

Part 1

Application and Proofs

1 How do I apply for SNAP benefits?

You have the right to apply for benefits – whether or not DTA thinks you are eligible. This is a fundamental right of all Massachusetts residents. The SNAP rules require DTA to encourage individuals who inquire about SNAP to apply. [106 C.M.R. §361.130](#). DTA still needs to determine if you are eligible, but no one should discourage you from filing a SNAP application.

There is NO wrong door! You can:

- *Apply online:*
 - through [DTAConnect.com](#) on a computer or from a smartphone.
- *Apply by phone:*
 - Call the DTA Assistance Line at (877) 382-2363 and press #7.
 - Persons age 60 or older can call the Senior Assistance Office at (833) 712-8027. See **Question 25**.
- *Apply through your healthcare application or renewal:*
 - When you apply for or renew your MassHealth or Medicare Savings Program (MSP) coverage, you can check the “apply for SNAP” checkbox. Your healthcare application is then sent to DTA for follow up.
- *Apply in person at any local DTA office:*
 - Each DTA office *must accept* your SNAP application the same day you walk in. [106 C.M.R. §361.130](#).
 - Every local DTA office also has computers/iPads for you to submit documents to your case. See **Question 15**.
 - If you go in person, the local office should: screen you for expedited (emergency) SNAP, offer to do an interview, give you an EBT card and accept any forms or documents you bring in. See **Question 3** about expedited SNAP.

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- *Mail or fax in a paper application:*
 - Paper SNAP applications in multiple languages are available at [Mass.gov/lists/snap-benefit-application](https://www.mass.gov/lists/snap-benefit-application). See **Question 14**.
 - Adults 60 or older can fill out a shorter “SNAP Application for Seniors.” Available at [Mass.gov/lists/snap-application-for-seniors](https://www.mass.gov/lists/snap-application-for-seniors).
 - If you would rather receive a paper application by mail, DTA should put one in the mail the same day you ask for it. [106 C.M.R. §361.140](#)

- Apply through a SNAP outreach provider by calling:
 - The Project Bread Food Source Hotline at 1-800-645-8333
 - Call a local SNAP Outreach Provider, list available here: [Mass.gov/snap-outreach](https://www.mass.gov/snap-outreach). Many local Councils on Aging and food pantries, as well as the Food Bank of Western MA and Greater Boston Food Bank, do SNAP enrollment.

See SNAP application rights: [106 C.M.R. §361.080 et seq.](#)

Your right to apply with minimal information

You have the right to *file* a SNAP application with just your basic information: your name, address, signature and the date. [106 C.M.R. §361.130](#). You will still need to give DTA more information later, but don't delay filing a SNAP application because you don't have all the information or proofs.

If you already have a working EBT card

The SNAP application asks if you already have a Massachusetts EBT card (from past receipt of SNAP). If you have one with your name on it that works, you can still use it once your SNAP case is approved. If you tell DTA you do not have an EBT card, DTA will mail you a card. You can also go to the local DTA Office to pick one up. See **Question 86**.

Signing the application

Your *electronic, ink, or verbal signature* is your agreement that the information you provide to DTA is truthful and accurate. When you sign the application, you agree that you understand your rights and responsibilities to follow the rules, including your obligation to report changes when required.

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Your right to retroactive SNAP benefits

If you are approved for SNAP within 30 days of when you apply, you should get benefits paid *back to the date* DTA received your *signed* application. [106 C.M.R.§361.080](#). For example, this would be the date you applied by phone or online, or the date DTA received your SNAP checkbox application from MassHealth (typically the day after you do the MassHealth application).

Cash assistance applications while applying for SNAP

If you are applying for DTA's cash assistance benefits (TAFDC or EAEDC), you can apply for SNAP at the same time. [106 C.M.R.§361.160](#). DTA must still process your SNAP benefits, even if it turns out you are not eligible for cash assistance. [106 C.M.R.§365.120\(A\)\(1\)](#), [\(A\)\(2\)](#).

If you apply for SNAP and you also wish to apply for cash assistance, the DTA SNAP case worker should connect you to a cash case worker to help you apply for cash benefits. For example, if you have little or no income and are 65 or older or disabled, you might be eligible for EAEDC benefits. You might be eligible for TAFDC if you are pregnant or have children. DTA should ask you if you want to apply for these benefits.

Please contact MLRI at info@masslegalservices.org if DTA did not start a SNAP application for you on the same day that you applied for cash, or if you were denied cash benefits but DTA did not make a decision about SNAP in your case.

See MLRI's TAFDC and EAEDC Advocacy Guides for more on these cash benefits, available here: [Masslegalservices.org/LegalAdvocacyGuides](https://masslegalservices.org/LegalAdvocacyGuides)

DTA Online Guide: See **Appendix G** for DTA's BEACON 5 Online Guide for this section.

MassHealth Eligibility Operations Memos: EOM 2021-10 and EOM 2021-12 announcing the addition of the SNAP gap checkbox and SNAP signature sections to MassHealth and Medicare Savings Program applications, [available here](#). And MassHealth instructions on implementing the SNAP checkbox onto the HIX MassHealth Connector online application, implemented July 27, 2022, [HIX System Release Update #25 available here](#).

2 What happens after I apply?

Signing a SNAP application is the *first step*! There are *two* more steps:

- a phone *interview* with a DTA worker (see **Question 10**) and
- sending *proofs* (if DTA needs them, see **Question 12**).

Note: If you would prefer to have your SNAP interview *in person*, you have a right to have an interview at a DTA office. See **Question 10**.

Getting an EBT card

Once DTA verifies your identity, DTA should also send you *an EBT card* and *PIN* in the U.S. mail. These come in two separate envelopes and can take about 5-10 days to arrive in the mail.

Here's what to know about the EBT card:

- Your EBT card has no benefits on it until DTA approves your SNAP case.
- DTA will not send you an EBT card if you tell them on the SNAP application that you have one.
- If you would rather go in person to get a card (for example, because you want an EBT card more quickly or do not have a reliable address), you have the right to visit a local DTA office to get one in person.
- Contact the DTA Ombuds Office if you need help getting a card by overnight mail or need to problem solve getting a card. See **Question 31**.

See **Question 86** on how to access your EBT benefits.

To learn more from DTA about EBT cards, visit [Mass.gov/guides/using-your-ebt-card#-get-a-new-card-](https://www.mass.gov/guides/using-your-ebt-card#-get-a-new-card-)

DTA Online Guide: See **Appendix G** for links to the DTA's BEACON 5 Online Guide for this section.

3 When am I eligible for expedited (emergency) benefits?

Expedited SNAP benefits are a *faster way* to get your first month of SNAP benefits - *within 7 days* of when you apply if you qualify.

You may be eligible for *expedited* SNAP if:

- you have \$150 or less in monthly gross income and \$100 or less in liquid assets (cash and money in the bank), or
- your shelter costs are *higher* than your combined gross monthly income and cash and savings (DTA adds the value of the standard utility allowance to your rent or homeownership costs), or
- you are a migrant household with \$100 or less in cash and savings.

Expedited SNAP rules: [106 C.M.R. §§365.800-365.850](#).

Example: Stella is 65 and earns \$200 per week in gross wages (before taxes) at her part time job. Her total monthly income is \$867 (weekly x 4.333). Stella pays \$500/month rent and separately pays heating costs. Her total shelter costs are \$1,360 based on her rent of \$500 plus the \$852 heating/cooling standard utility allowance. Because her shelter costs are higher than her gross income, Stella is eligible for expedited SNAP.

The SNAP rules require DTA to *screen* all applicants for expedited SNAP when DTA gets your application. [106 C.M.R. §365.800](#). DTA does this screening during the application interview. See **Question 10**. To get *ongoing SNAP* benefits after the expedited month, you will have to provide proofs of all the other eligibility factors. [106 C.M.R. §365.850\(B\)](#).

