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Child Care Financial Assistance Program: Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA)-Related Policies

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Applicability: The Department of Transitional Assistance, Family Access Administrators (FAAs), Mass211, Child Care Resource and Referral (CCRR) agencies, Contracted Providers, and Families.

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BACKGROUND

The Massachusetts Child Care Financial Assistance System

The Department of Early Education and Care (EEC) provides financial assistance to help low-income families in Massachusetts afford high-quality early education and care. This policy consolidates various 2023–2026 interim policies and advisories into a single consolidated guide to ensure clarity, transparency, and equitable access for all residents of the Commonwealth.

There are three Child Care Financial Assistance Programs to address the different needs of families across the Commonwealth:

- Income Eligible Child Care Program
- Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA) Related Child Care Program
- Department of Children and Families (DCF) Related Child Care Program

The Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA) Related Child Care Program

The Department of Early Education and Care (EEC) works in partnership with the Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA) to meet the child care needs of children and their families who are receiving economic assistance (TAFDC) and/or food assistance (SNAP) and are engaging in work, education, training programs, or who have another qualified service need.

AUTHORITY

- M.G.L. c. 15D, § 1: General authority to assure children and families full opportunity to reach their potential.
- M.G.L. c. 15D, § 13A: Codification of CCFA program into statute.
- 606 CMR 10.00: Child Care Financial Assistance Regulations.
- 45 CFR Part 98: Federal Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) Plan.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

- Child Care Financial Assistance Overview of Massachusetts Child Care Financial Assistance (CCFA) programs. Resource for families to learn about help with paying for child care and out-of-school time programs.
- Information about DTA-related childcare: DTA provides child care to parents and caregivers who are TAFDC clients and work or participate in education, training or employment-related activities.
- Hub for Child Care Financial Assistance Program Online repository for most recent regulations, policies, policy advisories, procedures, FAQs and training resources on child care financial assistance.
- Common Forms for Child Care Financial Assistance
- For assistance with the implementation or interpretation of these interim Child Care Financial Assistance policies, contact EEC at: eecsubsidymanagement@mass.gov

OBSOLETE

- Interim DTA-Related Child Care Financial Assistance Program Policies – October 1, 2023
- EEC Policy Advisory – Field Operations 2023 - 4 - Child Care Financial Assistance
- EEC Policy Advisory – Field Operations 2024 - 7 - Child Care Financial Assistance Updated Policy Guidance
- EEC Policy Advisory – CCFA 2025 – 03 - Interim Income Eligible and Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA) Child Care Financial Assistance Policies

ELIGIBILITY AND REFERRAL

DTA will issue child care referrals, consistent with federal and state requirements, to the following families with active or recently closed DTA cases who are:

- Receiving TAFDC and exploring TAFDC Pathways to Work activities;
- Receiving TAFDC where a parent is working or in an approved TAFDC Pathways to Work activity;
- Receiving SNAP where a parent is in an approved SNAP Path to Work activity;
- A relative caregiver receiving TAFDC for a child in their care and working; and/or
- A former TAFDC parent whose case closed within the past 24 months and is working or participating in education or training (through DTA transitional referral).

DTA shall refer parents with a written child care authorization to the appropriate Family Access Administrator (FAA). Families referred by DTA shall receive immediate access through the referral and are not required to be placed on EEC's centralized waitlist. Referrals issued by DTA will be valid for 90 days from the date of issue. If a family is unable to secure child care during this 90-day period, DTA can send an updated referral for an additional 90 days. Referrals will be sent to the CCRR by DTA staff, including Full Engagement Workers, SNAP E&T Specialists, or case managers. Family Access Administrators shall reach out to families referred by DTA within 3 business days of the referral to complete the child care financial assistance process, including helping the family identify a child care program who can provide subsidized care.

