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From the Commissioner



From left to right: Leonard Hayes, Saul Lugaro, Elaine Frawley, Ellie Taddeo, Terri Ruggiero, Julia Kehoe, Aracelis (Tina) Gelpi-Rivera, Mary Flanigan, Michelle Botus, Tom Foster, and Dana Stancill participated in the first Commissioner’s Coffee Hour on July 21st.

Dear Colleagues,

Recently, I’ve had the pleasure of meeting with many of you at our first two Commissioner’s Coffee Hours. Staff members from Central, Newmarket Square, Dudley Square, Revere, and North Shore gathered at Central Office to offer helpful, honest feedback and to share ideas about how we can more effectively meet our mission (to assist low-income individuals and families in meeting their basic needs, increasing their incomes and improving their quality of life). I greatly appreciate your candor and participation in these events, and look forward to scheduling more of them across the state.

Our Coffee Hours, along with the Staff Focus Groups conducted by the Strategic Development and Community Relations Unit, provide a clear picture of how things are going in the field offices. Not surprisingly, many of you share similar concerns. Thus far, some of your thoughts include:

(Continued on page 2)

From the Commissioner (Continued from page 1)

1. The number of new applications for all of our programs is on the rise, and the larger volume could compromise our Department's job performance. New field staff is needed to manage the increased workload.

I take this issue seriously and I'm currently looking into how we can improve the situation. Although it is unlikely we'll be able to hire a large number of new staff, we will continue looking for ways to minimize the paperwork and systems challenges to make sure more of your time is spent helping our clients reach their goals.

2. We need to be more aggressive with our full engagement strategies and our providers need to be held accountable.

We are currently working with EOHHS to re-procure our Employment Services vendors. New performance-based contracts will hold providers more accountable and encourage them to use funds more efficiently. We are also in the process of rolling out a new Orientation Program for TAFDC families. The new orientation will provide more consistent and comprehensive information through a video and updated information packet. You will hear more about this very soon.

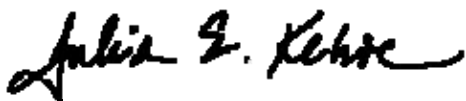
Also, we plan to give clients better work incentives and develop better mechanisms for referring clients to our vendors.

3. The Department is creating the impression that we can assist everyone who comes through the door. Many clients have unrealistic expectations.

During these difficult economic times, we are seeing an increase in the number of people seeking assistance. Although we are unable to assist everyone who walks through our doors, we are working to refer ineligible applicants to our community partners and other state agencies. To provide the public with a clearer picture of the benefits and services available through our Department, we are also in the process of fine-tuning our public messages including posters, brochures and media appearances, and reorganizing our central office units to more comprehensively and consistently manage certain customer service efforts.

These are just a few of the topics we have discussed, and I look forward to hearing from you at upcoming Coffee Hours and office visits. I greatly appreciate your hard work and determination during such difficult times. Your feedback, along with information gathered from clients and community partners, continues to shape our programs and policies. Each of you has a broad range of knowledge and experiences, and we have a lot to learn from each other. Thank you again for your suggestions and ideas. I hope to have coffee with you soon!

Sincerely,



From the Forms File

New Forms

02-860-0908-05

TAFDC-App-Info-1 (9/2008)

TAFDC Applicant Information

02-866-0908-05

ESP ProvAppt (9/2008)

ESP Provider Session Appointment Letter

02-864-0908-05

ESP ProvLog (9/2008)

ESP Provider Session Log

The above three forms are to be used with the Orientation Session PowerPoint Presentation. Refer to Field Operations Memo 2008-46 for more information.

02-870-0908-05

02-871-0908-05(S)

TAFDC-OSPP (9/2008)

Orientation Session PowerPoint Presentation

This form is the paper version of the orientation PowerPoint presentation to be included in the application packet given to TAFDC applicants. Refer to Field Operations Memo 2008-46 for more information.

Revised Forms

02-201-0908-05

02-260-0908-05(S)

T-A34/36 (Rev. 9/2008)

Assignment of Support Cooperation with Child Support Enforcement Division of the Massachusetts Department of Revenue (DOR) Good Cause Claim

This form has been revised to remove the name of the noncustodial parent from Section I. In addition, the good cause reasons are listed on the front of the form for ease of reference.