Troubleshooting:

Proofs: You only need to verify your *identity* to qualify for expedited SNAP. You can provide proof of your identity when you apply. DTA will also verify your identity by confirming your SSN with SSA. See **Appendix C**.

Ongoing SNAP: If you received expedited SNAP, but *did not send DTA all the other required proofs for ongoing SNAP*, DTA should send you a denial notice explaining what documents DTA was missing. If you send DTA these proofs, DTA can reopen your SNAP case. If you do not get this denial notice, email info@masslegalservices.org.

How much: The amount DTA will give you in expedited SNAP is based

on the date you apply and the “cyclical month” of your SNAP application. [106 C.M.R. §365.840](#). For example, you may get more than 1 month worth of initial benefits, depending on when you apply.

How often: You can only get expedited SNAP once every 12 months, unless you completed the full SNAP application the last time you applied (see DTA Transitions [FYI, December 2010](#), pg 8).

DTA Online Guide: See **Appendix G** for links to the DTA’s BEACON 5 Online Guide for this section.

4 What is Bay State CAP for SSI recipients?

There are two groups of Supplemental Security Income (SSI) recipients who get SNAP benefits through Bay State CAP or the SNAP “Combined Application Project.” [106 C.M.R. §366.910](#). One group are SSI recipients who connect to Bay State CAP through an SSI application or renewal. The second are SSI recipients who were getting SNAP before their SSI began, or who apply for SNAP through DTA.

You may qualify for Bay State CAP SNAP benefits if:

1. you are approved for SSI,
2. you are 18 or older and not living with a spouse,
3. you live alone, or live with others but purchase and prepare your own food separate from the others,
4. you do not have regular earned income, *and*
5. a portion of your SSI benefits is *federally-funded SSI*.

Bay State CAP – applying for SNAP through SSA

In Massachusetts, many SSI applicants and recipients can apply for SNAP directly through the Social Security Administration (SSA) when applying for or renewing SSI.

In this situation, you *do not need to file* a separate SNAP application at DTA. DTA uses your SSI eligibility information to establish your benefits and send you an EBT card. [106 C.M.R. §366.910\(C\)](#).

When you apply for SSI and appear eligible to get your SSI claim approved within 30 days, the SSA Claims Representative *should* screen you for SNAP. An SSI application is usually approved quickly for persons ages 65

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and over with little or no income or assets, and persons with severe disabilities who were getting SSI before and the benefits stopped for some reason. However, if your SSI benefits were suspended for less than 12 months due to hospitalization or other institutionalization, SSA may not ask about Bay State CAP in a suspension case. It's best to contact DTA to reapply for SNAP.

If you apply for SNAP through SSA, you do not need to send DTA any proofs. DTA will use the income and other information they get from SSA, including the amount of your shelter costs. [106 C.M.R. §366.910\(C\)](#) If approved, DTA will send you a Bay State CAP approval letter. DTA should also send you an EBT card and PIN. [106 C.M.R. §366.910\(E\)](#).

If you are approved for Bay State CAP through SSA, you may qualify for more in regular SNAP if you have high shelter or medical costs. Tell DTA if you have high rent, homeownership, or health care costs.

Some SNAP cases assigned to Bay State CAP

DTA also moves some SSI recipients from regular SNAP to Bay State CAP when they would qualify for more SNAP benefits under the Bay State CAP rules. This usually happens because the SSI recipient was getting SNAP already before their SSI started, or they applied for SNAP directly through DTA.

If you would qualify for a higher SNAP benefits under Bay State CAP, DTA will automatically moved your case over to Bay State CAP. DTA automatically moves cases over once per month. You also have a right to switch from Bay State CAP to regular SNAP any time you would get higher SNAP benefits. [106 C.M.R. §366.910 \(H\)\(2\)](#).

The benefits of Bay State CAP

Bay State Cap SNAP benefits are certified for 36 months. [106 C.M.R. §366.910\(E\)\(3\)](#). During that 36 month period, you are not required to report any changes to DTA. See **Question 95**. However, it is best to tell DTA if you move so you do not miss DTA notices.

When it is time to recertify your benefits, DTA should send you a *short* Bay State CAP Recertification form for you to fill out and send back to DTA.

DTA Online Guide: See **Appendix G** for links to the DTA's BEACON 5 Online Guide for this section.

SSA Policy Operations Manual: Section SI BOS01801.302; accessed February 2022: <https://secure.ssa.gov/poms.nsf/lnx/0501801302BOS>

5 Can I register to vote when I apply for SNAP?

Yes! DTA must ask all SNAP and cash assistance household members *who are over age 17 and U.S. citizens* if they wish to register to vote for any federal elections. [52 U.S. Code § 20506](#).

Massachusetts state law also allows 16- and 17-year-olds to pre-register to vote, [M.G.L. 51 §42](#). Here's what you should know:

- When you apply, recertify or change your address for your SNAP or cash assistance case, DTA is required to tell you how you can *register to vote and assist you with voter registration*. [106 C.M.R. §360.950](#).
- If you apply, recertify or change your address *in person*, DTA is required under federal law to physically hand you a Voter Registration packet. If do this *online or by phone*, DTA is also supposed to mail you a letter with a Voter Registration Form.
- If you complete a Voter Registration Form through DTA, DTA is required to send the completed form to your city/town election office with 5 business days.

IMPORTANT: Voter registration is optional. DTA will not deny or close your SNAP case if you choose to not fill out a Voter Registration Form.

If you have a current MA state ID or driver's license, you can also register to vote online, or get forms mailed to you. Go to the Secretary of State's [Register to Vote webpage](#) for more information on how to register.

Homeless individuals using the voter registration form can use the map on the form to indicate a location for voting purposes if they do not have a "conventional" address.

DTA Online Guide: See **Appendix G** for links to the DTA's BEACON 5 Online Guide for this section.

6 Can someone else help me apply for SNAP?

Yes! You can always ask a family member, friend, or social services agency to help you fill out an application. They can also help you send in proofs, go with you to a local DTA office and/or participate in a phone interview with you - with your permission. See **Question 10** to learn more about the interview.

But *you should sign* the application and *participate* in the interview. That's because *you* are legally responsible for all the information on the application. DTA *must not conduct any SNAP interview* without you!

If the helping friend or agency gives DTA incorrect information – or leaves out information that is important to tell DTA – *you* may end up with a SNAP overpayment, or worse. The helping agency that gave DTA wrong information about your situation could be legally liable as well.

7 What is an Authorized Representative?

An Authorized Representative is someone you choose to act on your behalf and manage your SNAP benefits. [106 C.M.R. §§361.300-361.330](#). This is similar to a “representative payee” for SSI or Social Security benefits.

The Authorized Representative does not need to have legal guardianship or a court appointment, but you do have to give *your voluntary written consent*.

DTA will ask you to sign a DTA form appointing this person, *Request to Choose Someone to Be My Authorized Representative*. See [Appendix C](#).

You can decide how much control the Authorized Representative has. You can decide if the person you designate as an Authorized Representative can:

- sign the SNAP application on your behalf, receive DTA notices, report changes and talk about your case with DTA, **and/or**
- get a second EBT card to shop for you with your SNAP benefits. DTA can issue two EBT cards – one for you and one for the Authorized Representative.

Troubleshooting:

A trusted person: Be sure to *choose someone you trust*. If this person gives DTA incorrect information and you get too much SNAP, you might have to pay back an overpayment. [106 C.M.R. §§361.310 \(B\)](#).

