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Governor

**Kimberley Driscoll**  
Lieutenant Governor



**Kathleen E. Walsh**  
Secretary

**Jeff McCue**  
Commissioner

# Annual Department of Transitional Assistance Organizational Report

**November 2023**



# **Annual Department of Transitional Assistance Organizational Report**

## **NOVEMBER 2023**

### **OVERVIEW**

Section 10 of Chapter 18 of the Massachusetts General Laws requires the Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA) to submit a report annually that contains a description of the organization of the department and a review of the work of the agency.

### **AGENCY MISSION**

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.

### **PROGRAMS ADMINISTERED**

DTA administers nutrition and economic assistance programs as well as employment and training programs that receive both state and federal funding, which aim to meet the agency's mission. In addition to administering these programs, DTA provides rigorous oversight and special attention to eligibility standards and compliance for each program. DTA uses advanced analytics and a variety of fraud detection practices to promote programmatic integrity.

#### **SUPPLEMENTAL NUTRITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (SNAP)**

SNAP benefits help families supplement their food budgets to afford nutritious food. Residents of the Commonwealth who participate in SNAP include families with children, older adults, and persons with disabilities. While administered by DTA, SNAP benefits are 100% federally funded and regulated. The Commonwealth is responsible for 50% of the costs to administer the program.

Beyond the core responsibilities in administering the SNAP program, DTA works alongside a variety of partners contributing to the mission of food security in the Commonwealth.

#### **HEALTHY INCENTIVES PROGRAM (HIP)**

HIP is an innovative state program that supports food security and economic development by incentivizing SNAP households to buy fruits and vegetables from local farm retailers. Administered by DTA in collaboration with the MA Dept. of Agricultural Resources, the Healthy Incentives Program credits SNAP households' EBT accounts for healthy produce purchases at participating Massachusetts farmers' markets, farm stands, mobile markets and community supported agriculture (CSA) farm share programs, up to a monthly maximum amount.

#### **PANDEMIC EBT (P-EBT)**

P-EBT is a federal child nutrition program created in the Families First Coronavirus Response Act during the public health emergency to promote increased food security for students and children who miss school or cannot attend child care due to COVID-19. While administered by DTA and the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), P-EBT benefits are 100% federally funded and regulated. P-EBT is ending following the close of the federal public health emergency.

### **SUMMER EBT**

The Summer EBT program is a new federal option that Massachusetts is electing to join, being launched by the federal government in summer 2024. Summer EBT provides grocery-buying benefits to low-income families with school-aged children when schools are closed for the summer.

### **TRANSITIONAL AID TO FAMILIES WITH DEPENDENT CHILDREN (TAFDC)**

TAFDC is a state and federally funded program that provides financial assistance and employment programming to families with children, and pregnant women, with little or no income. TAFDC is operated under the federal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) block grant. Certain TAFDC participants are required to perform a work-related activity as a condition of eligibility. Participants receive child care and transportation assistance to support their engagement in education, training, or other employment related activities.

### **EMERGENCY AID TO THE ELDERLY, DISABLED, AND CHILDREN (EAEDC)**

EAEDC is a state funded program, which provides financial assistance to certain adults who are elderly or disabled, as well as children. Those eligible for EAEDC include people over 65 who are waiting for Supplemental Security Income payments to begin, individuals unable to work due to a physical or mental incapacity, and individuals who are participating in a Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission program.

### **SUPPLEMENTAL SECURITY INCOME (SSI) AND STATE SUPPLEMENTAL PAYMENTS (SSP)**

The SSI program is a federal program that provides cash assistance to older adults, persons with disabilities, and the blind. Massachusetts provides optional state-funded payments designed to supplement these funds. Currently, the University of Massachusetts Medical School administers SSP payments for DTA.