15-200-0808-05

ADA-1 (Rev. 8/2008)

Request for an ADA Accommodation

The following words have been changed on the Request for an ADA Accommodation: “applicant/recipient” has been changed to “applicant/client” and “AU Manager” to “case manager.”

09-150-0808-05

SSI/FSP-1 (Rev. 8/2008)

SSI Food Stamp Benefits Reapplication Form

The following changes have been made to the SSI Food Stamp Benefits Reapplication Form: Malden SSI Regional Office has been changed to Malden Centralized SSI Office and the signature line has been restated on the cover sheet of the SSI Food Stamp Benefits Reapplication Form.

MassHealth - HCR-2 Packets

Please be advised that new HCR-2 Packets in English dated 08/08 will be sent to TAOs in the next few weeks.

The following forms are now available in Portuguese.

09-159-0808-05

FSA-Elderly (P)

Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance Simplified Food Stamp Application for Elderly Applicants

09-252-0808-05

RR-FSP-1B (P)

Rights and Responsibilities and Food Stamp Penalty Warning

From the Hotline

If you have questions on this column or other policy or procedural material, please have your Hotline designee call the **Policy Hotline at 617-348-8478**.

The questions below concern expanded categorical eligibility for NPA food stamp households. More information on this topic is also available in Field Operations Memo 2008-27.

- Q.** Are elder or disabled households that receive a disability benefit (SSI, RSDI, VA) subject to a gross income test in the determination of food stamp eligibility?
- A.** No. Elders (age 60 or over) or clients who receive disability benefit (SSI, RSDI, VA disability benefit) do not have a gross income test in the determination of **food stamp benefit eligibility**.
- Q.** Why is there a 200% Gross Monthly Categorical Eligibility Income Standard for elder and non-SSI Disabled households?
- A.** USDA requires that the 200% Gross Monthly Income Standard be used to determine whether

or not an elder or non-SSI disabled household is **categorically eligible**.

- Q.** Can an 18-year-old who lives alone be considered categorically eligible for food stamp benefits?
- A.** Yes. Receipt of the *Help for Those in Need: A Resources Brochure* will confer categorical eligibility on this adult.
- Q.** Given the recent changes that expand categorical eligibility for NPA food stamp households, why was my Department of Mental Health (DMH) client recently denied food stamp benefits for exceeding gross income limits?
- A.** DMH involvement with a client does not always mean that the client meets the Food Stamp Program definition of a disability. Although your client was residing in a DMH facility, she was not elderly, neither was she receiving a disability-related benefit and therefore did not meet the Food Stamp Program special rules for disabled clients as outlined in 106 CMR 361.210.

Field Operations Memos

Department Obligations under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)

TAFDC

Field Operations Memo 2008-35

The Department has certain obligations towards applicants and clients under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. Section 504 makes it illegal for public agencies receiving federal funds to discriminate against individuals with disabilities. Title II of the ADA prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability by states and government entities.

Generally, the Department must provide an individual equal opportunity to participate in or benefit from its programs.

This memo reminds TAO staff about:

- current ADA policies; and
- TAO Accommodation Teams used for handling and reviewing ADA-related issues, including requests for ADA accommodations.

This memo reinforces and adds to information TAO staff have received in the mandatory ADA training.

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Field Operations Memos (Continued from page 4)

Employment Services Program (ESP) Regulation Change

TAFDC

Field Operations Memo 2008-42

This memo informs TAO staff that, effective October 1, 2008, the Department plans to change the TAFDC Employment Services Program (ESP) education and training activity regulations to allow a client to meet the work program requirement by participating in an education program beyond the Associate's degree level.

If an applicant or client wants to enroll in a four-year or advanced degree program that begins in September 2008, the Hotline designee must call the Policy Hotline with the case name and case number and the name and Social Security number of the client who wishes to enroll in the four-year or advanced degree program. Central Office will provide the case manager with instructions to process this case.

EAEDC Eligibility for Disabled Noncitizen Adults Denied TAFDC Due to Not Meeting TAFDC Noncitizen Requirements

EAEDC

Field Operations Memo 2008-43

This memo informs TAO staff about potential EAEDC eligibility for certain noncitizen adults ineligible for TAFDC for not meeting the TAFDC noncitizen requirements. The memo provides examples of disabled noncitizen adult applicants' potential EAEDC eligibility and addresses their potential eligibility for food stamps as well.