Changing/ending authorized rep status:

DTA *cannot require you to have an authorized rep* if you do not want one. The only exception to this rule is for residents of substance abuse disorder treatment programs and some group home residents. [7 CFR 273.11\(e\) and \(f\)](#), and [106 C.M.R. §§361.350](#)

You can also ask DTA to *remove the person* who is your Authorized Rep from your SNAP case any time. For example, you may find a family member or friend is not spending your SNAP benefits appropriately.

More info: To learn about the difference between a helping agency and an Authorized Representative, see [MLRI FAQ: Masslegalservices.org/content/helping-agency-vs-authorized-representative](#).

DTA Online Guide: See **Appendix G** for links to the DTA’s BEACON 5 Online Guide for this section.

8 Can I give someone permission to talk with DTA about my SNAP case?

You have the right to give permission to anyone you trust to help you find out what’s going on with your SNAP case. This can be a social service agency, food pantry, legal services, a trusted family member or friend. This is *different* from appointing an *authorized representative*. See **Question 7**. You can also call the DTA Assistance Line with an agency or friend on the line at the same time to help you. For example, you can do a “3-way” call.

Before anyone can talk with DTA about your case (if you are not with them by phone or in person), you need to send DTA a *written and signed statement* that allows DTA to share information with the person or organization helping you. [106 C.M.R. §360.400](#).

[Appendix C](#) has a sample *Client Consent Allowing DTA to Release Information to a Helping Agency*. You can also send DTA a handwritten or typed note (signed and dated) with the same information. There is no specific DTA form that must be used.

DTA Online Guide: See **Appendix G** for links to the DTA’s BEACON 5 Online Guide for this section.

9 How do I apply if I live in a group home, substance abuse center, or teen program?

Group home residents

If you live in a *licensed group home* for persons with disabilities, you may be eligible for SNAP benefits as a one-person household even though you share common meals. [106 C.M.R. §361.240\(B\)](#). A licensed group home is licensed by the state as a community-based residential facility that has no more than 16 residents living there at a time. [106 C.M.R. §365.620](#). Each local DTA office has a Group Home Liaison who can help you with your SNAP application.

Some group homes act as the *Authorized Representative* for residents. That is common for group homes run by the Mass Department of Developmental Services (DDS) and sometimes group homes run by Mass Department of Mental Health (DMH). This means a group home manager may file a SNAP application for residents and/or the group home receives the EBT card for the resident.

Other group homes that are more “transitional” or short term may have residents apply for SNAP and buy and prepare their own food. Some group homes have point of sale (POS) devices that allow the group home to swipe benefits off the EBT cards of residents to collect money for common food.

If you have filed a SNAP application or are already getting SNAP when you join the group home, the group home cannot force you to turn over your SNAP. They must make an *individual determination* whether or not you can handle your own affairs, such as managing your cash or SNAP benefits. If the group home determines that you do not have the physical or mental ability to handle your own affairs, the group home will file an application for SNAP on your behalf (act as an “Authorized Representative” to do your SNAP application). You can challenge this determination.

If you apply for your own SNAP, you can choose whether to have the group home transact (keep) your EBT card to buy food or if you want to keep your own EBT card to make and buy your own food. See [7 C.F.R. 273.11\(f\)](#).

Residents of substance abuse disorder treatment centers

If you are a resident of a *licensed substance abuse disorder treatment program*, the SNAP rules say that the treatment program must be your Authorized Representative. [106 C.M.R. §365.610](#). Even if you apply for

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SNAP on your own, you must transfer your SNAP benefits to the treatment program for food purchases while you are staying there.

“*Sober houses*” typically provide room and meals for adults transitioning from a treatment program and/or referred by a court or probation officer. Sober houses may be regulated at the local level but usually are not licensed or regulated by the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (DPH). If you live in a “sober house” or other roomer/board situation not licensed by DPH, the sober house cannot take your EBT card unless you *voluntarily* appoint them as your Authorized Representative to transact SNAP on your behalf. Contact Legal Services if this happens.

Note: Drug and alcohol treatment centers and group homes are responsible for any SNAP overpayments that happen while the person getting SNAP is a resident of the treatment center or group home. [106 C.M.R. §365.650](#). The only exception is if a group home resident applied for SNAP on their own, then the resident is responsible for any over-issuance. [7 C.F.R. 273.11\(f\)\(7\)](#).

Residents of teen living programs

If you are living in a *teen parent program*, the program is given the authority to decide if it will be the authorized representative and receive the SNAP benefits, or if it will allow you to apply for and spend the benefits yourself. [106 C.M.R. §365.620\(B\)](#).

When leaving a residential program

After you leave a group home or treatment center, the program *must return your EBT card to you*.

If you do not have an EBT card in your name, they should help you get one. When you leave, the group home or treatment center must give you back SNAP benefits in the following ways:

- If they have not yet used any of your SNAP for the month, they must return your entire monthly allotment.
- If they have already used some of your SNAP for the month but you leave *before* the 16th of the month, the program must give you back half of your allotment. If you leave *after* the 16th and the program has already used your SNAP for that month, you may not get any SNAP back.

For the rules on how your EBT benefits should be restored to you, see [7 C.F.R. 273.11\(e\)\(6\) and \(f\)\(6\)](#). Contact the DTA Ombuds office or MLRI at info@masslegalservices.org if you do not get back your EBT card or a portion of your benefits. See **Question 31**.

DTA Online Guide: See **Appendix G** for links to the DTA’s BEACON 5 Online Guide for this section.

10 Does DTA have to interview me?

DTA *must* interview all applicants for SNAP benefits. [106 C.M.R. §361.500](#). The interview must be done by a DTA SNAP worker. Conversations with SNAP Outreach partner are not SNAP interviews.

What to know about the SNAP interview:

DTA usually does the interview done *over the phone*. DTA should call you as soon as they get your SNAP application and should *screen you* for emergency (expedited) benefits.

- After you apply, DTA will make a “cold call” to try and conduct an interview.
- The caller ID should say “COMM of MASS” or 877-382-2363.
- These calls come through DTA’s computerized phone system. If you pick up the call, you will hear an automated message asking you if you want to talk to a DTA worker. You may need to wait for a few minutes for the worker to come on the line. Contact info@masslegalservices.org if you have issues with this.
- If they do not reach you, DTA should *send a letter* with the date and time a DTA worker will call to do the interview.
- You do not need to wait for the scheduled interview. You can also call the **DTA Assistance Line** *any time* after you apply to have your interview: **1-877-382-2363**.
- If you do not get any calls from DTA, double check that DTA has your correct phone number. You can check or update your phone number on DTA Connect.

In-person interviews at a DTA office

If you want one, you also have the right to an *in-person* interview in a private space at a local DTA office. [106 C.M.R. §§361.550](#).

- DTA should *schedule you for an in-person interview* if you **do not** list a phone number on your SNAP application.
- You can always use someone else’s phone (a friend or social services agency) if you prefer a phone interview. Call the DTA Assistance Line between 8:15 AM and 4:45 PM, Monday to Friday, and ask for a phone interview if you have access to a phone.

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- You can also *ask for an in-person interview* if you cannot get through the DTA Assistance Line, or you are more comfortable talking with a SNAP worker in person.
- If you *apply for benefits in person*, you also have the right to have your interview the same day at the office.
- When you do an in-person interview, DTA should offer you a *private room* where you can speak to a worker. DTA should never do the interview in the waiting area where others can hear you.

If DTA denies you an in-person interview, tell MLRI at info@masslegalservices.org. If you do not want to wait to have the interview, the DTA office should still screen you for expedited SNAP and issue you an EBT card if you need one.

If you miss the interview call

If you do not pick up when DTA calls, DTA should *leave a voicemail* and call back a couple of minutes later. Be sure to check for any messages. If you miss the phone call, you can still call the DTA Assistance Line during business hours.