The referral itself is sufficient documentation for the family listed on the referral to be eligible for DTA-Related Child Care and the only other necessary documentation is proof of identity, if not previously provided. Family Access Administrators will verify the identity of the parent(s) listed on the child care referral. While a photo I.D. is preferred, if one is not readily available, any document that reasonably verifies identity is acceptable. Income and asset limits do not apply to families receiving DTA-Related Child Care.

DTA referrals have an initial eligibility period of not less than 12 months, unless the family is referred with DTA's seeking approved activity referral type. Families seeking an approved activity will receive an initial authorization period of 12 weeks. A 12-week "Seeking Approved Activity" provisional authorization may be issued for a TAFDC parent who is exploring Pathways to Work programs or seeking work. DTA must provide a new referral for TAFDC Approved Activity for the family to receive a 12-month authorization and continue care.

DTA families will be authorized for full time child care unless otherwise noted by the referral. The DTA referral determines the service need, and no other documentation is required.

YOUNG PARENTS

DTA may issue a DTA-Related Child Care referral to a family with a Young Parent who is ineligible for TAFDC due to the income of their parent. The Young Parent will receive immediate access to child care financial assistance and will not be placed on the waitlist. The DTA referral is sufficient documentation for the family to be eligible for DTA-Related Child Care without additional documentation to meet income, service need, residence, and household requirements. Young Parents with a DTA referral will not be assessed a parent fee. For more information about how child care financial assistance serves all parents under 24 and their families, please see Income Eligible policies.

Family Access Administrators are available to inform and counsel all parents under 24 on their Child Care Financial Assistance Program choices, services provided, and participation requirements.

TRANSPORTATION FUNDING

Families who receive a DTA-related child care authorization will be eligible to receive transportation funding through EEC when available as part of their child's placement while on CCFA. Family Access Administrators shall work with DTA families to assist them to determine how to best meet their family's needs for transportation, in accordance with the Income Eligible-Transportation policies.

PARENT FEES

DTA families who receive TAFDC and/or SNAP and participate in a Pathways to Work Program, or a TAFDC parent who is working, will not be charged any parent fees. This fee exemption shall continue until the end of the DTA-Related Child Care authorization.

DTA families with a transitional DTA referral will not be charged a parent fee in the initial 12-month transitional authorization period. A parent fee will be assessed during the second 12-month transitional authorization period using the Income Eligible Parent Fee Schedule. For additional information about parent fees, please see Income Eligible Program policies.

CHANGE REPORTING

Family Access Administrators will work together with DTA staff to ensure families are informed about how and when to report certain changes that occur during a DTA-Related Child Care authorization. These changes must be reported by the family to the

DTA staff within 30 days of the change. DTA staff will notify the Family Access Administrator as soon as a change is reported by a family.

Following DTA case closure, any changes that occur during the DTA-Related Transitional Authorization must be reported by the family directly to the Family Access Administrators. DTA will not be required to continue reporting changes to the Family Access Administrator after the closure of a family's DTA case.

Changes that must be reported include:

- Household income exceeding 85% State Median Income (SMI);
- Family contact information (including change of address or change in child custody arrangements for more than 30 total days);
- Household composition for more than 30 total days in a 12-month authorization;
- Family no longer living in Massachusetts; and
- A change or discontinuation of a parent's work, training, or education participation that is expected to last for more than 12 weeks.

If a change is reported that requires the issuance of a new DTA-Related Child Care referral, such as a new child being born or a change in a child's custody arrangement, the Family Access Administrator shall notify the appropriate DTA staff. A child's placement will not be disrupted while a new referral is being issued unless a change is requested by the family.

ATTENDANCE

Once authorized, families will work with the selected provider to enroll their child and establish a schedule that aligns with the authorization and meets their family's needs (i.e., full or part-time care). Providers will receive payment based on the family's enrollment.

- An **absence** is defined as any day that a child is authorized to attend an early education and care program but is not in attendance.
- All absences must be recorded in the provider's attendance records.

