

# Part 6 Applications and Proofs

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## 101 Where do you apply for TAFDC?

Apply for TAFDC at your local DTA office. 106 C.M.R. § 702.130. Some DTA offices have extended hours in the early morning and in the evenings. If you are sick or disabled and cannot go to the office, tell the local office you want a home visit. 106 C.M.R. § 701.600(Y).

Be sure to sign an application the first time you go into the welfare office. You can do this even if there is no worker there to take your application. The date you sign is the earliest date your benefits will begin. You have a right to sign an application even if the worker thinks you are not eligible. 106 C.M.R. §§ 702.115, 702.150.

### *Advocacy Reminders:*

- ✓ DTA must provide a professional interpreter if you want one and you use American Sign Language or your primary language is not English, regardless of language, national origin or non-citizen status. You can use your own interpreter if you want, but you cannot use a child to interpret for you except to schedule an appointment. 106 C.M.R. 701.360; DTA Field Operations Memo 2008-16 (April 1, 2008).
- ✓ You have the right to refuse a particular interpreter if you are uncomfortable with the interpreter for personal or other reasons. You don't have to give a reason. DTA must then provide a professional telephone interpreter.

## 102 What should you bring with you?

A DTA intake worker will interview you and is supposed to help you with your application. You will have to bring in proof of your eligibility before your application will be approved. Your worker will give you a list of what to bring. 106 C.M.R. §§ 702.120, 702.125. You will also have to watch a presentation about DTA benefits and rules. See DTA Field Operations Memo 2010-12 (Feb. 10, 2010).

If you do not have everything, bring what you have. In many cases, you can sign a sworn statement to prove something. You can also sign a form letting your worker contact someone else to get the proof. 106 C.M.R. § 702.340.

Things you might be asked to bring are

- proof of who you are (for example, your driver's license, birth certificate, voter registration verification),
- social security numbers for everyone in your family (except for ineligible non-citizens) or proof that you have applied for their social security numbers,
- proof that your children are related to you and how old they are (for example, birth certificates, school records, a statement from someone who knows you and them),
- proof of your immigration status if you are not a citizen and you are requesting benefits (see **Question 8**),
- proof that the other parent of your children does not live with you (for example, papers showing he is dead, you are divorced or separated, you have brought an action against him for abuse, other evidence that he does not live with you or, if none of this is available, a sworn statement),
- proof of your income (for example, pay stubs, government checks),
- proof that you are not eligible for unemployment compensation (available from the Division of Unemployment Assistance),

- proof of where you live (for example, a landlord’s statement or utility records) unless you are homeless (see **Question 7**), *and*
- proof you have housing expenses—to qualify for the rent or mortgage allowance and to avoid the in-kind deduction (for example, a lease, rent receipt, mortgage or statement from a landlord).

There are many other proofs that DTA can ask for in a particular case. Do the best you can to get them, but if you cannot get them, ask for help from the worker and ask if you can verify the information by signing a statement. Your worker is supposed to help you get required proof when your worker has been told or is otherwise aware that you need help. See 106 C.M.R. § 702.310(B); DTA Operations Memo 2010-55 (Nov. 23, 2010).

If you need more time to get proofs, you can get an extension. If you have trouble, talk to an advocate.

***Advocacy Reminders:***

- ✓ If DTA schedules your appointment for a time that is bad for you, you can reschedule. See **Question 109**.
- ✓ Try to keep a copy of any verifications you give to DTA. If you are leaving verifications when your worker is not there, try to get a copy date-stamped. See **Question 109**.
- ✓ DTA may ask you to bring proof of citizenship for all citizen members of your household. Proof of citizenship is not required for TAFDC unless it is questionable, but may be required for MassHealth so you should provide it to DTA if you can. Your TAFDC application should not be delayed or denied pending DTA’s receipt of proof of citizenship. DTA Field Operations Memo 2007-10 (Feb. 20, 2007).
- ✓ Some information does not change and only needs to be verified once, unless there is reason to think that it was wrong originally or has changed. For example, you should not need to re-verify your date of birth at redetermination or re-application. DTA Operations Memo 2010-55 (Nov. 23, 2010).

## 103 How long does it take to decide whether you are eligible?

DTA must decide on your application within 30 days and either pay you benefits or deny your application. The 30-day time limit can be extended if you ask for more time to get proof of eligibility. 106 C.M.R. § 702.160. If you get a notice saying you did not bring enough proof, you have 30 days from the date of the notice to bring in proof.

