



Transitions

November 2011

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Dear Colleagues,

Every day I am humbled by your Herculean efforts to assist Massachusetts' lowest income residents meet their basic needs, increase their incomes and improve their quality of life. Your work is not easy in the best of times, but it has been particularly difficult, and inspirational, during the worst recession in generations.

Over the last four and a half years, we have shared many triumphs, faced numerous challenges, and assisted millions of people. Today I am writing to you to let you know that later this month, I will leave my post as Commissioner of the Department to become the Senior Advisor on Policy Development at the Executive Office of Health and Human Services. I will work closely with Secretary Bigby to align program goals and outcomes across agencies in order to improve the quality of services to Massachusetts residents; leverage existing programs to better focus on reducing poverty and associated social problems (including racial disparities in access to economic opportunity, intergenerational reliance on government assistance, teen pregnancy and youth violence) and increase government efficiency by reducing duplication and maximizing limited resources.

While I am excited about this new opportunity, I am very sad to leave such a dedicated, compassionate, fabulous team. Your expertise, creativity and commitment are unmatched and I cannot express how much I have appreciated your hard work and candor during my time at DTA. In just a few short years together, we:

- Increased the amount of SNAP benefits coming into Massachusetts by more than \$70 million per month, and continued to manage a caseload that has more than doubled, despite having limited resources.
- Hosted the first-ever Statewide Hunger Summit.
- Made numerous improvements to SNAP, including shortened applications for elders and people with disabilities; longer recertification periods; standard medical deductions; expanded categorical eligibility; pre-filled re-certification forms; and more.

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Commissioner's Corner *(Continued from page 1)*

- In collaboration with the Executive Office of Elder Affairs, the Executive Office of Veterans Affairs, the Department of Public Health, and other agencies, we held eight Senior Benefit Expos across the state.
- Worked with the Department of Housing and Community Development to transfer the Emergency Assistance Program to DHCD.
- Launched satellite offices and SNAP Outreach Centers.
- Conducted customer service surveys and focus groups to learn from our clients how we can best assist them.
- Created 16 local office Advisory Boards.
- Launched the Virtual Gateway consumer application, My Account Page, and the Automated Hotline.
- Procured the Competitive Integrated Employment Services (CIES) program and the Young Parents Program (YPP).
- Offered a consistent, updated orientation process for new TAFDC applicants.
- Implemented the DTA Works Internship Program.
- Expanded the Community Service Site program, now called Volunteer to Succeed.
- Incorporated Waiting Area Coordinators and other front-door improvements at our local offices.
- Improved security at local offices.
- Worked with the Department of Agricultural Resources to expand EBT access at Farmers' Markets.
- Marketed the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) Outreach Campaign.
- Were chosen by USDA to administer the Healthy Incentives Pilot in Hampden County.
- Won millions of dollars in SNAP High Performance Bonus Awards.
- Held DTA's first Commissioner's Citation Awards ceremonies.
- Administered Disaster SNAP to more than 16,000 tornado survivors in just seven days.
- Reached agreement with SEIU Local 509 to implement an Intake and Ongoing model to administer SNAP in local offices.
- Worked together across offices to help each other whenever necessary.

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Commissioner's Corner *(Continued from page 2)*

These are just a few examples of all of your wonderful accomplishments.

I wish each of you happiness, success, and fulfillment as you continue to meet DTA's mission. In my new role, I will continue to work with you and I hope you will stay in touch. My last day with the Department will be Friday, November 18th.

Please join me in welcoming DTA's new Commissioner, Daniel Curley, who currently serves as Director of Administration and Finance at the Justice Resource Institute. I know you will make him feel welcome when he arrives on November 21.

I am so grateful for having had the opportunity to have worked with you. You have taught me so much about leadership, teamwork, diversity, and compassion: the building blocks of truly great public service.

With much appreciation and many thanks,

Julia E. Kehoe
Commissioner

Quality Corner

This month, we will review two SNAP errors. The first case had an error attributed to shelter expenses, while the second case had an error caused by an invalid denial.