If you miss the scheduled interview and any follow up calls, DTA is *required* to send you a *written notice* called a “Notice of Missed Interview” (a “NOMI”). The DTA notice must say that you have the right to another interview. [106 C.M.R. §§361.500, 361.700\(B\)\(1\)](#). If you reach a DTA worker by phone or go in-person, you should not be turned away and told to wait for a rescheduled interview. DTA should do the interview when you reach them or when you are in-person.

In general, if you do not have your interview *within 30 days* of when you applied, your SNAP application will be denied. [106 C.M.R. §361.700\(B\)\(1\)](#). You have the right to reapply for benefits. The denied application will not be held against you, but the start date of your benefits will be the date you reapply.

DTA *cannot deny your SNAP application or make you reapply* if DTA failed to contact you, failed to send a notice about an initial interview, or failed to send a notice of missed interview (called a “NOMI”). You have a right to call the DTA Assistance Line and ask to speak with a Supervisor, or you can call the DTA Ombudsman office. You can also file an appeal to seek retroactive benefits.

DTA Online Guide: See Appendix G for links to the DTA’s BEACON 5 Online Guide for this section.

11 What happens during the interview?

During the interview, the DTA worker should:

- Screen you for expedited (emergency) benefits. See **Question 3**.
- Confirm the information you gave on your application *and* any information DTA gets through government databases.
- Review the documents you sent in, tell you *what* verifications (proofs) DTA needs and *when* they are due. See **Question 12**.
- Answer any questions and *offer to help* if you need help getting proofs or contacting a third party for information.
- Review the *exemptions and the work rules* if you or a household member is subject to the ABAWD 3-month time limit. (The ABAWD time limit is not in place right now.). See **Question 60**.
- Tell you *how long* your benefits are certified for, *what changes* you need to report to DTA, and *when* you need to send back an Interim Report and/or a Recertification form. See **Question 95**.
- Explain *your rights and responsibilities*, as well as the *penalties* for committing fraud or for other program rules.
- Issue you an *EBT card* if one has not already been issued and you don't have one— either by mail or in person at the DTA office – and tell you how to use the EBT card.

SNAP interview rules: [106 C.M.R. §§361.500 - 361-550](#).

DTA Online Guide: See **Appendix G** for links to the DTA's BEACON 5 Online Guide for this section.

12 What proofs does DTA need and when?

During the interview, the DTA worker should *verbally tell you* what proofs are required and ask if you need their help getting them. [106 C.M.R. § 361.550](#). DTA should then send you a *verification checklist* (also called a “VC-1”) with *at least 10 days* for you to get the mandatory proofs back to them.

How much time you have to send DTA proofs

You have a *full 30 days* from the day you apply before DTA can send a denial notice. If you had an interview but some proofs are still missing by Day 30, DTA will send you a “pending denial notice.” [106 C.M.R. §361.930](#). This means you have *another 30 days* to get them missing proofs and not have to reapply. See **Question 21** if you send DTA your proof more than 30 days after you apply.

DTA *cannot limit proofs to any single document*. Any document that proves an eligibility factor should be accepted. [106 C.M.R. §§361.640\(A\), 361.650](#). If you have trouble getting DTA proofs, *ask DTA for help!*

If you got SNAP or cash benefits *in the past and are re-applying*, DTA should not ask for permanent verifications you already gave them in the past, such as proof of your age or identity.

Mandatory proofs

The SNAP rules require that you provide proof of certain *mandatory eligibility factors*. [106 C.M.R. §361.610](#). This includes proof of:

- the identity of the head of household (the person who applies and whose name is on the EBT card and on DTA notices),
- your Massachusetts residence,
- the Social Security Numbers (SSNs) for all household members who are applying (no need to send DTA the SSN cards),
- current earned income or self-employment (and business expenses),
- unearned income that DTA cannot verify through a database,
- the last day of work, if you stopped work recently,
- immigration status if you or a household member is applying for SNAP but is not a U.S. citizen, **and**
- other proofs that DTA needs to be sure you are eligible.

Appendix C lists the *mandatory verification factors*, and document options. Some information can be *self-declared* (see **Question 13**) or is

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optional, meaning not required to approve your case, (see **Question 14**).

Troubleshooting

Missing wages: If you have trouble producing missing wage information or your last day of work, DTA can do a “collateral contact” and contact the employer directly for proof. If there is a missing pay stub, DTA should be able to figure out the missing week of income from other pay stubs.

Terminated income: DTA should not ask for proof that income has ended except in very limited situations. If you are asked to prove that a job or other income ended, contact MLRI at info@masslegalservices.org.

A new baby: Do not wait until you have an SSN for the baby. DTA should add the baby to your DTA case without needing an SSN until your next recertification or for 6 months after birth (whichever is later).

Immigrant status: If DTA is waiting on a response from USCIS to confirm your immigration status or for proof of 40 quarters of work history, DTA should issue you SNAP for up to 6 months. See **Question 48**.

DTA Online Guide: See **Appendix G** for links to the DTA’s BEACON 5 Online Guide for this section.

13 What information can I self-declare?

You can *self-declare* the following information for SNAP eligibility:

- Your *household composition* – for example, if you live with others but purchase and prepare most of your food separately.
- The *U.S. citizenship* of any household member.
- Your *date of birth*.
- Your *shelter expenses* such as your rent or homeownership costs, and the type of utilities you pay for.
- Your *childcare or adult dependent care expenses*.
- If you are age 60 or older or get a disability-based benefit, your out-of-pocket *medical expenses* up to a capped amount.
- Your *college student status*.

See list of SNAP verifications at application: [106 C.M.R. § 361.610](#).

DTA should accept your self-declaration unless DTA determines the information is *questionable*. See **Question 17**.

You can *verbally tell DTA this information* when you talk with a SNAP worker, or you can write down this information on your SNAP Application, Recertification or Interim Report forms. You can also send DTA a written statement that you have signed and dated. See [Appendix C](#) for a sample self-declaration form for shelter and dependent care costs.

DTA Online Guide: See **Appendix G** for links to the DTA’s BEACON 5 Online Guide for this section.

14 What proofs are optional?

DTA needs certain information beyond your income to calculate the amount of your SNAP. These are considered *optional verifications or proofs*.

This means that, DTA *cannot deny* your application for benefits – but the SNAP amount will be calculated without these deductions if DTA does not get the information or the proofs they need. [106 C.M.R. § 364.450\(B\)](#).

Optional information includes your:

- shelter (rent, home ownership) and utility costs,
- childcare or adult dependent care costs,
- health care costs (if eligible to claim them),
- child support you pay to a child outside the household.
- business expenses for self-employment income.

Shelter and childcare costs can be *self-declared*. Health care costs can be self-declared if between \$35 and \$190/month, but DTA needs proof if claiming health care costs above \$190/month. DTA also needs proof of child support paid out and business expenses from self-employment to exclude those costs from your income.

Troubleshooting

Child support: If you verified with DTA that you are legally required to pay and that you are paying child support, double check DTA’s SNAP math. The child support you pay out should be excluded from your income, but sometime DTA workers make mistakes. If you did not verify your legal requirement to pay or the amount you pay, DTA will not exclude the child support you pay from your income and can deny your SNAP case if that means your income is too high to qualify, or give you lower SNAP than you should receive. See **Question 69**.

Self-employment: Double check how much of your income DTA used when calculating your benefit. Sometimes DTA workers erroneously count income that they should exclude because of your business expenses. Ask DTA for help identifying and verifying your business expenses. See **Question 78**.

15 How do I send DTA my documents?

You can send documents to DTA many ways. [106 C.M.R. §361.650](#).

1. **Take a photo and upload your documents** through DTA Connect. The documents go straight into your DTA case record. This is the *fastest way* to get DTA proofs! See **Question 23**.
2. **FAX** documents to DTA at **617-887-8765**.
3. **MAIL** documents to: Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA)
P.O. Box 4406, Taunton, MA 02780-0420.
4. **Hand-deliver** documents to any local DTA office in person. DTA should help you scan them directly into your case and give you back your original documents.

