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From the Commissioner

Dear Colleagues:

As you may be aware, we have recently been in discussions with the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) about the urgent need to reduce our backlog in overdue Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) re-certifications. I want to take this opportunity to thank all of you for your efforts across our agency – in Field Operations; Policy, Program, and External Relations (PPER); Management Information Systems (MIS), Administration and Finance (ANF), and beyond – to process these re-certifications quickly and efficiently. I know you have sacrificed many nights and weekends, and the results have been impressive.

As of March 22nd, the number of overdue re-certifications, which had previously risen as high as 30,000, was at 878. I appreciate your dedication and teamwork, and I am hopeful that we will have processed all overdue re-certifications by April 1st. We plan to offer overtime hours until the end of March.

In order to ensure our continued timely processing of applications and re-certifications, we are continuing to pursue a range of activities to simplify our administration of SNAP and make it more accessible to the clients we serve. These efforts include:

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- **Annual Reporting:** USDA recommended we implement an option to conduct Annual Reporting in conjunction with an interim report for eligible households. This would streamline the eligibility review process for as many as 160,000 households. We hope to implement this plan in June 2011. An instructive Operations Memo will be issued prior to implementation.
- **Waiver of Interviews for Elderly and Disabled Households:** Initially, we had some difficulties with implementing this waiver and suspended the project. We are currently making systems changes that will resolve these difficulties, and hope to reinstate the waiver of these interviews this spring.
- **EBT Card Replacement:** As of February 28, 2011, we no longer require clients to submit a signed form requesting a replacement EBT card. Although this is a minor change, it will improve our efficiency and our customer service.

(Continued on page 2)

From the Commissioner *(Continued from page 1)*

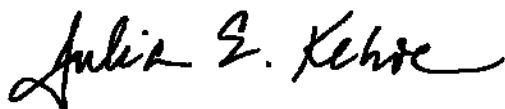
We have also issued an Operations Memo (2011-8A) that explains how to prioritize SNAP re-certifications by release date. The minimum verifications required for case processing can be found in Operations Memo 2010-55. By monitoring the status of cases according to release date we can ensure that we take timely action and complete the processing of cases where clients have appropriately responded to the requirement to begin the recertification process.

On February 23, 2011, I testified at the Joint Hearing of the House and Senate Committees on Ways and Means. In addition to informing them about the challenges we face with our dramatic caseload increase and limited resources, I spoke about our many recent accomplishments including programmatic and operational improvements, expanded use of technology, and national recognition. I urged the Legislature to support the level of funding outlined in the Governor's House 1 budget, particularly to ensure adequate staffing and the maintenance of monthly cash benefit levels for our clients.

Soon, the House Committee on Ways and Means will release their budget, and we will be able to further evaluate our funding for FY 2012.

Thank you again for all of your work to assist the individuals and families who need our services. I am proud of all that we have accomplished together, and know that we will continue to meet each challenge with compassion, professionalism, and collaboration.

With much appreciation,



Julia E. Kehoe
Commissioner

Quality Corner

This month, we will review two errors which occurred in Non-Public Assistance (NPA) SNAP cases. Both errors were related to shelter expenses.

Incorrect Standard Utility Allowance SUA

In the first case, the SNAP household was a 49-year-old client living alone. The case was certified as Universal Semiannual Reporting (USR).

At recertification, the client reported on the USR form that he had moved and now paid rent of \$200 per month and no utility expenses. The case manager changed the client's address on BEACON but neglected to remove the heating/cooling SUA, which was for the client's previous address. This caused an overissuance of \$42 for the review month.

What's a Case Manager to Do?

Since policy permits self-declaration of shelter and dependent care expenses, it is important that recertification forms be carefully reviewed for reported changes. Some changes, such as expenses that are allowed to be self-declared, could otherwise be missed because the client is not required to provide independent verification, unless the information is questionable. Careful review and recording will help to reduce agency-caused errors.

Address and Shelter Expenses Change

In the second case, the household was a 64-year-old client who lived with her daughter, son-in-law and their two children. She purchased and prepared her meals separately from her daughter and family, so she received SNAP benefits as a household of one. The case was certified as Change Reporting with a twelve-month certification period from November 8, 2010 through November 7, 2011.