Attribution of Shelter Expenses

The first case is a household of one. The client reported a monthly income of \$965 in RSDI and \$361.03 in income from annuity funds. The household had shelter expenses of \$2300 per month for rent and was responsible for heating and cooling expenses. The client was eligible for SNAP benefits of \$200.

Based on a letter from the client's brother that was found in the case record, Quality Control (QC) determined that the client's full rent of \$2300 had been paid by the client's brother on a monthly basis. This rental payment was made directly to the landlord. On further review of the SNAP application, QC found that the client had recorded that she did not pay for rent. Attributing the rental payment to the client caused an overissuance of \$184 for the review month.

What's a Case Manager to Do?

Upon receiving the letter from the client's brother, the case manager should have excluded the money for rent as a vendor payment. The client would have also been ineligible for a shelter deduction based on this rental amount. However, she could have been eligible for a shelter deduction for utilities since she was responsible for paying those expenses. The rental amount entered on BEACON should have been \$0.

Careful attention must be paid to proofs provided by clients. Verifications, including letters from family members or roommates must be reviewed for date, amounts and other pertinent information. For more information on vendor payments, see 106 CMR 363.230(B).

Negative Error

This was a household of two whose SNAP recertification form was received on June 21, 2011. An interview was conducted and a verification checklist mailed to the client on June 29, 2011. The client reported earnings of \$1189.58 per month, while her disabled spouse received \$733 per month in RSDI. The household had mortgage expenses of \$638.07 per month, homeowner's insurance of \$44.42 per month and paid heating expenses separate from their mortgage. A denial letter was mailed to the client, citing the household's ineligibility due to income that exceeded the program limit. The table referenced in the denial notice was the gross income table (130% of poverty).

QC determined that at reevaluation, the case manager had changed the husband's disability status to No in the disability field on BEACON. This misplaced disability status caused the household to be identified as able bodied adults without dependents (ABAWDs). Because of the erroneous coding, BEACON did not recognize any disabled household members, and since this household did not include any elderly members, the household was subjected to a gross income test for SNAP eligibility. A recalculation of SNAP benefits for this household using the correct disability status of the spouse resulted in SNAP benefits for the household. This erroneous coding caused a negative error for the review month.

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Quality Corner *(Continued from page 3)*

What's a Case Manager to Do?

A household that includes at least one person who is elderly or disabled is not subject to a gross income test for SNAP eligibility nor a capped shelter deduction. These two provisions of SNAP regulations are favorable elements of the SNAP benefit calculation for elderly and/or disabled households.

Case managers must be careful when entering information into BEACON. Nonfinancial information such as disability status and number of household members also impacts the eligibility of the household. For more information on elderly or disabled household members see 106 CMR 361.210.

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.** A father applied for TAFDC and SNAP benefits this morning. His family members are eligible for benefits. The father has verified his noncitizen status as a Parolee, but arrived in the U.S. only last year. He is not disabled and does not meet the five-year requirement. Is he eligible for TAFDC and SNAP benefits?
- A.** It depends. Just as a Legal Permanent Resident (LPR) applicant with less than five years in the U.S. may present with another qualifying noncitizen status, the same may be true for those who were paroled into the U.S. on or after October 10, 1980. For example, if the applicant has also verified Cuban or Haitian nationality, he may qualify for benefits as a Cuban/Haitian Entrant without the five-year wait. Verifications for this include the arrival/departure record, Form I-94 stamped:
- 212(d)(5),
 - 8 CFR 212.12(b),
 - 8 CFR 241.13 or
 - 8 CFR 241.14.

Also, any stamp on the I-94 indicating Cuban/Haitian Entrant status is acceptable. For more information on Cuban/Haitian Entrants, refer to Field Operations Memo 2007-52.

Note: A noncitizen with one year of Parolee status may be eligible for EAEDC. For more information on eligible noncitizen statuses in the EAEDC Program, see 106 CMR 320.620(A).