Troubleshooting

Urgent action: If you need DTA to take quick action on your case and you are at a physical DTA office, ask to speak with a DTA worker or manager who can look at the documents. If you need urgent help at a DTA office and do not get it, contact MLRI at info@masslegalservices.org.

Pre-paid envelopes: DTA has *postage-paid envelopes* available at local offices pre-labeled with the DTA mailing address in Taunton. DTA can also mail you these envelopes if you ask for them.

Tracking your documents: It's best to upload your documents directly to your DTA Connect account. *If you mail or fax documents to DTA*, keep track of the date and proof that you sent DTA the documents in case documents get lost. Write *on each page* of the documents your name and your DTA "Agency ID" (if you know it) or the last 4 digits of your SSN.

Faxing proofs: If you are faxing a *double-sided document*, don't forget to fax both sides! And photos or documents printed on gray or color paper do not fax clearly. Send these documents in through DTA Connect.

DTA Online Guide: See **Appendix G** for links to the DTA's BEACON 5 Online Guide for this section.

16 Should DTA help me if I am having a hard time getting proofs?

YES! DTA workers are required to help you get proofs if you tell DTA you are having difficulty. [106 C.M.R. §361.650](#). This includes offering to do a “collateral contact” – a call to a third party – to confirm information in your case. [106 C.M.R. §361.640\(B\)](#).

For example, a DTA worker can:

- Contact an employer for missing wage information.
- Contact another state to confirm the date your SNAP case in that state closed.

If you need DTA to contact a third party for information, DTA will need the third party’s contact information and your permission for DTA to contact them. If you need DTA to do a collateral contact and a worker tells you they can’t do one, ask to speak with a supervisor.

In general, DTA *cannot require you* to agree to a third-party contact if you can verify the information they need some other way. Your privacy is important and must be respected. [106 C.M.R. §360.400](#).

Troubleshooting

If you and DTA cannot get the proofs they need, DTA must accept the *best available evidence* for verifying income. This may end up being your self-declaration. See [106 C.M.R. §363.210\(G\)\(3\)](#). For example:

- Your former employer refuses to give you proof about your pay and will not talk with DTA. DTA should accept your self-declaration.
- You are self-employed but you do not have detailed business records and make so little you do not file taxes.
- You have no other records of your income. DTA should accept your self-declaration.

If you have a disability that makes it hard for you to get proofs or comply with other DTA rules, see **Question 28**.

DTA Online Guide: See **Appendix G** for links to the DTA’s BEACON 5 Online Guide for this section.

17 What if DTA does not accept the proofs I sent them?

DTA should accept *any documents* that reasonably prove your eligibility, unless the information is *questionable*. [106 C.M.R. § 361.640](#). DTA must review the individual circumstances of each household before determining whether information is questionable. And remember, DTA must offer to help you get proof by directly contacting a third party. See **Question 16**.

“Questionable” means the information you gave DTA is *inconsistent* with information you already shared with them or information they know about (e.g. through database checks). [106 C.M.R. §361.620](#).

Example: Sandy applied for SNAP. DTA does a Registry of Motor Vehicles (RMV) check that shows that her ex-husband still registers his car at her address. During her interview she explained that she divorced her husband six months ago and he does not live with her. This information is not questionable and does not contradict what she said during her interview. Sandy has no control over her husband and does not own the car. Sandy should not be required to prove where her ex lives.

Troubleshooting

Cooperation from third parties: If income verification depends on the cooperation of a *third party* – such as getting wage information from an employer – DTA should accept your self-declaration if the employer will not cooperate. This is the “best evidence available” rule under [106 CMR 361.610\(A\)](#). DTA should also offer assistance if you are having trouble getting a document from any other third party. See **Question 16**.

DTA rejects proofs: If DTA does not accept the proofs you give them, the DTA worker must record the reason for rejecting your proofs in your SNAP case - in what are called “case narrative” notes. [106 C.M.R. §361.660](#). You have the right to ask for a copy of the notes in your case, to challenge the worker’s decision, including going to a supervisor or the Ombuds, or to file an appeal.

Proofs you cannot get: If DTA asks you to prove something that you cannot provide or DTA fails to offer you help, you can speak with a Supervisor, call the Ombuds Office or file an appeal.

18 What if DTA questions my income or my living expenses?

Many low-income households have living costs that exceed their income. Households often borrow from family members or friends, run up credit cards, or have unpaid bills that lead to a utility shut off or eviction. None of this is fraudulent activity; it is how most households survive tough times.

If DTA thinks your income is too low to meet your rent or other costs when you apply for SNAP, a DTA worker may call and ask you questions about how you are getting by. *It is very important that you answer DTA's questions truthfully.*

These are common situations that DTA should not consider questionable:

- If you *borrow money* from friends or relatives or borrow against your credit card to pay your expenses, that is not questionable. Loans are not countable income. See **Question 65**.
- *Cash contributions* for living expenses from people who are *not legally obligated* to support you are not questionable. In most cases, these payments should also not count as income in your case. Examples of non-legally responsible people include a grandparent, aunt, uncle, neighbor, or friend who is just helping you out. See **Question 66**.

However, if you get *cash contributions (money) from people who are legally responsible* for your living expenses, such as child support for your children or alimony from a spouse, that is countable income.

DTA should not ask for proofs *unless* the information you provide is deemed “questionable.” See **Question 17**. However, if your shelter costs or other expenses continue to exceed your income at the point of your SNAP *recertification*, DTA will likely ask you for more proof. That can include documents that show you are behind in your rent or utilities, or a statement from people you are borrowing money from.

DTA Online Guide: See **Appendix G** for links to the DTA’s BEACON 5 Online Guide for this section.

19 If I move, how do I report my new address?

It's important to tell DTA if your address changes so you don't miss important notices. Also, if you move and your shelter costs go up you may be eligible for more SNAP. Whenever you report a change of address, DTA should update your address in your case record.

To report a change

- *Call the DTA Assistance Line at 877-382-2363* and follow the prompts to update your address.
- Use the *DTA Connect* profile settings to change your address.
- *Verbally report* the change to a DTA worker on the Assistance Line or at a local DTA office, **or**
- *Upload* information to DTA Connect about your new address, or *mail or fax* it to DTA.

Advocacy Tip: If you update your change of address through the Assistance Line or DTA Connect, DTA will also mail you a form that says you have to send in information about changes in your household. DTA often *incorrectly sends* this form to most SNAP households. You do not have to return this form unless you also get TAFDC or EAEDC.

See **Question 95** to see what changes you are required to report to DTA. If DTA reduces your SNAP when you move, contact MLRI at info@masslegalservices.org.

If your rent amount changes

If your rent has increased, your SNAP may increase if you report the change to DTA. You are not required to report a decrease in your rent until your Recertification. If DTA sends you an Interim Report, you only have to report a decrease in your rent if it went down because you moved. See **Question 95**.

If DTA gets returned mail:

DTA mail is not forwarded by the U.S. Post Office. If you move and DTA does not have your new address, DTA letters will likely get returned to DTA. However, if you left a forwarding address with the U.S. Post office, DTA may use that information to update your address. This does not always happen so it is important to always tell DTA if you have a new mailing address.

If everyone in your SNAP case also gets DTA cash

If you move and everyone in your SNAP case gets TAFDC or EAEDC (or some people get TAFDC and others get SSI), you must tell DTA you're your new address is within 10 days of the move. At the same time you must also tell DTA if your rent changed. See **Question 99**.