Family Self-Sufficiency (FSS) Regional Nonprofit (RNP) Referrals List

TAFDC

Field Operations Memo 2008-44

Field Operations Memo 2008-37 provided revised procedures for making referrals to the Regional Nonprofit (RNP) housing agencies.

This memo gives TAO staff a new list of TAFDC clients with Housing Choice (Section 8) vouchers who will receive Family Self-Sufficiency (FSS) informational sessions detailed in Field Operations Memo 2008-37.

Clothing Allowance

TAFDC

State Letter 1338

Field Operations Memo 2008-45

The Department paid a nonrecurring clothing allowance for September 2008 to TAFDC clients. The clothing allowance is \$150 per eligible client under the age of 19. The clothing allowance is prorated for clients eligible in September but who have a start date after September 1, 2008.

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Diversity Quote

"We all should know that diversity makes for a rich tapestry, and we must understand that all the threads of the tapestry are equal in value no matter what their color."

Maya Angelou

Field Operations Memos (Continued from page 5)

Orientation PowerPoint Presentation as an Application Activity

TAFDC

Field Operations Memo 2008-46

Field Operations Memo 2007-45 introduced TAO staff to Orientation Sessions. Attendance at these sessions was voluntary for any TAFDC applicant or work-program-required client. Orientation Sessions provide applicants and clients with information about their TAFDC benefits and about services offered to help them become economically self-sufficient and also provide introductory information about ESP providers offering services to help applicants and clients become self-sufficient.

To ensure that all TAFDC applicants receive this critical information in as timely and as uniformly a way as possible, the Department is making the orientation PowerPoint presentation a required part of application activities for all TAFDC applicants (see 106 CMR 702.125 (C) and (E)). This change in procedure began September 2, 2008.

This memo informs TAO staff about the orientation PowerPoint presentation as an application activity and about follow-up activities.

Revised Food Stamp Recertification Notice

FS

Field Operations Memo 2008-47

To facilitate the recertification process for food stamp clients and case managers, the Department has revised the food stamp recertification notice and will now enclose a food stamp application for the client to complete and return. The title of the notice has been changed from *Notice of Food Stamp Benefit Termination* to: *Important Notice of Food Stamp Benefit Expiration*. The enclosed application is identical to a regular food stamp application, except that a large *R* appears over the Source box to indicate that the application originated with the notice mailing and is for a recertification.

To allow case managers more time to conduct all of the required recertification activities, the apply-by date assigned by BEACON identified in the notice will be five days earlier than the former apply-by date. Please see the *NPA Food Stamp Benefits Processing Chart* in Policy Online under “Reference Documentation” in *Related Systems Information* for the new schedule of apply-by dates.

There are no other changes to the recertification process.

Dates to Remember**September 12, 2008****Senior Benefits Expo**

Lowell Senior Center, 276 Broadway Street, 9:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

September 16, 2008**Senior Benefits Expo**

Peabody Council on Aging, 79 Central Street, 9:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

September 16, 2008**Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Event in Springfield**

Riverview Tenants Council, 82 Division Street, 10:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m.

September 27, 2008**The Money Conference for Women and Families**Reggie Lewis Athletic Center, Roxbury Community College
1350 Tremont Street, Roxbury Crossing, MA 02120Contact <http://www.themoneyconference.com/regboston.htm>**Do you know...?**

Over the next couple of months, food stamp outreach staff will be supporting the following:

- Senior Benefits Expo events featuring a free continental breakfast and resource information on food stamp benefits and nutrition; fuel and utilities; transportation; health and fitness; stroke and heart disease symptoms; health screenings; personal safety; housing; and programs for people with disabilities. All are welcome to attend, especially seniors, people with disabilities, caregivers, family, and friends. For more information, please email colleen.mchatton@state.ma.us.
- Senior SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) events in Springfield. These events will take place at senior centers to educate seniors about nutrition and provide participants with an opportunity to apply for food stamp benefits. For more information, please email karen.driscoll@state.ma.us.

Please have your clients tell their friends and neighbors about these important food stamp outreach events.

