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From the Commissioner

Dear Colleagues:

On January 26, 2011, Governor Patrick announced his budget for Fiscal Year 2012. This budget is a responsible and balanced plan to fund as many of the state’s programs and services as possible, while recognizing that we all must live within the resources available.

The budget is centered on the Governor’s four key priorities, outlined in his State of the Commonwealth address earlier this month:

- Spur job creation in the Commonwealth
- Address urban and youth violence in our communities
- Control health care costs through innovative solutions while preserving our national-leading coverage of residents
- Eliminate the achievement gap and prepare all of Massachusetts’s students for the jobs of tomorrow.

We are pleased to preserve ongoing subsistence benefits for thousands of families, including cash assistance for more than 52,000 Transitional Aid to Families with Dependent Children (TAFDC) households and more than 22,000 Emergency Aid to the Elderly, Disabled and Children (EAEDC) households. The Governor’s budget maintains the critical monthly benefits provided by these programs at the Fiscal Year 2011 levels. Services for survivors of domestic violence are also protected.

Unfortunately, the Commonwealth continues to face economic challenges and fewer resources, in large part because of the loss of federal stimulus aid. Difficult choices were necessary, and the Department is facing some reductions. The budget:

- Eliminates the Employment Services Program (ESP). This means that all ESP programs will be discontinued effective July 1, including:
 - Competitive Integrated Employment Services (CIES)
 - The Young Parents Program (YPP)
 - Massachusetts Office of Refugees and Immigrants – Job Placement Services

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From the Commissioner *(Continued from page 1)*

- Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission - Benefits Planning Assistance and Outreach Program
- DTA Works Internship Program
 - Please note: current DTA Works interns will not be impacted by this change.
- GED Program
- Community College Program
- Vocational Specialists
- Transportation.

I realize this news may come as a shock to many of you. Please be assured that we will do everything we can to retain the jobs of our colleagues who manage the programs and contracts supported in the ESP line-item, through redeployments to other areas of need. We will also work closely with our staff, our stakeholders, and ESP providers to develop a plan that will phase out these programs as smoothly as possible. Employment services, training, and education are critical to assisting families to move out of poverty; however, maintaining subsistence-level benefits that are already very low must be a priority, particularly since any reduction would not be replaced by assistance from other organizations.

- Does not fund the September clothing allowance for children on TAFDC. Although it is an important resource for TAFDC families, the clothing allowance is not a basic ongoing benefit and we believe protecting ongoing monthly benefits is most important for our clients, and most critical to our mission.
- Funds the caseworker account at a level that will preserve our existing staff. While this is a relief, the loss of federal stimulus money will likely mean we will be unable to backfill vacant caseworker positions during FY12.
- Assumes the state will take over administration of the state supplement portion of Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits. Currently, the state supplement for SSI is administered by the federal government at a cost of nearly \$26 million per year. In FY12, these functions will be assumed by the University of Massachusetts Medical School, at an estimated savings of about \$11 million per year. This change will not affect the amount of benefits received by SSI clients.

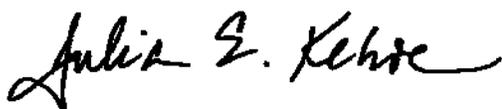
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From the Commissioner *(Continued from page 2)*

The FY12 budget is not yet final. In the coming months, the budget will move through the House and Senate and each branch will release a budget; the House and Senate will submit a “conference committee” budget; the Governor will submit his vetoes; and the House and Senate will have the opportunity to override the Governor’s vetoes. Since the final FY12 budget will not be available for several months, we must work under the assumption that the Governor’s budget will take effect in July. As such, we will soon develop plans to implement these reductions. It is our goal to be able to preserve all existing DTA staff, which will be crucial as we continue to face caseload growth.

Thank you as always for your patience, understanding, and commitment to low-income individuals and families. I will keep you updated on our budget as the process continues.

With much appreciation,



Julia E. Kehoe
Commissioner

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Quality Corner

This month, we will review a negative error. This error was caused by the inappropriate denial of a case that included eligible U.S. citizens who were part of a mixed household that also included an ineligible noncitizen.

Ineligible Noncitizen

The SNAP household included the grantee and two children who were both less than six years old. A SNAP application was received by the TAO on August 11, 2010. A verification checklist was created on that same day requesting residency and income and expense information. On August 25, 2010, the case was denied due to ineligible noncitizen status.

The QC reviewer found that the application form listed the two children as U.S. citizens. In addition, a birth certificate for each child was found in the case record. The birth certificates indicated that both children were born in the United States. Finally, on the AU Composition Results page, the children were coded as ineligible noncitizens. However, on the Citizenship page, the children were correctly coded as U.S. citizens.

What's a Case Manager to Do?

Grantee parents who are ineligible due to noncitizen status may still apply for benefits for their children who are U.S. citizens. In this case, the denial of the SNAP application was inappropriate because the children were both eligible for SNAP benefits.