DTA may also close your cash case if they get returned mail for you, and/or if you move but do not respond to DTA letters asking you to verify your new address. DTA's policies for handing returned mail in cash assistance cases may not follow the law. If DTA closes your DTA benefits due to returned mail, contact MLRI at info@masslegalservices.org.

DTA Online Guide: See **Appendix G** for links to the DTA's BEACON 5 Online Guide for this section.

20 Can I get my SNAP case reopened if I am denied for lack of proofs?

DTA must give you a full 30 days from the date you applied to get in proofs before your SNAP application is denied. They must send you a timely notice of the proofs needed and options for proofs.

If the proofs DTA needs are still missing by day 30, DTA will send you a "*pending denial notice*." [106 C.M.R. §361.930](#). The SNAP pending denial notice should both list the specific proofs that are still missing **and** give you *another 30 days to bring in these proofs*.

This is also the policy if you got expedited (emergency) SNAP.

If you get the proofs to DTA within this second 30-day period, your case should get *reopened*. You do not need to reapply. [106 C.M.R. §361.940](#). However, your benefits may be prorated. See **Question 21**.

Example: Vicky applied for SNAP on June 1. She sent DTA most of the required verifications by June 29th but was missing wage stubs from one of her part-time jobs. Vicky was sent a denial notice dated June 30th telling her she was denied and listed the proofs missing (wage stubs from her part-time job). Vicky sends DTA the missing wage stubs on July 10. DTA should reopen Vicky’s SNAP application without making her reapply.

DTA Online Guide: See **Appendix G** for links to the DTA’s BEACON 5 Online Guide for this section.

21 What if DTA does not give me SNAP back to the date I applied (“pro-rating”)?

If DTA denies your SNAP benefits for missing proofs, you still have options. If you send DTA the missing proofs *within 30 days* of the denial, DTA should reopen your SNAP application. You do **not** need to reapply.

But DTA may only give you benefits starting with *the date DTA received the required proofs*, not the date you applied for SNAP. This is called “*pro-rating*” your SNAP benefits. This means you may end up with less SNAP benefits for the first month.

If the delay is your fault: DTA will start your benefits *the date they got the proofs* – not the day you applied - if they decide the delay was *your fault*.

Example: Louise applied for SNAP on June 1st but was distracted with a new job and changes with her child’s daycare. She did not send in her pay stubs. DTA sends her a “pending denial” notice on June 30th. Louise sends DTA her paystubs on July 10th. DTA approves her case, but only gave her SNAP starting July 10th. She missed \$300 in retroactive SNAP as a result.

If the delay is DTA’s fault: Your SNAP benefits should **not** be “pro-rated” if the reason for the delay was *not your fault*. [106 C.M.R. §§361.910-361.920](#)

Example: In the above case, you learn that Louise did not have copies of her paystubs and she told DTA that her employer refused to give her a copy and that she needs help. You also learn that when Louise told DTA this, the worker did not offer to contact the employer or otherwise help Louise. Louise had to schedule a

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meeting with HR at a location an hour from her home and drive there to pick up a copy of her paystubs. She gets the proofs to DTA on July 10th. In this situation, the delay in getting DTA the earnings proof was not her fault. DTA should not pro-rate her SNAP benefits. She gets \$300 in SNAP to cover June 1 to July 9.

*A delay is **not** your fault if:*

- DTA did not tell you which proofs they needed or what alternate proofs they can accept,
- You sent DTA proofs but they did not look at them,
- DTA did not tell you that the proofs you sent them were not adequate,
- DTA did not give you enough time to get in proofs, **or**
- DTA did not offer help if you had trouble getting the proofs.

Troubleshooting:

It is important to know that DTA's eligibility computer system (BEACON) is automatically programmed to decide whether the delay was DTA or the applicant's fault *without* diving into all the facts. This "automated" decision may not be correct, especially if the DTA worker failed to offer help.

- If you think DTA was wrong in pro-rating your benefits, ask DTA *how* they determined "fault." If you disagree with the worker's explanation, you can talk to a Supervisor, the DTA Ombuds Office or file an appeal.
- To figure out if your SNAP was "pro-rated," check the EBT amount DTA deposited on your card after your application was approved. You can also see this information on DTA Connect.
- If you send DTA the missing proofs *within 30 days* from when you received a pending denial notice, call the DTA Assistance Line. Ask them to review the documents you sent.
- If you were denied or terminated from SNAP within the last 90 days for missing proofs, you have a right to appeal. In general, the hearing officer should accept any proofs you provide at the hearing under special "de novo" appeal rules and should also look at whether DTA was at fault for not doing its job. See **Question 105**. You should also reapply for benefits (to get back on quickly) even if you file an appeal for retroactive benefits.

DTA Online Guide: See **Appendix G** for links to the DTA's BEACON 5 Online Guide for this section.

22 How do I get information about my SNAP by phone?

Call the **DTA Assistance Line at 1-877-382-2363** to hear automated information about your case.

After you select your language, press 1 to enter your identifying information. You have a choice to enter your SSN, EBT card number, or your DTA Agency ID (found on all DTA notices), plus your year of birth. If you are worried about an abusive partner or unauthorized callers trying to get your personal information, you can ask DTA about a “block” on this service. See **Question 32**.

After you identify yourself

Through *the Assistance Line’s “Interactive Voice Response” or IVR system*, you can hear information about your case and report certain changes, 24 hours/7 days a week. The IVR information you can get depends on the status of your case, but generally includes:

- Your case status and EBT card balance,
- The date your benefits are issued and monthly amount,
- When you are due for a Recertification or Interim Report,
- The date that DTA last received a document from you.

If you need to have an interview or complete paperwork to get or keep benefits, the system should connect you directly to a worker when you call.

Additional services from the DTA Assistance Line

- Request a letter showing the amount of SNAP or cash benefits you receive (a “benefit verification letter”)
- Request and track the mailing of an EBT card
- Request for replacement SNAP if you lost food you bought with SNAP due to a fire, flooding or other disaster. See **Question 93**.
- Update your phone number.

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To speak with a DTA SNAP worker

Call Monday through Friday from 8:15 AM to 4:45 PM and follow the prompts to reach a case manager. The worker will ask for your name, your DTA Agency ID (if you know it), or for other identifying information. This helps the worker confirm who you are and look up your case. Be sure to ask the worker for their name and write it down.

If you are calling because *you need an interview*, the DTA worker should do an interview on the spot and not tell you to call back later.

If there are long waits on the phone, sometimes DTA allows a “*call back*” option, meaning a DTA worker will call you back. Be sure to leave a phone number where DTA can reach you in the next 24-48 hours. If you have an urgent issue and do not have a call back option, or the phone line automatically disconnects due to high call volume, you can always go in person to a DTA office or call the DTA Ombuds, see **Question 31**.

Other DTA staff you can reach through the DTA Assistance Line (follow the phone prompts):

- If you get DTA cash (EAEDC or TAFDC), direct transfer to your assigned case manager’s phone.
- Local office staff if you want to apply for cash.
- Access to Domestic Violence specialists (see **Question 32**).
- Access to Client Assistance Coordinator for a disability accommodation (see **Question 28**).
- Employment staff to learn about education/training programs
- The DTA Hearings Division
- The Overpayment Collections Unit

Troubleshooting:

If you do not have an active or pending case: If you are not in the process of applying, are not getting SNAP, and have not applied or gotten SNAP in the past 90 days, you will not be able to get through by entering your SSN, DTA Agency ID, or EBT card number. In this situation, to reach a worker press 7 when you call (the option for other languages).

Helping agencies: If you are calling on behalf of a client, be sure to send DTA a signed client consent in advance.

Limited cell phone minute: If you are worried about limited cell minutes, ask for a call back or try to use a landline or the phone of a social service agency line or friend with unlimited minutes.

DTA Online Guide: See **Appendix G** for links to the DTA’s BEACON 5 Online Guide for this section.