### **EMPLOYMENT SERVICE PROGRAMS (PATHWAYS TO WORK)**

DTA provides employment services for TAFDC clients through the Employment Services Program (ESP). The primary goals of DTA's employment and training programs are to assist clients to prepare for and connect with career pathways and resolve barriers for sustained employment. DTA case managers connect clients to employment and training programs by referring them to appropriate activities based on their skill level and economic mobility goals. DTA also administers the SNAP Path to Work program, a partnership between federal, state, and local partners that provides the state's SNAP clients with the skills, training, experience, education, and employment supports needed to find and keep good paying jobs.

### **AGENCY STAFFING**

As of September 2023, DTA employs approximately 1,781 employees across the Commonwealth in the areas of programs, policy, and management. DTA staff have a range of responsibilities from benefit eligibility, employment and training assistance, program integrity, legal, finance, policy development, and fair hearings. More than 80% of the department's active employees (1,433 employees), are deployed in one of our 20 local transitional assistance offices in communities across the Commonwealth.

Currently, the Department's SNAP workforce, serving the largest caseload of the agency's primary programs, consists of 743 employees, including 569 caseworkers and 174 supervisors.

The Department's economic assistance workforce includes 412 DTA staff members serving clients who receive TAFDC and EAEDC, including 122 supervisors.

In addition to DTA's case management workforce, our local transitional assistance offices are staffed by 278 employees, 60 of whom serve in managerial roles, and others provide administrative assistance and interpreter services, or offer intensive, targeted client supports.

The Department is in the process of hiring staff across all programs, including SNAP case workers, TAFDC and EAEDC case workers, Self Sufficiency Specialists, and Full Engagement Workers. As part of the agency's diversity, equity, and inclusion work, DTA has been actively recruiting diverse candidates to fill vacancies in both management and front-line roles to ensure the agency reflects the families and communities the Department serves. The agency's efforts have included implementing revised hiring practices, launching an agency-wide mentorship program, and supporting the creation of employee-led affinity groups, known as employee resource groups (ERGs), to identify and support professional development and career advancement opportunities for specific employee populations.

## **ORGANIZATION OF DTA**

DTA is organized into 20 local transitional assistance offices and one central office. Transitional assistance offices are responsible for providing direct services to clients and those seeking assistance throughout the Commonwealth. The agency's central office houses the Office of the Commissioner, senior management, policy, quality management, program integrity, operations, legal, finance, and other administrative units.

Included in this report is an organizational chart of DTA's central office and a leadership chart of the Department's 20 local transitional assistance offices.

## **DTA OPERATIONAL UPDATE**

DTA continues to leverage technological enhancements as it manages high caseloads and the expiration of federal flexibilities and increased federal pandemic-related supports to maintain a high level of customer service for individuals and families and promote economic stability.

Over the past several years the agency has expanded its digital services, and while DTA offices are open across the state for in-person services, the majority of DTA clients are continuing to choose to do business with the Department through its enhanced online and telephonic platforms. Our client-facing web-portal and mobile application continues to be enhanced to support client access and experience. For example, our client-facing web-portal, DTA Connect, is available in several languages: English, Spanish, Brazilian Portuguese, Simplified Chinese, Vietnamese, and Haitian Creole. Clients can reschedule their appointments with DTA via DTA Connect. Residents can now easily initiate a SNAP application when applying for or renewing their MassHealth benefits online. These updates will improve the customer experience by streamlining the process to apply for SNAP benefits while residents are already submitting information needed to determine their

healthcare eligibility.

DTA continues to prioritize accessibility and an inclusive experience, both in digital service delivery as discussed above, as well as in-person. All local offices contain a client-facing Pictorial Communication Board to support clients who are Deaf, hard of hearing, nonverbal or have limited verbal or English proficiency. These boards include images and descriptive words in eight languages to help determine the primary reason for a client's visit. Virtual meetings are an option for clients who want or need a face-to-face interaction but are not able to come into an office. This is a great option for clients who rely on closed captions or when the meeting includes multiple people. Further, DTA provides Video Remote Interpreter (VRI) access in all local DTA offices. VRI is an auxiliary aid that provides video remote American Sign Language (ASL) interpreter services.