On September 28, 2010, the client reported a change of address and a change in shelter expenses. At the new address, she paid zero rent but paid for heating/cooling expenses. At the time of the QC review in November, the office had not yet acted on the reported change. This caused an overissuance of \$58 for the review month.

What's a Case Manager to Do?

Based on the client's certification type, which was Change Reporting, she was required to report her address change and any associated change in shelter costs. Since she reported the changes on September 28, 2010, the case manager should have made the changes in BEACON to reflect the new benefit amount by November's cyclical issuance date.

Case managers are reminded that there are numerous SNAP reporting requirements and must take action on required changes in a timely manner. Untimely changes can result in a supplement to the client for an underpayment of SNAP benefits or in a recoupment from the client for an overpayment the client received. Case managers must be mindful of this outcome when making changes on a case and must follow up with a supplement or a recoupment, as needed. For more information, see 106 CMR 366.120, Department Responsibility to Take Timely Action.

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.** What are the required processing rules when a SNAP Application Appointment letter for a telephone interview is sent, but the client ends up missing his scheduled appointment?
- A.** SNAP regulations require that a Notice of Missed Interview (NOMI) be sent to an applicant who does not appear for the scheduled interview. The NOMI can be BEACON-generated for pending cases.
- Q.** How soon after the missed appointment should I send the NOMI?
- A.** The NOMI should be sent as soon as possible, but no later than two days after the date of the missed interview.
- Q.** What are the steps to generate a NOMI in BEACON?
- A.** To generate a NOMI for your applicant:
- Enter the SSN in the SSN field of the Client Search Page;
 - Click on the Letter Request icon located on the task bar;
 - Select NOMI from the dropdown list in the Letter field;
 - Generate and print the letter; and
 - Click on Save.

For more information on application processing and missed appointments, refer to Field Operations Memo 2006-30, *FS (NPA and PA) Application Processing Guideline*; Field Operations Memo 2007-16, *BEACON-Generated Food Stamp Application Appointment Letters and the Food Stamp Notice of Missed Interview*; Field Operations Memo 2007-39, *Food Stamp Program: Negative Errors*; and Field Operations Memo 2008-59, *SNAP Negative Errors and Application Processing*.

Diversity Quote

“If you don't like something, change it. If you can't change it, change your attitude.”

Maya Angelou



From the Forms File

New Poster

DTA information at your fingertips!

26-310-0311-05

26-311-0311-05 (S)

DTA-IVR Poster

The *DTA information at your fingertips!* Poster lists the DTA Automated Hotline telephone number and the My Account Page (MAP) website address. Please display this poster in the TAO waiting area.

Revised Form

Application for Payment of Funeral and Final Disposition

04-085-0211-05

04-086-0211-05 (S)

F&FD-1 (Rev. 2/2011)

The *Application for Payment of Funeral and Final Disposition* has been revised. Refer to Operations Memo 2011-7 for more information. Please discard old versions of this *Application for Payment of Funeral and Final Disposition* and use the revised version. The forms are available in the Online Forms section of Policy Online.

Universal Semiannual Reporting (USR) Income Guidelines Form

09-375-0211-05

09-376-0211-05 (S)

SNAP-USR-2 (Rev. 2/2011)

The *Universal Semiannual Reporting (USR) Income Guidelines Form* has been revised with the new 200% of Federal Poverty Level (FPL) Income Standards. Please discard old versions of this form and use the revised version. The forms are available in the Online Forms section of Policy Online.

Revised Brochure & Inserts

How to Get SNAP Benefits

09-075-0211-05

09-076-0211-05(S)

SNAP-BB (Rev. 2/2011)

SNAP-BB Senior Insert

09-078-0211-05

09-077-0211-05 (S)

SNAP-BB Senior Insert

The *How to Get SNAP Benefits* brochure and *Senior Inserts* have been revised. Revisions include the updating of the **SNAP Income Standards** chart on the brochure as well as the addition of information about optional proofs under the **What Proofs Will I Need?** section of this brochure. Also, the revised SNAP Senior Inserts are available. Please discard old versions of this brochure and insert and use the revised versions.