FYIs

BEACON

The timeline for the BEACON 3.0 project is currently under review. A list of priority system changes to be incorporated into BEACON 2.0 and then BEACON 3.0 is final. In order to allow for completion of the BEACON 3.0 project, there will be no changes to BEACON 2.0 outside of the identified priority items. MIS will be working with the vendor to assess the impact of approved priority changes to the BEACON 3.0 schedule. Once this has been finalized, a revised implementation date will be published. System testing of the application as delivered is currently under way. The Implementation Team, which is headed by Sandy Coleran, and has representatives from all agency divisions continues to meet weekly and has made some good progress, including determination of communication activities and a training approach. Further updates on project status, including system testing, user acceptance testing, training and documentation will be provided using the BEACON Bulletins.

Changes to DTA Online

This month, the following forms have been added to the “Online Forms” option accessible from the **Policy Online** side-bar:

- *Simplified Food Stamp Application for Elderly Applicants, FSA – Elderly (7/2008)* associated with Field Operations Memo 2008-38 (English, Spanish, Portuguese);
- *TAFDC Applicant Information, TAFDC App Info-1 (9/2008)* associated with Field Operations Memo 2008-46;

- *ESP Provider Session Log, ESP Provlog (9/2008)* associated with Field Operations Memo 2008-46; and
- *ESP Provider Session Appointment Letter, ESP ProvAppt. (9/2008)* associated with Field Operations Memo 2008- 46.
- *Orientation Session PowerPoint Presentation (9/2008)* associated with Field Operations Memo 2008-46 (English and Spanish).

Additionally, the following information posted on our EOHHS mass.gov DTA Homepage will now also appear at our DTA intranet location:

- “About the Department of Transitional Assistance” can be selected by accessing the **Our Organization** side-bar; and
- “DTA Upcoming Activities” can be selected by accessing the **Calendar of Events** side-bar.

Changes to existing DTA Online information include:

- an updated Vocational Rehabilitation Providers list accessible through the **Resource Inventories** side-bar;
- an updated “Who We Are” page accessible from the **Administration & Finance** tab;
- updated NPA Food Stamp Benefit processing charts (as well as a new, separate chart for pure SSI households), accessible from the **Policy Online** side-bar option; and
- an updated listing of Diversity Council participants accessible from the **Diversity** side-bar option.

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FYIs

(Continued from page 8)

Changes to the EOHHS mass.gov DTA Homepage

Changes to the EOHHS mass.gov DTA Homepage include the following:

- Updates to our caseload information which can be accessed by selecting the appropriate Department program beneath the **Research & Statistics** sidebar.
- The addition of the June 2008 *Facts and Figures Report* which can be accessed by selecting DTA Facts and Figures from the **Research & Statistics** sidebar.
- A new listing of food stamp outreach events which can be accessed by selecting “DTA Upcoming Activities” from the **News & Updates** sidebar.
- The Northeastern Massachusetts Merrimack Valley Food Bank has been added to the Project Bread Food Bank Listing, which can be accessed by selecting the “For Consumers” tab and then choosing “Food & Nutrition” from the **Basic Needs** option.

Fuel Assistance 2008

The Fuel Assistance mailing is taking place in September. TAFDC, EAEDC and FS clients will receive a brochure about the Fuel Assistance Program. Information in this brochure includes an overview of the program and explains how to apply for fuel assistance. It also includes a list of agencies statewide where applications can be filed. The brochure tells food stamp benefit clients that if: 1) they receive food stamps and 2) they receive fuel assistance and 3) their heat is included in their rent, they may be entitled to more food stamp benefits.

TAFDC and EAEDC clients will also receive a system-generated notice with verification of their grant amount. Food stamp benefit clients will receive a system-generated notice confirming the food stamp benefits family size. All clients will also receive a flyer entitled, *Act Now, Save Now - Ways to Save Money on Your Winter Heating Bills*.

During fuel assistance season (November through April), case managers are reminded to ask clients at **every** contact if they receive fuel assistance. If they receive fuel assistance and food stamp benefits, make sure they are given the heating Standard Utility Allowance **even if they are not paying for heat separately from their rent**.

NewMMIS Update

NewMMIS is still scheduled for implementation on January 5, 2009.

Mailing of the new MassHealth Cards will begin on October 3, 2008. Refer to Field Operations Memo 2008-29: *NewMMIS MassHealth Cards* for information about the new MassHealth Cards.

You will be kept informed about all updates to the implementation schedule as information becomes available.

TAO Meeting Notes