DTA continues to play a key role in the Commonwealth's work to promote food security and a strong local food system and economy. DTA participates in a monthly cross-Secretariat food security workgroup to develop action steps that advance current food security priorities, key issues to be addressed/resolved, cross system solutions and resources needed, and to identify and support cross-system strategies to promote food security and access.

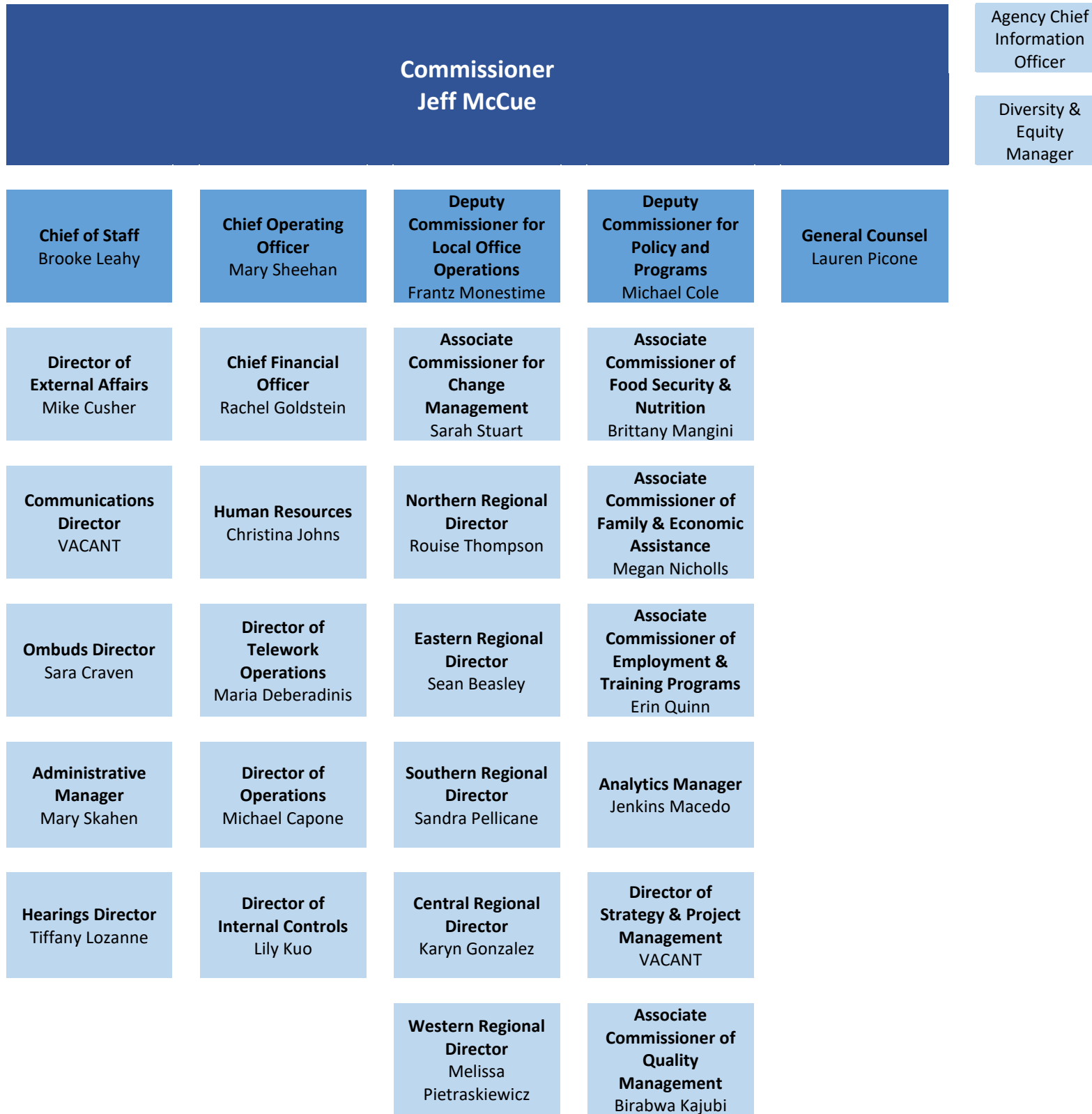
As a Department, recent highlights to support and promote food security include: In the 2022-2023 school year (SY22-23) and summer, DTA administered the final iteration of the Pandemic EBT (P-EBT) program. The SY22-23 program also expanded eligibility to a new population, students attending virtual schools and students who are home schooled due to concerns about COVID. To serve this population DTA constructed a new online application portal. In total, P-EBT provided direct food assistance in the amount of \$20.8M to the families of almost 500,000 children.

