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Transitional Aid to Families with Dependent Children (TAFDC) Consolidated Report

February 2018

Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance



Report on Transitional Aid to Families with Dependent Children (TAFDC)
Consolidated Report
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I. OVERVIEW

In response to the following legislative reporting requirements, the Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA) is pleased to provide this comprehensive report on the current status of the TAFDC program including work program requirements, an update on the implementation of Pathways to Self Sufficiency Initiative and the role of the Self Sufficiency Specialist.

Legislative Reporting Requirements

Chapter 18 Section 2 of the Massachusetts General Laws requires the Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA) to annually report regarding the Transitional Aid to Families with Dependent Children work requirement.

Chapter 118 Section 3C of the Massachusetts General Laws requires the Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA) to annually report on the Pathways to Self-Sufficiency Program.

Chapter 18 Section 5 of the Massachusetts General Laws requires the Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA) to annually report on the specialists positions established by the commissioner, known as Self-Sufficiency Specialist.

II. BACKGROUND

DTA's mission is to assist and empower low-income individuals and families to meet their basic needs, improve their quality of life, and achieve long-term economic self-sufficiency. DTA offers a comprehensive system of programs and supports to help individuals and families achieve greater economic self-sufficiency, including food and nutritional assistance, economic assistance, and employment supports. DTA serves one out of every eight people in the Commonwealth including working families, children, elders, and people with disabilities.

Massachusetts has one of the strongest economies in the country. Despite its educated workforce, high median wage and low unemployment rate, 13.3% of Massachusetts' children live below the Federal Poverty Line. Latino and African American children are especially likely to live below the Federal Poverty Line.

Research demonstrates a lack of family income, especially during a child's early years, has immediate and life-long consequences. Children living in poverty are less likely to enter school ready to learn, perform at grade-level, graduate from high school or go to college. As adults they are less likely to participate in the workforce and to achieve economic security for themselves and *their* children.

DTA continues to focus its efforts on placing a renewed emphasis on our employment program to focus on comprehensive and innovative ways to assist our clients moving towards financial

independence and economic self-sufficiency. The Pathway to Self-Sufficiency (PSS) program is generating the desired outcomes for DTA. Almost 28% of clients who are PSS required have found work in the first 60 days of applying. DTA's front-line staff has expressed pride in this shift back to more meaningful client engagement. DTA is focused on reinforcing this program through enhanced avenues of staff input, comprehensive continuous improvement measures, and a review of PSS-related client outcomes.

DTA is also focused on creating opportunities for and addressing the needs of both parents and children together through a two-generation approach to increasing economic security for families. Research has documented the impact of a parent's education, economic stability and overall health on a child's trajectory. Similarly, children's education and healthy development are powerful catalysts for parents. Our own research has revealed that more than half of young parents receiving TAFDC today were also members of a household receiving assistance when they were a child. This is not a legacy we want another parent to pass down to their child, and so we are embracing a two-generation approach that helps both generations make progress together and provides interventions that can break the cycle of multi-generation poverty.

Finally, DTA is an essential partner in the state's efforts to implement the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). WIOA seeks to integrate the states' workforce systems to better serve employers and jobseekers. WIOA reauthorized the nation's employment, training, adult education and vocational rehabilitation programs for the first time in 16 years. The new law is substantially different from its predecessor, the Workforce Investment Act (WIA), in its emphasis on targeting low-income adults and youth with limited training and skills to help them overcome barriers to economic success, as well as individuals with disabilities.

Since the passage of WIOA, DTA has worked closely with EOLWD to implement the closely integrated system of workforce development for DTA clients and others with significant barriers to work.

The aim of this collaboration is to:

- develop meaningful pathways to work and economic self-sufficiency for low-income, disabled and chronically un/underemployed individuals/families; and
- ensure DTA individuals and families with significant barriers can access the workforce system with the support needed to attain and sustain employment.

We are pleased with the progress of our Pathways to Self Sufficiency Program and our collaborative work with partners in workforce development to secure better economic futures for DTA clients and their children.

III. TRANSITIONAL AID TO FAMILIES WITH DEPENDENT CHILDREN (TAFDC)

TAFDC is a state and federally-funded program that provides cash assistance to families with children, and pregnant women, with little or no income or assets. TAFDC is operated under the federal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) block grant. As a part of TAFDC, participants may be required to perform a work-related activity as a condition of eligibility.

Participants receive child care and transportation support associated with these work-related activities, and can access a number of supportive referrals. However, many if not all individuals receiving TAFDC, face challenges to employment and long term economic self-sufficiency. Our Pathways to Self Sufficiency assessment found that these challenges include: need for skills training, lack of work experience, homelessness, limited literacy/math skills, health issues, child care or transportation.

DTA’s Employment Services Program (ESP) is an integral part of the DTA’s efforts to help TAFDC clients work and move to self-sufficiency. Case managers assist TAFDC clients to meet their work program requirements primarily by referring them to appropriate activities for their skill level and goals, often through community-based training providers or one stop career centers. ESP providers assist TAFDC clients in finding jobs, resolving barriers to employment and providing a means to gain a pathway to self-sufficiency. In FY17, DTA was able to fund employment related activities/slots for approximately 3,900 clients.

IV. TRANSITIONAL AID TO FAMILIES WITH DEPENDENT CHILDREN CASELOAD

Of the total TAFDC caseload of 27,625¹, those clients who have a work program requirement total: 7,164. That leaves the remainder of the caseload (20,461 clients) exempt from the work program requirement. On average, DTA clients remain on TAFDC for 36 months.

