

KNOW YOUR RIGHTS

This brochure explains your rights and responsibilities if you receive Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA) benefits including Transitional Aid to Families with Dependent Children (TAFDC), Emergency Aid to the Elderly, Disabled, and Children (EAEDC), and/or Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits.

Please read it carefully. You will also need to read the program brochures for each specific program to get important information. You are responsible for telling the members of your household about program rules and their rights and responsibilities. If you do not understand something, be sure to ask DTA to explain it. If you are a noncitizen, make sure you receive the “What Noncitizens Need to Know” and the “Noncitizen Resources” brochures.

Your Responsibilities

You must:

- give complete and correct information to the DTA.
- keep your appointments. If you need to reschedule, contact DTA as soon as possible.
- complete scheduled eligibility reviews (you may be contacted at other times for other reasons).
- cooperate with government employees who may need to review your case.
- report changes to DTA in writing, by phone, or in person, within 10 days of the change. If you do not report these changes, you may lose your benefits. If you are not sure whether you have to report information, call the **DTA Assistance Line at 1-877-382-2363** or your case manager.
- tell the Department of any changes that may affect your benefits, including but not limited to:
 - the number of people who live with you;
 - where you live (your address) and any utility or shelter costs (including Section 8 or other subsidy programs);
 - your health insurance coverage (for example, if you get new health insurance through a job or an absent parent, or you lose your health insurance);
 - the amount of income you receive, including but not limited to earnings, Social Security payments, cash, or child support;
 - any money you receive, such as a settlement, a retroactive Social Security payment, or lottery winnings; and
 - for TAFDC, you must let us know if you will be out of state for more than 30 days.
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Depending on the rules of the program, you may also be required to participate in the Work Program or seek employment and sign a release of medical records.

If you are looking for housing or shelter benefits, contact the Department of Housing and Livable Communities at 1-877-418-3308.

Your Rights

You have the right to:

- be treated politely and with respect;
- file an application;

- have your case information kept private;
- have your eligibility for benefits determined within 30 days;
- receive a DTA notice about the decision on your application and every time there is a change to your case;
- receive benefits from the date you apply, if you are eligible;
- an interpreter provided by the DTA, if needed;
- get immediate help with food and medical care, if you are eligible;
- get help with domestic violence issues;
- register to vote and get help completing the registration form;
- file an appeal if you disagree with any action taken on your case (to appeal, fill out the form on the back of the notice you get from the DTA; if you lose the notice, contact DTA to get another appeal form);
- review your case file;
- have an authorized representative to help you; and
- reasonable accommodations (special help) if you are disabled.

How to Get Your Benefits

You will get your benefits by direct deposit to your bank account or by Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT). With EBT, you get your cash benefits through ATMs (bank machines). You can use cash and/or SNAP benefits at point-of-sale (POS) terminals (checkouts) in supermarkets and other stores. You can have someone receive benefits on your behalf. This person would be called your authorized payee or representative. Talk to DTA about this option. If you have a bank account, you must receive your cash benefits by direct deposit.

Use of Your Information

DTA may contact other people or agencies to check the information you provide. The information you give will be subject to verification by federal, state, and local officials and through government data match systems.

What You Can't Buy with Cash Benefits on Your EBT Card

It is illegal for you to use cash benefits to pay for the following purchases or services: alcoholic beverages, court-ordered fees, fines, bail or bail bonds, firearms and ammunition, gambling, jewelry, lottery tickets, jewelry, adult-oriented material or performances, tattoos or body piercings, tobacco or marijuana products, or vacation services or televisions, stereos, video games or consoles at rent-to-own stores.

Where You Can't Shop with Your Cash Benefits on Your EBT Card

It is illegal to use cash benefits at: adult-oriented bookstores, paraphernalia stores, performance establishments, ammunitions and firearms dealers, gambling casinos or gaming establishments, cruise ships, jewelry stores, liquor stores, tobacco or marijuana stores, manicure shops, or aesthetic shops, cash transmittal agencies to foreign countries or tattoo parlors.

