



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Executive Office of Health and Human Services
One Ashburton Place, Room 1109
Boston, Massachusetts 02108

DEVAL L. PATRICK
Governor

TIMOTHY P. MURRAY
Lieutenant Governor

JOHN W. POLANOWICZ
Secretary

Tel: (617) 573-1600
Fax: (617) 573-1891
www.mass.gov/eohhs

Thursday, May 30, 2013

Office of the State Auditor
State House
Room 230
Boston, MA 02133

Dear Auditor Bump,

I am writing to renew our request for the full information used to produce your most recent audit of the Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA).

Of the nearly 875,000 individuals DTA serves, your audit references 1,164 cases where recipients "appear to have been deceased" or were using a deceased individual's Social Security Number to access benefits. One case of an individual fraudulently receiving benefits is one case too many. We will track down anyone who commits fraud and hold them accountable.

But to date, your office has only provided us with 178 cases where individuals were identified as deceased even though their guardians were claiming benefits. After eliminating 13 duplicate entries, DTA researched the remaining 165 cases, and found that 54 of those cases had already been closed, while 79 cases cited as deceased were in fact not deceased. DTA took action on 32 cases as a result of the audit, and only 17 cases were identified as guardians receiving benefits on behalf of deceased individuals – and they have all been closed. DTA staff are ready to conduct a full review once we receive the 1,164 cases from your office.

Your office also said DTA provided \$662,000 in benefits to individuals who were receiving benefits under two separate Social Security Numbers. This is false. Auditors provided 26 cases to review where it appeared one person was receiving benefits under two separate Social Security Numbers. After our review, we found that 18 of those cases were actually two individuals living at the same



home with the same name. Of the remaining cases, two are being investigated by DTA as potential fraud

Regarding the audit's claim that EBT cards were not located in secure locations, over half of these cards were located at the Worcester Transitional Assistance Office, which had suffered a flood in July 2012. The flood significantly impacted the storage space available, and the office was forced to temporarily change storage and security for EBT card inventory. The area in which the cards were held was patrolled by security officials. All EBT cards were kept in a safe and the office abided by proper security protocols with regards to active cards.

In light of the inaccuracies found with the guardianship cases you provided DTA, I am again requesting the complete set of cases cited in your audit. If your team requires assistance in confirming the validity of these cases, DTA stands ready to help with that review. Earlier this year, the Office of the Inspector General released a comprehensive report on DTA and provided the Department with all cases in question for further review. This process helped us work with the inspector general to collaboratively zero in on the cases that required action or closure.

As your audit noted, all but a tiny fraction of the \$1.7 billion in benefits DTA administers each year is used as intended. As part of Interim Commissioner Stacey Monahan's 100 day action plan, DTA is hiring new program integrity staff to investigate fraud, waste and abuse. We are integrating new systems to block prohibited ATM transactions, restrict access to replacement EBT cards and conduct new state and federal data matching.

In the past, when we found flaws in our data, we assumed responsibility and corrected our faults. If the error rate found in the sample of cases you have provided us with reflects the error rate in the larger group of cases, I trust the audit results would be adjusted accordingly.

On behalf of the Patrick-Murray Administration, I want to thank you for your continued focus on program integrity at DTA and across state government. We share your goals of addressing fraud and abuse, and we will take swift action to recoup any improperly obtained funds to taxpayers. We look forward to working together to protect these programs and help our most vulnerable residents meet their basic needs.

Sincerely,


John W. Polanowicz
Secretary, Executive Office of Health and Human Services