- Q.** A mother and her disabled child are currently receiving TAFDC. Does this mother need to apply for SSI benefits on behalf of her child?
- A.** No. Unlike EAEDC, applying for SSI is not a TAFDC eligibility requirement. However, remember to advise this client that often a disabled child can receive more in financial assistance from the SSI

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From the Hotline (Continued from page 4)

Program than from the TAFDC Program. Individuals who are eligible for both SSI and TAFDC benefits may elect to receive either benefit, but cannot participate in both programs. For more information on SSI benefit requirements in the TAFDC Program, see 106 CMR 702.710(A).

- Q.** When a child in an EAEDC caretaker household appears to be disabled and potentially eligible for SSI, must this caretaker apply for SSI on behalf of the child and must an AP-SSI-I form be completed?
- A.** Yes. A child who may be eligible for other benefits must apply for these to become or remain eligible for EAEDC. If a child living in an EAEDC caretaker family is disabled and potentially eligible for SSI, the caretaker must apply for SSI on the child's behalf and complete an *Authorization for Reimbursement of Interim Assistance Initial Claim or Post Eligibility Case (AP-SS-IAR)*. For more information on the development of other benefits, see 106 CMR 702.700.

Operations Memos

DTA Families Receiving DHCD HomeBASE Housing Assistance

TAFDC, EAEDC and SNAP
Operations Memo 2011-48

This Operations Memo informs TAO staff about the HomeBASE housing assistance program implemented in August 2011 by the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD). The HomeBASE program offers time-limited housing assistance to families at risk of homelessness, as an alternative to placement in an EA family shelter or a motel.

The memo also addresses the impact HomeBASE assistance has on the cash assistance and SNAP programs. TAO staff have no responsibility for determining eligibility for EA and HomeBASE assistance.

TAFDC – Increased Work Participation Hours Clean-up

TAFDC
Operations Memo 2011-49

The Fiscal Year '12 state budget increased clients' work program requirement from 24 hours per week to 30 hours per week if their youngest child is between mandatory full-time school age and eight years old.

This Operations Memo describes:

- a data fix to BEACON for these clients that occurred on the night of October 21; and
- a report mailed to TAOs regarding clients impacted by this change.



Operations Memos

Fall 2011 SNAP Heat and Eat (H-EAT) Program Update

SNAP

Operations Memo 2011-52

DTA, in collaboration with the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD), provides H-EAT benefits to eligible SNAP households each year. Households newly eligible for H-EAT benefits will receive a significant increase in SNAP benefits based on receipt of the H-EAT Fuel Assistance Program.

This memo reviews H-EAT Fuel Assistance Program criteria, explains the responsibilities of DTA and DHCD, provides instructions for restoring lost SNAP benefits to H-EAT households and describes the DHCD client brochure. There is minimal case manager impact since the H-EAT Fuel Assistance Program enrollment and SNAP recalculation processes are fully automated.

TAFDC – New Five-Year (60-Month) Period

TAFDC

Operations Memo 2011-53

TAFDC benefits are limited to a maximum of 24 months in a 60-month period (5 years) for nonexempt clients. As of November 30, 2011, the five-year period is ending for some clients. This Operations Memo advises case managers about changes to clients' cases as a result of the new five-year (60-month) period.

SNAP – Reinstatement of Benefit Offset for SNAP Overpayments

SNAP

Operations Memo 2011-54

Beginning November 21, 2011, the Department is reinstating the benefit offset process for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) households that have received an overpayment and have an established overpayment claim. The purpose of this Operations Memo is to advise staff about the benefit offset process.

TAFDC - BAPIC's Young Parents Program (YPP) Shutdown

TAFDC

Operations Memo 2011-56

This Operations Memo advises staff about the immediate shutdown of the Brockton Area Private Industry Council, Inc. (BAPIC) Young Parents Program (YPP) and how to refer affected clients to another activity that meets the teen parent school attendance requirement or work program requirement, if applicable. Pregnant and parenting teens may be referred to Training Resources of America (TRA), a vendor located in Brockton that provides YPP services.