Penalties for violating this law include:

First Offense: You must pay DTA back the amount of the items or services.

Second Offense: You must pay DTA back the amount of the items or services AND you will lose your cash assistance for two months.

Third Offense: You must pay DTA back the amount of the items or services AND you will lose cash assistance permanently.

To report fraud or a prohibited purchase or sale, call 1-800-372-8399.

Important Information Replacing Your EBT Card

Any DTA client who receives a total of 4 or more EBT cards within 12 months must talk with their case manager before getting a new card. Based on this discussion, DTA may investigate to ensure that no fraudulent activities have occurred.

EBT Card Replacement Fee for SNAP, TAFDC and EAEDC Clients

DTA charges a \$5 fee for replacement EBT cards. The \$5 fee will be taken from your benefits when you ask for a replacement card. If you receive cash benefits, we take the fee from your cash benefits first. If you have no cash benefits available, we will take the fee from your SNAP benefits, if any. If you have no benefits available at all, DTA will take the fee from you at a later date.

Use of Social Security Numbers

Household members applying to receive assistance are required to give DTA their Social Security numbers. These numbers will be verified. Household members without a Social Security number will be referred to the local Social Security Administration office to apply for one if they have not already done so.

When you sign your application, you are giving DTA permission to use your household's Social Security numbers to keep track of your case and to prevent receipt of duplicate benefits.

To verify the information you give, DTA may match all household members' Social Security numbers with the records of:

- any federal, state, county or local agency;
- banks and other financial institutions;
- Department service providers; and
other agencies or institutions as allowed by law.

Noncitizens

To be eligible for TAFDC, EAEDC, or SNAP benefits, noncitizens must verify that they are in the United States legally. If you have any questions about noncitizen status, ask your case manager.

Under TAFDC and SNAP rules, a noncitizen unable or unwilling to provide immigration status information or a Social Security number due to immigration status need not do so. This noncitizen however, will **not** be eligible for benefits. The remaining members of the household may still receive benefits.

If you become a U.S. citizen, you may be eligible for federal benefits such as Supplemental Security Income (SSI). Generally, you need to have been a permanent resident for five years (three years if married to a U.S. citizen) before you are eligible for citizenship. You can apply 90 days before you have met the five-year requirement.

Massachusetts Office for Refugees and Immigrants (ORI) supports community-based organizations across the Commonwealth to provide citizenship assistance to low-income refugees and immigrants. The Citizenship for New Americans Program (CNAP) assists legal permanent residents of the Commonwealth in becoming citizens of the United States. The Program assists persons who are within 3

years of eligibility to become citizens of the United States. Services provided include: ESOL/civics classes, citizenship application assistance, interview preparation, and support services, including, but not limited to, interpretation and referral services.

DTA can provide you with a list of organizations that can help you apply for citizenship.

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)

If you think you have a disability that prevents you from meeting DTA requirements or accessing Department programs, you may be entitled to get help under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Under the ADA, you can get a “reasonable accommodation” or special help from the Department. Ask DTA for more information.

Nondiscrimination Statement

In accordance with federal law, DTA is prohibited from discriminating on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, age, disability, religion, or political beliefs.

To file a complaint of discrimination, you may contact the following:

For SNAP-related complaints:

U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA)
Director, Office of Adjudication
1400 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20250-9410
1-866-632-9992

For TAFDC-related complaints:

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Office of Civil Rights
JFK Federal Building – Room 1875
Boston, MA 02203
617-565-1340
617-565-3809 (fax)

You may also e-mail your complaint to:
OCRcomplaint@hhs.gov.

**File your discrimination complaint with DTA or the MCAD
on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity.**

Department of Transitional Assistance
Legal Division
One Ashburton Place, Fifth Floor
Boston, MA 02108
Telephone: (617) 348-8520

Massachusetts Commission Against Discrimination
(MCAD)
One Ashburton Place, Sixth Floor,
Room 601
Boston, MA 02108
Telephone: (617) 994-6000