Case managers must always be careful when entering noncitizen information. An incorrect entry could trigger the wrong eligibility calculation and lead to inappropriate denial of the case. For more on noncitizens, see 106 CMR 362.220 and a *User's Guide: Transitional Assistance Program and BEACON*, Chapter XIII-E.

Diversity Quote

“Cowardice asks the question, ‘Is it safe?’ Expediency asks the question, ‘Is it politic?’ But conscience asks the question, ‘Is it right?’ And there comes a time when one must take a position that is neither safe, nor politic, nor popular but because conscience tells one it is right.”

**Martin Luther King, Jr.
American Baptist minister and
Civil Rights Leader, 1929-1968**

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 TAFDC applicant says he is receiving payments from the Montgomery GI Bill Program. This Program provides veterans with up to 36 months of payments to cover education costs. Is this income excluded for TAFDC and SNAP?
- A.** Yes, this income is excluded for both TAFDC and SNAP purposes. Since these payments are not intended for day-to-day living costs, do not duplicate assistance received under TAFDC and are used solely for education or education-related purposes, they are noncountable in the TAFDC Program. For more information on noncountable income, refer to 106 CMR 204.250(J) and 106 204.250(CC).
Montgomery GI Bill payments are excluded for SNAP as well. For more information on income exclusions in SNAP, refer to 106 CMR 363.230(D).
- Q.** My SNAP client is over 65 and has reported earnings received from the Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP). Is this countable earned income excluded?
- A.** Yes. This program is designed to enhance employment opportunities for seniors by providing job training and employment assistance. Any income received under this program is excluded because it is authorized under Title V of the Older Americans Act. For more information on income exclusions in SNAP, refer to 106 CMR 363.230(K).
- Q.** I received a TAFDC application today from a stepfather who is applying for one child. He is recently divorced from his former spouse who is the mother of the dependent child. Now that this stepfather is divorced from the dependent child's mother, is there still an acceptable TAFDC relationship in this case?
- A.** Yes. Even though there is no blood relationship between the stepfather and this child and despite the recent divorce, the stepparent bond continues and this relationship is considered acceptable according to TAFDC regulations. For more information on relationship requirements and verifying relationship in the TAFDC Program, refer to 106 CMR 203.585.
- Q.** I received an application today for TAFDC. The individual was a step-grandfather applying for himself and his stepdaughter's son. Is he eligible for TAFDC?
- A.** Yes, he is eligible if he is the spouse of the dependent child's grandmother. For more information on relationship requirements and verifying relationship requirements in TAFDC, refer to 106 CMR 203.585.

Operations Memos

Medex Premium Rate Changes and Medicare Changes

All

Operations Memo 2011-1

Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Massachusetts announced Medex premium rate changes for the following non-group plans: Bronze, Core, Gold, Silver, Standard, Basic, Core Plus, Basic No Rx and Core Plus No Rx.

These changes were effective on January 1, 2011.

This memo:

- identifies the non-group plans that have changed and the corresponding rate changes;
- provides information on updates to SNAP benefits and the Medex premium amounts; and
- gives information about the 2011 Medex Premium Rate Change Report.

While there is no SSA Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) this year, the Medicare Part B Premium will change for certain people. The Medicare Part D Deductible will not be adjusted with the Medex Premium Rate change.

Expiration of the SNAP Expedited Waiver

SNAP

Operations Memo 2011-2

This memo informs staff of the expiration of the SNAP Expedited Waiver and instructs case managers to return to regular expedited processing standards for eligible cases.

TAO Reception Log (e-Log)

All

Operations Memo 2011-3

This memo provides instructions on how to prepare staff to access the e-Log database, register an existing client or a new applicant into the e-Log database, and access the Job Aids to support the implementation of the e-Log database.

Operations Memos

The ARRA \$25 Weekly Unemployment Compensation Payment Has Ended for All Claimants

SNAP

Operations Memo 2011-4

This memo informs staff that the ARRA \$25 weekly unemployment compensation (UC) payment has ended for all claimants. In addition, the memo advises staff about the recalculation of cases, the payment of retroactive benefits to affected households and procedures for entering UC income going forward.

TAFDC and SNAP: Federal Poverty Guidelines Increased for 2011

TAFDC and SNAP

Operations Memo 2011-5

This memo informs staff that the 2011 Health and Human Services (HHS) poverty guidelines were increased and published in the Federal Register on January 20, 2011. On January 20, 2011, the TAFDC and SNAP eligibility charts and tables affected by the poverty guidelines and posted at www.mass.gov/dta were updated to reflect the increase in the 2011 poverty guidelines.

Effective February 1, 2011, BEACON began using the increased eligibility standards in the calculation of income eligibility for TAFDC teen parents under age 18 living with a parent and the gross monthly income test for categorically eligible SNAP households.

FYI

Increase in Federal Mileage Rate

Effective immediately, TAO staff must use the federal mileage rate of 51 cents per mile when calculating allowable transportation costs to be used as a medical deduction or a dependent care deduction for SNAP purposes. The new federal mileage rate represents an increase from the rate issued in an *FYI* in *Transitions* of March 2010.

TAO Meeting Notes