State Letters

TAFDC, EAEDC and SNAP – Limitations on Usage of Cash Benefits

All

State Letter 1361

As a result of Chapter 84 of the Acts of 2011 amending Chapter 18 of the Massachusetts General Laws, this state letter transmits the following changes:

It prohibits DTA cash clients from using any money received from the Department to purchase alcoholic beverages, lottery tickets or tobacco products.

It allows the Department to recover the full amount of the purchase in instances when clients have used their cash benefits to purchase alcoholic beverages, lottery tickets or tobacco products. These regulations were effective July 28, 2011.

TAFDC – Work Program Requirement Hourly Change

TAFDC

State Letter 1362

The FY '12 state budget increased the number of weekly hours certain TAFDC recipients must participate in the work program.

This State Letter transmits the following change:

Clients whose youngest child in the assistance unit (or who is not in the assistance unit in accordance with 106 CMR 204.305 (E)(1), (2) or (3)) is between the ages of mandatory full-time school age and nine must participate 30 hours per week. These regulations were effective October 1, 2011.

From the Forms File

Revised Forms

15-120-1111-05

IRF (Rev. 11.2011)

Interpreter Request Form

The Interpreter Request Form (IRF) has been updated. The IRF is available in Administration and Finance/Interpreter Services and the Online Forms section of Policy Online. Please use the revised version of the IRF.

09-010-1111-05

09-044-1111-05 (S)

SNAP-9B (Rev. 11/2011)

Statement of Loss/Request for Replacement Food Due to a Household Disaster or Misfortune

The *Statement of Loss/Request for Replacement Food Due to a Household Disaster or Misfortune* has been revised and is available on Policy Online under the SNAP section of Online Forms. Please discard old versions of the form.

FYI

Department of Children and Families (DCF) Quarterly Clothing Allowance and TAFDC Teen Parents

DCF quarterly clothing allowance payments to teen parents are considered noncountable income in the TAFDC Program as they are a contribution that provides for a portion of the teen parent's needs. See 106 CMR 204.250(AA) for more information. Although an individual receiving state or federal foster care maintenance payments is ineligible for TAFDC benefits (see 106 CMR 204.305(E) for more information), as long as the DCF quarterly clothing allowance is the only DCF payment issued to the teen parent, he or she is not considered in receipt of state or federal foster care maintenance payments. Accordingly, these teen parents may be approved for TAFDC, if otherwise eligible. To verify the type, amount and frequency of DCF payments, a current statement from DCF staff indicating these details is required.

For SNAP purposes, the DCF quarterly clothing allowance payment is also considered excluded income as it is restricted for a specific purpose and provides for a portion of the teen parent's needs. See 106 CMR 363.230(A) for more information.

Home Visits

This FYI serves as a reminder to Department staff that, although infrequent, home visits are conducted by the Department. Home visits may be conducted by case managers in cash and SNAP programs to take applications, interview a client, etc. Quality Control (QC) reviewers conduct home visits on a monthly basis as a part of their review process. The time of the home visit must be scheduled in advance with the household by telephone or letter. If the home visit is conducted due to a client's disability as an Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) reasonable accommodation, an (ADA-1) form should be completed.

When a client receives a notice of a pending home visit by QC or other Department employee, the client will sometimes call the case manager to verify that home visits are conducted. When this occurs, the case manager must inform the client that the Department does conduct home visits.

For more information on home visits, see 106 CMR 361.510: *Waiver of the Office Interview*, 106 CMR 361.640 (C): *Sources of Verification*, 106 CMR 362.120: *Verification of Residency*, Field Operations Memo 2002-16: *Waiving In-Office Face-to-Face Interviews for NPA FS AUs*, *A User's Guide: Transitional Assistance Programs and BEACON Chapter IV-A*, page 3, *Processing the Request for Assistance*, *A User's Guide: Transitional Assistance Programs and BEACON Chapter XIII-C* page 2, *Teen Parent* and *BEACON Today* Issue 10.

Diversity Quote

“All life is an experiment. The more experiments you make the better.”
Ralph Waldo Emerson

TAO Meeting Notes