Obsolete Form

Request for Mail Replacement Card/PIN

18-865-0504-05

18-866-0504-05(S)

EBT-14 (5/2004)

The *Request for Mail Replacement Card/PIN (EBT-14)* form is now obsolete. Refer to Operations Memo 2011-9 for more information. Please discard all versions of this form.

Operations Memos

Corporation for Public Management (CPM) Partial Shutdown

TAFDC

Operations Memo 2011-6

This Operations Memo serves to advise staff that, effective February 28, 2011, the Corporation for Public Management (CPM), which is a CIES vendor, will suspend operations in the following TAOs: Fitchburg, Plymouth and Southbridge. Therefore, effective with this Operations Memo, no referrals to CPM may be made by TAO staff in these TAOs.

Changes to Funeral and Final Disposition Reimbursement Rules

TAFDC and EAEDC

State Letter 1359

Operations Memo 2011-7

The FY '11 State budget authorized changes to the Department's administration of Funeral and Burial payments, one of which was a change in terminology to Funeral and Final Disposition payments.

The State Letter transmitted the following changes to the TAFDC and EAEDC programs:

The Department may now pay up to \$1100 for funeral and final disposition expenses for impoverished decedents, with no maximum limit on the total cost of the arrangements, provided all other eligibility factors are met. This material was effective July 1, 2010.

The Operations Memo clarifies information regarding the Funeral and Final Disposition process and revises the Funeral and Final Disposition form (F&FD-1).

Streamlined EBT Card Replacement and Re-PIN Procedures by Mail

SNAP

Operations Memo 2011-9

To streamline EBT card replacement and re-PIN procedures, the Department has discontinued the use of the *Request for Mail Replacement Card/PIN* (EBT-14) form. The client will no longer need to complete an EBT-14 to receive a card or PIN replacement.

This Operations Memo:

- obsoletes the EBT-14 form; and
- provides new procedures for verifying identity when a client calls to request that a replacement EBT card or PIN be sent by mail.

All other current EBT card replacement and re-PIN procedures remain unchanged.

FYI

TAFDC, EAEDC and SNAP

Best Practices: Completing the Application Interview

As time and work schedules permit, face-to-face application interviews for TAFDC and EAEDC should be completed in one meeting. By doing this, the applicant avoids additional trips to the TAO and case managers save time. For more information on application interviews in the TAFDC and EAEDC Programs, refer to 106 CMR 702.120 and 106 CMR 702.125.

For SNAP applications, case managers should conduct the interview by telephone unless the applicant requests a face-to-face interview, requests a heightened level of security (HLS indicator), or the applicant does not have telephone service. For those who apply for SNAP in person, offer the telephone interview option and screen for expedited service, at the time of first contact. If the applicant specifically requests a face-to-face interview, you should plan to conduct the entire interview in one meeting, as long as time and work schedules permit. For more information on application interviews in SNAP, refer to Field Operations Memo 2006-30. For more information on the confidentiality of case record information and the HLS indicator, refer to Field Operations Memo 2010-50.

Voter Registration Form

The Voter Registration Form has been revised. “Green-Rainbow” has been added under the field, *Party Enrollment or Designation* (#9), and “Libertarian” is no longer listed as a political party.

Accordingly, the three political parties in Massachusetts are Democrat, Republican, and Green-Rainbow.

In March, TAO’s will receive an initial supply of the new form in both English and Spanish and can subsequently order the form from the Document Production Unit. Upon receipt, case managers must discard the old version of the voter registration form and use only the new form moving forward.

The Voter Registration Workbook for Agencies has also been updated to reflect the change in political parties and new copies of the Workbook will be sent to the TAO’s as a reference for completing the revised Voter Registration form. The Declination Form has not been revised and can still be used at this time.

All case managers are reminded to dispose of the old Voter Registration form and start using the new form immediately.

TAO Meeting Notes