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), DTA agreed to outreach to potentially eligible SSI clients. DTA will outreach to current SSI clients who appear to be eligible for Bay State CAP in two additional phases.

Phase Three will target approximately 13,000 Bay State CAP eligible individuals who are coded for SSI purposes in State Living Arrangement A (living alone). Phase Three will be implemented through automatic enrollment. DTA chose these individuals for Phase Three because SDX provides all the information required to determine eligibility.

Field Operations Memo 2009-28 discusses the Phase Three outreach effort.

SNAP Recertifications - Changes to Expired Certifications

SNAP

Field Operations Memo 2009-29

This memo introduces a temporary modification to the recertification process that allows the continued issuance of SNAP Benefits past the end certification date when a reevaluation is initiated in BEACON. The memo also introduces two new Actuate reports, *Reevaluation Detail Status Report for xx/xx/xxxx* and *Daily Reevaluation Status Summary Report for xx/xx/xxxx*, that allow the case manager and supervisor to track the status of pending reevaluations, and determine which cases require priority processing.

Data Entry for Boston Family Housing

EA

Field Operations Memo 2009-30

As of May 2009, the Centralized Eligibility and Processing Unit in Central Office no longer enters data on initial shelter placements or shelter exits for the Boston Family Housing Office.

Field Operations Memos

Interim Contact with Certain SNAP Households

All

Field Operations Memo 2009-31

This memo introduces two new interim contact notices that will be sent midway through the certification period to:

- elderly/disabled households that currently have a 24-month certification period; and
- households that currently have self-employment income and a 12-month certification period.

The purpose of these notices is to remind these clients of their responsibility to report changes in their household circumstances.

EA Program Transitions from DTA to DHCD

EA

Field Operations Memo 2009-32

Effective July 1, 2009, the Emergency Assistance (EA) Program will transition to the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD). As of July 1, the EA Program and all of the activities associated with the EA Program will no longer be the responsibility of DTA.

This memo provides instructions for DTA staff in preparation for the transition from DTA to DHCD, including creating a separate EA case for DHCD, transferring cash and/or SNAP cases for families residing in shelters that are out of the TAO's service area to appropriate TAOs, reassigning cash and/or SNAP cases to office staff, and contacting shelters prior to July 1, 2009.

SNAP: Temporary Suspension of ABAWD Rules Based on the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA)

SNAP

Field Operations Memo 2009-33

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) included a provision to temporarily suspend the Able Bodied Adults Without Dependents (ABAWD) requirements. The ABAWD suspension is addressed in this memo.

This memo informs TAO staff of:

- the termination of the ABAWD waiver;
- the ARRA suspension of ABAWD rules;
- BEACON coding related to the rule suspension; and
- case manager responsibilities for processing ABAWD cases at application and recertification.

State Letter

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance

TAFDC

State Letter 1349

This State Letter transmits the following changes in the Transitional Cash Assistance Programs regulations regarding Supplemental Nutrition Assistance:

- Supplemental Nutrition Assistance benefits may be subject to a maximum income level as determined by the Department in order to stay within appropriated funds; and
- references to food stamps have been replaced with the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).

FYIs

Changes to DTA Online

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

- the Greenfield TAO address change has been added to the “Field Operations Region Listing,” which is accessible through the **Field Operations** tab;
- updates have been made to the SNAP “Job Aids,” an “Overview of DTA Programs” selection has been added and both are accessible from the **Training** side-bar option; and
- An updated “Event” has been added to the **Diversity** side-bar option.

Changes to the EOHHS mass.gov DTA Homepage

- Updates have been made to “DTA Facts and Figures” as well as to DTA caseload information, which can be accessed by selecting the appropriate department program (EAEDC, FS, Homeless, SSI, TAFDC) beneath the **Research & Statistics** side-bar option.

FYIs

EAEDC Medical Report Provider Number

The EAEDC Medical Report Provider Number is no longer needed on the EAEDC Medical Report. This field has been removed as part of the redesign of the Medical Report. Staff should not be calling Providers for numbers nor should staff be annotating the form.

Entering Terminated Income for SNAP Cases

At a recent Program Accuracy meeting, a case was found to be in error because terminated income that was still on record in BEACON caused a significant underissuance in the SNAP benefit calculation. For SNAP, terminated income may be countable only for the initial month of certification. Because the income was terminated, it should have been removed from BEACON the day after the case opened and the initial month's benefits were issued.

Another way to accurately process SNAP cases with terminated income is as follows:

- Open the case starting from the first **full** month of eligibility.
Note: Do not enter the terminated income on BEACON.
- Perform a *What If* calculation to determine the amount of SNAP benefits owed to the client for the partial month of eligibility, i.e., from the day of application through the day before the client's issuance date.
Note: Be sure to count any terminated income that falls in the initial month of eligibility when performing the *What If* Calculation.
- On Day 2, issue a Related Benefit in the amount determined by the *What If* calculation.

In the second way above, the case manager does not have to remember to zero out the terminated income but must remember to issue the related benefit.

TAO Meeting Notes