23 How do I get information about my SNAP case online or with my smartphone?

You can use DTA Connect to share updates with DTA, upload documents, fill out Recertification or Interim Report forms, view notices DTA sends you, and see important information about your case.

You can also use DTACConnect to tell DTA about changes to rent, child or dependent care costs, medical expenses, and more. In many cases, DTA will automatically adjust your SNAP benefit if you report a change on DTACConnect.

To set up a DTA Connect account you need an email address. To learn how to set up an account and see a list of what you can do with DTA Connect, see [DTA's "Help Using DTA Connect" page here: Mass.gov/info-details/help-using-dta-connect.](#)

DTA Connect is the *mobile app* for DTA clients. It is free and can be downloaded for iPhones at the App store or for Androids on Google play.

DTACConnect.com is an *online portal* for DTA clients.

DTA Online Guide: See **Appendix G** for links to the DTA's BEACON 5 Online Guide for this section.

24 Does DTA send text messages or emails?

Yes! In addition to paper notices and information posted on DTA Connect, DTA reaches out to households at certain points via text and/or email with status updates and information on DTA benefits. For example, DTA texts/emails when DTA:

- receives your application
- schedules an interview, or you miss your interview
- is missing proofs
- when they get documents
- approves, denies or closes your SNAP case
- sends you an EBT card
- approves your Interim Report/Recertification

The text messages DTA sends will show up from "382 674."

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You can opt out by replying “opt out” to the text message. General texts about statewide information (e.g. vaccines) are sent in English, Spanish, Portuguese, Chinese, Haitian Creole, and Vietnamese. Case specific texts are sent in English and Spanish. *And you can update your phone number* or add an email address on DTA Connect.

IMPORTANT REMINDER: Never provide your personal information, EBT card number, or Personal Identification Number (PIN) to unidentified callers, or to a link provided via text or email. DTA will never ask for your PIN. Learn more at [Mass.gov/ProtectYourEBT](https://www.mass.gov/ProtectYourEBT).

25 What is the Senior Assistance Office?

The Senior Assistance Office (SAO) is a special DTA office designed for customers age 60 and over to answer questions and process SNAP cases. You can reach them directly by phone without entering any information. If there is a wait time, DTA will give you the option of leaving a message to get a call back from an SAO worker.

Senior Assistance Office Phone: (833) 712-8027

The SAO is specially trained to work on SNAP cases for seniors, including discussing medical expenses. See **Questions 76 and 77**. If you are age 60 or older and you apply for SNAP, the SAO will do your phone interview, answer your questions and process your SNAP case.

26 What if I do not speak English?

If English is not your primary language, DTA must provide you with a bilingual DTA worker or communicate through an interpreter service.

When calling the **DTA Assistance Line**, DTA has a recording with the prompts you can push to get service in your language. The Assistance Line language capacity in English, Spanish, Portuguese, Cantonese, Vietnamese, Haitian Creole, and a separate prompt to push for other languages.

If you select a language other than English, then:

- You should be connected to a bilingual DTA worker,
- The DTA worker should add a bilingual DTA interpreter to do a three-way call with you, **or**
- The DTA worker should use their language line interpreter service.

Under federal law, DTA must provide you with an interpreter if you need one. DTA should not tell you to bring your own interpreter or have a family member interpret for you. See [Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, 42 U.S.C. § 2000d](#).

DTA’s Language Access Materials and Resources:

DTA Online applications at DTAConnect.com are currently in English, Spanish, Portuguese, Haitian Creole, Cantonese, and Vietnamese.

DTA paper applications are available in 13 languages: Spanish, Portuguese, French, Haitian Creole, Chinese, Vietnamese, Khmer, Korean, Russian, Italian, Polish, Arabic and English. You can download and print these applications at Mass.gov/SNAP.

DTA notices and forms (like Recertifications and Interim Reports) are currently only in English and Spanish. DTA also sends a standard flier in other languages that recommends you get the information translated.

DTA Connect and languages: The “preferred language” question on the DTAConnect.com online application currently defaults to English, even for applications filed in languages other than English. As of the writing of this Guide, DTA does not record the language of the application if it differs from the “preferred language” question answer.

Language Access Resources: For more information on the federal and state government’s duties to persons with limited English proficiency (LEP), see lep.gov and justice.gov/crt/executive-order-13166

Contact MLRI at info@masslegalservices.org if DTA contacts an LEP applicant or SNAP recipient in English and/or refuses to provide an interpreter for a client who speaks a language other than English.

DTA Online Guide: See **Appendix G** for links to the DTA’s BEACON 5 Online Guide for this section.

27 What if I am deaf or hard of hearing?

If you are deaf or hard of hearing, DTA must ensure effective communication with you. [106 C.M.R. §360.510](#). This can include if you need interpretation, communication access real time translation (CART), or sign language interpretation to communicate with your case manager. DTA requires staff to be trained on and use auxiliary aids.

All DTA local offices now have Video Remote Interpreting (VRI) services.

VRI is an auxiliary aid to communicate with Deaf and hard of hearing individuals using remote American Sign Language (ASL) interpreter services. If you are Deaf or hard of hearing and would like ASL interpreter service through VRI, go to an office with VRI or contact a Client Assistance Coordinator to set up an appointment in advance.

DTA also has an option to communicate with a Client Assistance Coordinator via Zoom, with an ASL interpreter on the Zoom video.

For a list of DTA's Client Assistance Coordinators (CACs) available in each local office, go to [Mass.gov/info-details/dta-disability-access](https://www.mass.gov/info-details/dta-disability-access)

DTA Online Guide: See **Appendix G** for links to the DTA's BEACON 5 Online Guide for this section.

28 What if a disability makes it hard for me to apply or comply with DTA rules?

The federal Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requires DTA to provide equal access to programs and services to qualified people with disabilities. [42 U.S.C. § 12132](#); see [106 C.M.R. §§360.250, 701.390](#).

Under the ADA you are a person with a qualifying disability if you have a disability that substantially impairs a major life activity, such as learning, understanding, walking, working, breathing, or caring for yourself. Disabilities include physical or mental health impairments, and intellectual disabilities. A temporary health problem like a broken leg may not be a disability under the ADA.

You can be disabled under the ADA even if you are not receiving any benefits on the basis of disability and even if DTA has decided you do not qualify for an exemption because of disability.

If a disability makes it hard for you to do the things DTA asks you to do to get and keep your benefits, you can ask DTA for a **reasonable accommodation**. An accommodation may be appropriate if your disability makes it hard for you to:

- Understand DTA's notices and forms
- Give DTA the verifications it asks for
- Communicate with DTA
- Meet deadlines or a specific rule or requirement

DTA must tailor the accommodation to what you need because of disability. Examples of accommodations can include DTA:

- Giving you extra help to meet a rule
- Giving you extra time to meet a deadline
- Changing a requirement or rule
- Naming someone to get copies of mail DTA sends you, or talk to DTA on your behalf (See **Question 7** on choosing to appoint an Authorized Representative)
- Providing an auxiliary aid (such as an ASL interpreter or large print notices)

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Example 1: Because of your learning disability, you need help understanding DTA notices and help completing the paperwork that DTA asks you to complete. DTA should accommodate you by explaining notices to you and by filling out the forms with you instead of requiring you to fill forms out by yourself.

Example 2: You have a hearing, vision, or other condition that makes it hard for you to communicate. DTA should ask you what kind of help you prefer to communicate with DTA. This help is usually called an auxiliary aid. DTA should try to provide your preferred auxiliary aid or work with you to find an acceptable alternative.

Example 3: Because of your disability, you have a hard time communicating with third parties. You need DTA to contact your health care provider to complete the special ABAWD Medical Report.