When a DTA child is absent or going to be absent from care, the family must let the provider know. Family Access Administrators (FAAs) should contact families right away if a child has been absent from care and has not communicated with the providers. If a child has been absent for more than 30 days in a row or 45 total days during a 12-month authorization, and the family has not requested and received an Approved Break in

Care, the absences will be considered a Non-Approved Break in Care. A Non-approved Break in Care may lead to the termination of the child's placement.

Before terminating a child's placement, the FAA must make two separate attempts to reach the family using different methods (e.g., phone call one day, email the next day). The FAA should contact the parent(s) to assess the family's situation and discuss available options. If needed, an Approved Break in Care may be offered before the end of the 30 consecutive days of absence.

FAAs must inform families of the option to end child care (ending their placement) but still keep their CCFA benefit subject to completion of the annual reauthorization process.

Termination of a child's placement (NOT the Authorization) may occur in the following circumstances:

- **After 30 consecutive unexplained absences:** a two-week termination notice may be issued on the 31st day
- **After 45 non-attended days including unexplained absences:** a two-week termination notice may be issued on the 46th day

A DTA family's financial assistance shall not be terminated without contacting the DTA Case Manager or Full Engagement Worker and receiving approval from EEC.

APPROVED BREAK IN CARE

Families may request an Approved Break in Care to pause child care services during their active financial assistance authorization for up to 90 days.

Family Access Administrators must offer a family an Approved Break in Care if the child will not attend care due to an event of more than two (2) weeks in length, including but not limited to:

- An extended illness or medical procedure;
- A break in care for the summer;
- A visit to a non-custodial parent; and
- An extended vacation.

EEC will not continue to pay for children on an Approved Break in Care. Parents have the right to opt out of an Approved Break in Care.

Providers are not required to hold a child's seat at the program during an Approved Break in Care. If a seat is no longer available when the family is ready to return, the family may transfer their financial assistance to another provider of their choice. This allows the child to resume care without being placed back on EEC's income-eligible waitlist. Unless the 12-month authorization expired during the Approved Break in Care, families returning from an Approved Break in Care during their current 12-month authorization are not required to secure a new referral or authorization prior to returning to care.

If a family does not return from an Approved Break in Care within the established time period and the family's 12-month authorization ends, the family's child care financial assistance will be terminated.

If the family returns at any time with a DTA referral, the family will be enrolled in accordance with the DTA-related child care policy.

If the family returns and no longer has eligibility through DTA-related or DTA Transitional Child Care, then the family will be subject to Income Eligible policies and will be placed on the waitlist.

If a child has been absent from care, and the provider has not been able to communicate with the family for more than 30 consecutive days or has been absent for 45 days total during a 12-month authorization, or more than 20 days during a 12-week Seeking Approved Activity provisional authorization, and the family has not requested and received an Approved Break in Care, the child's placement may be ended.

REAUTHORIZATION AND CONTINUITY OF CARE

DTA may reauthorize a family for an additional 12-months if the family continues to receive TAFDC. This DTA-related referral may be completed up to 60 days prior to the end date of the expiring authorization. Families do not need to complete a reauthorization in person: virtual and telephonic options must be made available. A child's placement will not be disrupted while a new referral is being issued unless a change is requested by the family.

DTA families who receive SNAP and participate in a SNAP Path to Work program may be reauthorized through the Income Eligible Child Care Program continuity of care policy, and do not need to be placed on the waitlist, provided the family continues to meet the program's eligibility requirements.

DTA-RELATED TRANSITIONAL CHILD CARE

DTA families are eligible for immediate access to Transitional Child Care for up to 24 months following the closure of their DTA case. To ensure a smooth transition, the following rules apply based on when the family accesses care and their current CCFA authorization status.