DTA on-boarded 107 new HIP vendors, the majority of which are small-scale farmers who live in, or have close ties to, the communities they serve, while others are agricultural vendors with demonstrated capacity to serve high-need communities. A Notice of Opportunity was issued and 30 restaurants and food trucks were strategically selected for the SNAP Restaurant Meals Program (RMP) pilot. Of the 30 selected local businesses, 77% are women-owned and 90% have owners who identify as Black, Asian and/or Hispanic/Latinx. Under federal rules, the RMP allows individuals experiencing homelessness, people with disabilities and older adults (aged 60+) to use their SNAP benefits at select, participating restaurants and food trucks. It is anticipated that this program will be available for clients in the fall of 2023.

The Department's financial benefit programs continue to be critical support to families and individuals with low incomes. TAFDC Pathways to Work is the Department's strategy in connecting individuals and families to education, employment and training programs and support services that promote career pathways, economic mobility, and family well-being. Pathways has been redesigned and is now returning after pandemic pauses. This phase of Pathways to Work system enhancements simplifies work rule policies, streamlines procedures, and creates new strategies to promote meaningful engagement for TAFDC clients. All families receiving TAFDC are eligible to engage in TAFDC Pathways to Work activities and must be offered the opportunity to do so, regardless of if they need to meet the work or school rules. Connecting families to opportunities and supports early on helps them take steps towards their individual and family goals while working with DTA.

DTA is committed to providing the individuals and families we serve with safe, reliable, and equitable access to all of the Department's vital supports and services. Though the Department's staff are managing higher caseloads and an increase in work due to the expiration of several federal flexibilities and the step-down of federal pandemic-related supports, our focus remains on prioritizing client benefits, access, and customer service.

# DTA ORGANIZATIONAL CHART



# TRANSITIONAL ASSISTANCE OFFICE LEADERSHIP CHART

Central Region	Eastern Region	Northern Region	Southern Region	Western Region
<b>Fitchburg Center</b> Jennifer Tait	<b>Brockton</b> Sarah Maloney	<b>Chelsea Center</b> Lucia Tramontozzi	<b>Fall River</b> Melissa Zeitz	<b>Greenfield</b> Zoy Soulis
<b>Framingham</b> Brian LaFleche	<b>Nubian Square</b> Kristen Webster	<b>Lawrence</b> Elaine DeVito	<b>Hyannis</b> Wendy Buttrick	<b>Holyoke</b> Joanne Lacour
<b>Southbridge</b> Joyce Clemence	<b>Quincy</b> Lise McKenzie	<b>Lowell</b> George Castro	<b>New Bedford</b> Nelson Abreu	<b>Pittsfield</b> Deni Evans
<b>Worcester</b> Carlos Resto		<b>Malden</b> Martine Cesar	<b>Taunton</b> Erin Donnelly	<b>Springfield</b> Linda Krok
		<b>North Shore</b> Sylvia Hosman		