Grant levels have remained unchanged since 2000:

CURRENT PAYMENT STANDARD MATRIX				
Assistance Unit Size	Exempt, No Rent Allowance	Exempt, With Rent Allowance	Non-Exempt, No Rent Allowance	Non-Exempt, With Rent Allowance
1	\$388	\$428	\$378	\$418
2	\$491	\$531	\$478	\$518
3	\$593	\$633	\$578	\$618
4	\$691	\$731	\$673	\$713
5	\$792	\$832	\$772	\$812
6	\$896	\$936	\$872	\$912
7	\$997	\$1,037	\$971	\$1,011
8	\$1,097	\$1,137	\$1,067	\$1,107
9	\$1,197	\$1,237	\$1,165	\$1,205
10	\$1,298	\$1,338	\$1,263	\$1,303

V. WORK PROGRAM REQUIREMENT EXEMPTIONS

¹ Caseload as of October 2017

There are a number of reasons an individual may be exempt from the work program requirement including:

- disability;
- parents caring for a disabled child or spouse;
- parents whose youngest eligible child is less than two or who have any child who is less than three months;
- women in their 33rd week of pregnancy and those in their third trimester of pregnancy who have a verified medical condition that prevents them from working;
- teen parents who are attending school full time;
- persons over age sixty; and
- care-taker relatives.

VI. EXTENSIONS TO TIME-LIMITED BENEFITS

TAFDC benefits are limited to 24-months within a 60-month period for nonexempt households. Clients may request an extension of benefits when they are nearing the end of their time limit (month 22). Extensions are approved for not more than three months at a time; if additional time is requested, the new extension request will be evaluated based on participation in activities approved in the previous extension.

Extensions are requested for a number of reasons, including:

- Not yet found employment;
- Wages are too low; and
- Completing an education/training program already enrolled in prior to requesting the extension.

In calendar year 2017, DTA received 5,898 extension requests, and approved 306 extensions.

VII. PATHWAYS TO SELF SUFFICIENCY

DTA believes that all clients, both those who are work required and those who are not, can and should be assisted in moving to a better economic position and improved quality of life. To that end, DTA launched Pathways to Self-Sufficiency (PSS) in 2016. The goal of PSS is positive client engagement and targeted supports that lead to employment, career pathways and long term economic self-sufficiency.

Pathways to Self-Sufficiency is an initial and ongoing assessment tool designed to better identify a clients' strengths and employment challenges, and to help our clients move toward economic self-sufficiency. The key elements include:

- I. An easier method of identifying where a client's workplace skills are strongest and where challenges may be preventing them reaching economic self-sufficiency
Strengthened referral procedures to help connect clients to the appropriate ESP activities and refer them to the appropriate agencies and / or DTA specialists

2. A new focus on helping exempt clients work to minimize their barriers to economic self-sufficiency in order to improve their family's overall quality of life.

The initiative also included a required pre-benefit job search period and a mandatory orientation.

Based on this new assessment process, DTA is better able to identify the key challenges clients' report that get in the way of obtaining gainful employment. These data support DTA case managers and our employment support providers in tailoring interventions to the specific needs of the client. Based on PSS data, DTA clients identify the following top challenges:

- Lack of Skills and training;
- Lack of work experience;
- Limited literacy/math skills;
- Health Issue; and
- Homelessness.

The Pathways to Self Sufficiency assessment and engagement process has laid a critical foundation for the Department, as we continue to identify and implement reforms, policy updates and new procedures that better support work and economic security for our clients.

VIII. SELF-SUFFICIENCY SPECIALISTS

Self Sufficiency Specialists (SSS) began their role at the Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA) in December 2015. In preparation to launch this new role, a detailed job description was developed, training was conducted, and policy documentation about the new role and who it would serve was issued.

Between April and June 2016, DTA conducted an assessment of how the role was functioning and identified ways to strengthen and clarify the SSS role. As a result, the following recommendations were developed and implemented:

- SSS provide intensive case management and support to all teen parents who are heads of household, whether parenting or pregnant.
- Other clients who *may* receive the assistance of an SSS include:
 - young parents (pregnant and/or parenting heads of household under the age of 24); and
 - residents of emergency assistance shelter, Hotel/Motel, Congregate Shelter, Scattered Site Shelter or Domestic Violence Shelter
- In limited circumstances, and as determined by a DTA manager, SSSs may also assist other clients who have been identified as having significant challenges in moving towards self-sufficiency.
- Each TAO has at least one SSS. Due to caseload limits, assignment of an SSS will be based on availability.

While the role definition has improved the effectiveness of the SSSs, there remains challenges associated with the legislatively mandated caseload caps for these workers. The caseload cap had

an adverse impact on DTA's ability to manage resources and move all clients toward self-sufficiency. Ensuring all caseworkers have manageable caseloads is critical, and DTA needs the discretion to make the appropriate decisions regarding what a manageable caseload means.

IX. CONCLUSION

In support of DTA's recently renewed emphasis on economic mobility and employment, and our work with the state's WIOA efforts, DTA has identified a number of necessary policy reforms within the TAFDC program that can simplify and streamline program rules and requirements for working families; better incentivize and support employment and employment related activities; and ease the "cliff effect" during transition to economic self-sufficiency.

Governor Baker's House 2 Budget Proposal includes a package of reforms that will significantly enhance the opportunity for DTA clients to fully participate in and benefit from the state's broader workforce development strategy, and to help meet the need for qualified workers in high demand industries. The total cost for building incentives to support the economic mobility and employment for TAFDC clients and their families is \$2.8 million, and is comprised of certain increased grants, higher asset limits, and earned income disregards.