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## 104 What if you need help right away?

You can get help with *immediate needs* for housing expenses, food, or health insurance within 24 hours of your application. 106 C.M.R. § 702.125(F). Be sure to tell the worker if you need help with immediate needs.

### **Rent, Utilities or Fuel**

If you need help right away with rent, utilities or fuel *and you appear to be eligible*, you can get an advance on your TAFDC benefits to pay for these things. The advance will be paid as a voucher to the landlord, utility or fuel company.

### **Food**

You may qualify for emergency or “expedited” food stamps (SNAP). If not, you can get an advance on your TAFDC benefits to pay for food.

### **MassHealth**

You can get a temporary MassHealth card.

## 105 How can you find out what is happening with your case?

You can call your DTA worker to ask about your case. If you can not reach your worker you can call your worker's supervisor (call the local office, see **Appendix C**, or Recipient Services, 800-445-6604 or 617-348-5502, to get the supervisor's name and telephone number).

You can also call Recipient Services to ask about your case, 800-445-6604 or 617-348-5502.

You can get basic information about your case through the My Account Page (MAP) online, including the case status, amount of your benefits, the date you will receive your benefits, contact information for your worker and local DTA office, and notices sent to you in the last 90 days. For security reasons you will need to register and provide personal information to access your information online. See [www.mass.gov/vg/self-service](http://www.mass.gov/vg/self-service) and DTA Field Operations Memo 2020-6 (Jan. 20, 2010). Make sure you do not share your MAP password, social security number, EBT card number or MassHealth benefits card number with *anyone*.

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## 106 Is your information kept confidential?

DTA must not release information about you without your written permission. 106 C.M.R. §§ 104.040; 701.320. DTA Operations Memo 2010-50 (Nov. 1, 2010). If you want DTA to share information about you with an advocate or anyone else, you will need to sign a written release that says DTA can share your information.

***Advocacy Reminders:***

- ✓ You or the advocate can fax the release to Recipient Services, (fax) 617-348-5668. DTA staff are authorized to discuss your case with the advocate if you or the advocate have sent a release to Recipient Services.
- ✓ An advocate may be able to talk to Recipient Services or the worker or supervisor without a release by setting up a three-way call with you, DTA and the advocate.
- ✓ DTA does not need your permission to release information about you in connection with a criminal investigation or similar purposes.

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## **107 Can domestic violence survivors and others get extra confidentiality protections?**

You can ask DTA for a Heightened Level of Security indicator because of domestic violence or any other reason. DTA Operations Memo 2010-50 (Nov. 1, 2010). This will flag your case so that

- DTA will not discuss your case with you or anyone else on the phone.
- You will have to conduct all business by going in person to DTA.
- You will not be able to talk to a Domestic Violence Specialist or Recipient Services by phone.
- You will not be able to view your “My Account Page” through the Virtual Gateway.
- DTA will be able to discuss your case with your lawyer only if you put your lawyer’s name on the form requesting the Heightened Level of Security.

***Advocacy Reminders:***

- ✓ These extra protections can sometimes be dangerous or very inconvenient, because you have to go to the DTA office to conduct your business with DTA. Think carefully about your own situation before asking for the special protection.
- ✓ You can cancel the special protection at any time by signing a form saying you no longer want it.
- ✓ You can ask the Domestic Violence Specialist in the DTA office for different arrangements that will work better for you. For example, you can ask to have your case handled in a different office where you will be safer. You can ask for a password so that DTA will talk to you on the phone but will not talk to anyone who does not have the password. You can request that DTA use a number instead of your SSN. See **Question 10**.
- ✓ Domestic Violence Specialists are available to help domestic violence survivors request waivers from DTA rules, see **Question 44**, and help you make a safety plan.

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## 108 What is BEACON?

BEACON is DTA's computer system. The DTA worker puts information about each client into BEACON. BEACON then decides eligibility and benefit amounts, creates a list of proofs you need to bring, calculates how many months you have used on your time clock, keeps track of when you have to meet with your worker, and automatically sends out notices in your case.

Sometimes BEACON makes mistakes because the worker did not give BEACON the right information. Sometimes BEACON makes mistakes because the computer program is wrong. Sometimes BEACON tells the worker to ask for information or proofs you should not have to give. BEACON is only a computer system. It does not set the rules or make policy. If you have any questions or problems with BEACON or you get notices from DTA you think are wrong, talk to your worker or your

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worker's supervisor. If the problem is not fixed right away, you should contact an advocate and appeal. See **Part 8**.