Troubleshooting:

When to request: An accommodation can be requested at any time, including after DTA has issued a notice stopping or lowering your benefits.

Scope of accommodations: DTA cannot require you to accept a specific accommodation (such as requiring a helper or authorized representative to act for the client). Instead, DTA should work with you to find an accommodation that you agree to.

Limits to accommodations: DTA is not required to provide an accommodation that fundamentally alters its program rules. For example, DTA cannot waive the federal SNAP law that requires a person with disabilities to receive a disability-based benefit, even if they cannot get SSI, EAEDC, MassHealth as disabled.

Advocacy: Contact a Legal Services advocate if you think DTA should provide an accommodation they have refused to provide.

DTA Online Guide: See **Appendix G** for links to the DTA's BEACON 5 Online Guide that apply to this section.

29 How do I ask DTA for an accommodation?

DTA is required to ask all clients if they have a disability and need an accommodation. A DTA worker is supposed to ask these questions at application and recertification, and also when a client raises disability. You can ask for an accommodation at any time that you need one.

You can ask a DTA case worker to connect you to a Client Assistance Coordinator (CAC) for an accommodation.

- Each DTA local office has a CAC who can help with the accommodation process and other disability related needs. You should explain why the disability means you need the accommodation you are requesting.
- You can also talk to a CAC through a Zoom video conference through your computer at home or at a local DTA office.
- Once you ask for an accommodation, DTA should work with you to figure out what accommodation is appropriate. For example, if you ask for something DTA says they cannot do, instead of denying your request, they should discuss other options with you.

DTA does not usually ask for medical proof that you need the accommodation. If DTA does ask for proof, you can ask the Client Assistance Coordinator to help you get it.

For a list of Client Assistance Coordinators in each local office, go to [Mass.gov/service-details/dta-disability-access](https://www.mass.gov/service-details/dta-disability-access)

30 What are my rights if DTA denies my reasonable accommodation?

It is unusual for DTA to deny a request for reasonable accommodation. If DTA cannot approve the specific accommodation you ask for, they should discuss what they can do for you. If DTA has not approved the accommodation you think you need, though, you have the right to appeal.

DTA should give you a written decision on your request for reasonable accommodation no later than 30 days from your request. If DTA denies your request, or any part of it, you can ask the DTA Central Office Accommodation Appeal Committee to review the decision by filling out the back of the form and sending it to DTA.

The Committee has 10 days to decide on the reconsideration request. You can also file your request directly with the Committee if the local office does not decide on your request in 30 days.

If the DTA Central Office Accommodation Appeal Committee denies your request for accommodation in whole or in part or does not make a decision in 10 days from your request for a decision, you can request a hearing by filling out the back of the form and sending it to the Division of Hearings.

To get help with your request for review and/or your appeal, see **Appendix E** for a list of Legal Services offices. See also **Part 6** on your appeal rights.

DTA Online Guide: See **Appendix G** for links to the DTA's BEACON 5 Online Guide that apply to this section.

31 How can the DTA Ombuds Office help?

DTA has a special DTA Ombuds Office to handle client complaints and concerns. You can call the Ombuds Office any time you need help fixing your SNAP case.

DTA Ombuds Office: 617-348-5354

If you get an answering machine, leave a detailed message with your full name, your DTA Agency ID or SSN, and a phone number where you can be reached. If you do not get help with your case, contact an advocate. You also have the right to appeal any decision made by DTA See **Part 6**.

32 What if I have concerns about my safety and access to my case information?

DTA can take steps to protect you from people who may try to harm you or steal your personal information two ways:

First, if you are concerned about safety or unauthorized persons accessing your information, ask DTA to **put a “block”** on getting case information from DTA Connect or the automated part of the DTA Assistance Line. You can still talk to a DTA worker over the phone or in person at a local DTA office, but you won’t be able to use DTA Connect or the automated Assistance Line. Call DTA at **1-877-382-2363** and ask a worker to put a block on “online services.” You can remove the block at any time by calling DTA.

Second, you can also ask DTA for a **“heightened level of security”** on your case. This means that DTA will put extra privacy protection on your case, which can be very important for victims of domestic violence or violent crimes. To ask about this extra level of security contact a Domestic Violence specialist at DTA.

DTA has Domestic Violence Specialists in each DTA office to assist individuals who are experiencing DV. For information and ways to contact DV specialists at a local DTA office, go to [Mass.gov/info-details/dta-domestic-violence-services](https://www.mass.gov/info-details/dta-domestic-violence-services).

You can also talk to a DV specialist through a Zoom video call from your personal computer/smartphone or at a local DTA office. Tell a DTA worker or the DV specialist if you want a virtual Zoom call.

33 What is a Photo EBT card and who needs to have one?

A small percentage of DTA cash assistance and SNAP households are issued EBT cards with a photo of the head of household. Most cash and SNAP households do not need to have a photo on their EBT card because they are “exempt” from the photo EBT rule.

Photo or no photo, all EBT cardholders and their household members have the *same rights* when using the EBT card to buy food. See additional information here: Masslegalservices.org/photoEBT

NOTE: Photo EBT cards do not include the household’s address nor date of birth. The EBT photo card is *not a substitute* for a government issued ID card for any legal purposes such as boarding an airplane, entering state or federal buildings, purchasing cigarettes or alcohol, or getting medications that require a government issued ID.

There are generally *two* types of DTA EBT cards in Massachusetts:

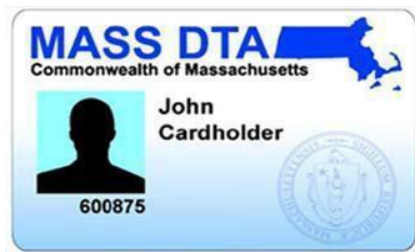
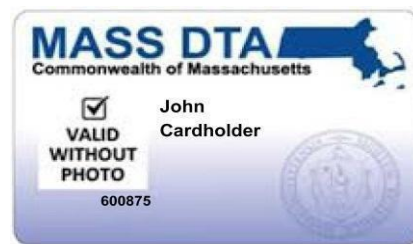


Photo EBT Card for “mandatory” (non-exempt) recipients.



“Valid-without-Photo” issued to exempt recipients.

Part 1 † Application and Proofs

The back of each DTA EBT card states: “**This card may be used by any household member.**” All household members are authorized to use the EBT card at the grocery store. The PIN is your electronic signature.

Here are your **customer rights**:

- Stores must allow all household members to use the card, whether their name or picture is on the EBT card.
- Stores may not set up “SNAP-only” checkout lines nor refuse to let you use self-checkout lines.
- Store clerks must not treat SNAP recipients differently from other shoppers who use credit or debit cards.
- Stores must not ask to see your photo EBT card unless it is the store policy to ask for ID of all debit or credit card customers.

Federal rules protect the right of all authorized members to use the EBT card and to not be discriminated against: [7 C.F.R. §274.7\(A\)](#), [7 C.F.R. §274.8\(b\)\(5\)\(ii\)](#) and [7 §C.F.R..278.2\(b\)](#).

Households EXEMPT from photo EBT card

You do not need a photo EBT card if you are the head of household (the person whose name is on the card) and you are:

- Age 60 or older
- Disabled or blind
- Under age 19
- Homeless
- A victim of domestic violence
- A person with a sincerely held religious belief.

DTA also does not issue photo EBT cards for authorized representatives nor for adults applying on behalf of their eligible dependents but *not applying for themselves*, such as a non-citizen applying on behalf of eligible children.

If you have a photo EBT card but you later became exempt from the photo EBT rules (for example, you turn age 60 or become disabled), you can ask for a “Valid-without-photo” EBT card. DTA will issue you a new EBT card without a photo and not charge you any replacement fee.

DTA Online Guide: See **Appendix G** for links to the DTA’s BEACON 5 Online Guide that apply to this section.