Families with an Active CCFA Authorization at DTA Case Closure

- If a family is already receiving DTA-related child care when their TAFDC case closes, their child care financial assistance will continue without interruption.
- The current DTA-related child care authorization shall not be shortened.
- The DTA case closure date will be recorded as the last day of the current DTA-related child care authorization.
- After the DTA-Related authorization ends, the family may be eligible for their first 12-month Transitional child care authorization.
- The family may be eligible for a second 12-month transitional authorization.

Families Accessing CCFA for the First Time Post TAFDC Case Closure

- Families may still qualify for Transitional Child Care even if they did not have child care while their DTA case was open.
- If a family requests child care within 24 months of their TAFDC case closing, they must not be placed on the waitlist.
- Families applying within months 1-12 after case closure may be authorized for Transitional child care, under the *First 12-Month Transitional Authorization Rule* below and then may be eligible for the second year transitional period.
- Families applying within months 13-24 after their TAFDC case closure date may be authorized for Transitional child care under the *Second 12-month Transitional Authorization Rule* below. At their next reauthorization, they may be eligible for continuity of care through the Income Eligible Child Care Program.

General Program Rules for Transitional Child Care

- In two-parent households, both parents must meet eligibility requirements to qualify for transitional care.
- 12-month authorizations remain in place unless a new referral indicates that the TAFDC case has reopened. In that case, a new DTA-related authorization will be entered based on the referral.
- A family is eligible for “Seeking Approved Activity” provisional authorization

within their first or second 12-month transitional periods.

- At the end of the transitional period (up to 24 months of Transitional Child Care), families may qualify for continuity of care through the Income Eligible Child Care Program, provided they continue to meet program requirements.

First 12-Month Transitional Authorization Rule

- DTA issues a referral for the first 12-month authorization.
- The referral is sufficient documentation to meet income and residency requirements for the 12-month period immediately following the authorization.
- DTA confirms the parent is in an allowable activity when issuing the referral. Family Access Administrators will verify the service need activity during the eligibility process.
- If a parent does not have an active service need at the time of assessment, they are eligible for a 12-week "Seeking Approved Activity" provisional authorization. Parents with a provisional authorization will receive the full 12 months if they demonstrate an eligible service need by the end of those 12 weeks.
- Parent fees are not assessed during this first 12-month transitional period, however countable income must still be submitted, documented and verified.

Second 12-month Transitional Authorization Rule

- The Family Access Administrators shall determine eligibility of
- the family according to standard Income Eligible policies.
- During this second 12-month transitional authorization period, parents may be required to pay a fee based on their income.
- If a parent does not have an active service need at the time of assessment, they are eligible for a 12-week "Seeking Approved Activity" provisional authorization. They will receive the full 12 months if they demonstrate an eligible service need by the end of those 12 weeks.

DENIAL, TERMINATION, REQUEST FOR REVIEW

Families who wish to appeal the denial or termination of their DTA-Related Child Care referral have the right to do so through the DTA Fair Hearing Process, in accordance with DTA regulations and policies.

Families who wish to appeal the denial or termination of their Income Eligible Child Care Financial Assistance, including families experiencing homelessness and young parents, have the right to request an EEC review, in accordance with the Income Eligible Denial,

Termination, and Request for Review policies.

COMMUNICATIONS

DTA will work collaboratively and in partnership with Family Access Administrators to ensure access to timely and dignified services. DTA will provide the name and contact information of the appropriate CCRR to coordinate the child's enrollment. After receiving the referral from DTA, the Family Access Administrator will make the initial outreach to the family to obtain a voucher. The CCRR will help the parents navigate resources and identify a child care provider of their choice, if needed.

Families will be notified of the end of their authorization period in writing and within 60 days of the family's eligibility period. Family Access Administrators will notify families at least twice that their eligibility period is ending. At least one of these notifications must be in writing and be provided no fewer than 60 days prior to the end of a family's eligibility period.

Family Access Administrators will send all notifications to families through at least two (2) forms of communication, including phone, text, email, and/or US mail.