

Part 6 Applications and Proofs

98 How do you apply for TAFDC?

Apply online at DTAConnect.com

- The application is very short. You can do it on a smartphone or a computer. After you submit it, DTA will interview you by phone.
- You can get the application in English, Spanish, Portuguese, Chinese, and Vietnamese.
- If you do not already get SNAP, your application counts as a SNAP application also.
- If you are approved, your benefits will start effective the day you submitted the online application or the next business day if you submitted the application after 5:00 PM or on a weekend or holiday. DTA Online Guide (Application (RFA)).

Apply by telephone

- Call your local DTA office. Find the phone number at <https://www.mass.gov/orgs/department-of-transitional-assistance/locations>
- If you are approved, your benefits will start effective the day DTA did the telephone application.. DTA Online Guide (Application (RFA)).
- If you can't get through to your local office, call DTA's Ombuds Unit: 617-348-5354.

Apply in person

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- Go to your local DTA office. <https://www.mass.gov/orgs/department-of-transitional-assistance/locations>
- Be sure to sign a Request for Assistance or use a DTA iPad to apply online the first time you go to the DTA office. You can do this even if there is no worker there to take your application. You have a right to sign a Request for Assistance even if the worker thinks you are not eligible. 106 C.M.R. §§ 702.115, 702.150. If DTA doesn't give you a Request for Assistance form and you are unable to apply online, write a request for TAFDC (and SNAP) on a piece of paper and sign the paper.

Advocacy Reminders:

- ✓ As this Guide goes to press, DTA local offices are not fully open because of the pandemic. If you want to apply in person instead of online or by telephone, DTA should make it possible for you to apply in person.
- ✓ You can also submit an application by fax or mail. DTA Online Guide (Application (RFA)). Say you want to apply for TAFDC and SNAP, put the date, sign our name, and say how to contact you.
- ✓ DTA must provide a bilingual worker or assistant or 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 noncitizen status. There are no magic words you have to say to request an interpreter. A professional interpreter may be provided in-person or by telephone. 106 C.M.R. § 701.360; DTA Online Guide (Guidelines for Providing Interpreter Services); DTA Operations Memos 2013-64 (Dec. 19, 2013), 2013-11 (Mar. 19, 2013); DTA Field Operations Memo 2008-16 (Apr. 1, 2008).
- ✓ You can use your own interpreter if you want, but this can be risky if the person is not a professional interpreter. You cannot use a child to interpret for you except to schedule an appointment. Children under age 12 cannot be asked to interpret for any purpose. 106 C.M.R. § 701.360. DTA Operations Memo 2013-11 (Mar. 19, 2013); DTA Field Operations Memo 2008-16 (Apr. 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. DTA Operations Memo 2013-11 (Mar. 19, 2013).

- ✓ If you have a vision, hearing or communication impairment, DTA should ask you what will help you communicate with DTA. See **Question 24**; DTA Online Guide (Available Auxiliary Aids); DTA Operations Memo 2013-64 (Dec. 19, 2013). If DTA doesn't give you the help you need, ask for the Client Assistance Coordinator. See **Question 25**.
- ✓ You have a right to a private space for discussions with DTA staff. DTA Operations Bulletins 2018-1, 2017-9.
- ✓ DTA is required to tell SNAP applicants about TAFDC benefits if the SNAP applicant is caring for a child and is a parent with little or no income or a non-parent caring for a child regardless of income. The DTA SNAP worker is supposed to explain that you can apply on line or you can have a DTA worker call you to take your application by telephone. DTA Online Guide (Informing Clients about Possible TAFDC and EAEDC benefits). See **Question 11** if the child support rules for TAFDC are a problem for you.
- ✓ DTA sometimes issues a "No Trespass Order" barring certain people from the DTA office. See DTA Online Guide (No Trespass Indicator and Page). This may not be legal. If it is a problem for you, call the Ombuds Office, 617-348-5354, which should make sure that you can apply and get your benefits on time.

99 What proofs do you need?

During the pandemic, DTA limited the written proofs you have to provide. You may be able to make an oral statement that shows you are eligible. DTA Online Guide (Temporary COVID-19 Verification Procedures). For example, you may be able to make an oral statement that your job ended.

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A DTA intake worker will interview you and is supposed to help you with your application. In most cases, the interview will be by telephone. If that is a problem for you, you should insist on an in-person interview.

The rest of this section discusses DTA’s policies about proofs before the pandemic. DTA may reinstate some of these rules after the pandemic.

Your worker will give you a list of what you need to prove. 106 C.M.R. §§ 702.120, 702.125. You may have to do job search and provide proof of job search to get approved for benefits. See **Question 102**.

If you do not have everything, give 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; DTA Online Guide (Methods of Verifications – TAFDC).

Some information is available to DTA in a database that DTA can access. If DTA can get the information from a database, it should not require you to provide the proof. DTA Operations Memo 2013-47 (Sept. 5, 2013). For example, DTA can get wage information for some jobs through a service called “The Work Number.” DTA Online Guide (The Work Number); DTA Operations Memo 2013-33 (July 19, 2013). If the Work Number information is not correct, you can ask DTA to contact your employer.

Things you might be asked to give DTA 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 noncitizens) 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 of who lives in your household,

- proof of your income (for example, pay stubs or a government benefit award letter),
- proof you applied for unemployment compensation (you can apply online and DTA can confirm you applied by checking the unemployment computer system),
- proof you applied for Paid Family and Medical Leave if you stopped working because of your own health condition, to care for a relative, or because of the birth, foster care placement or adoption of a child,
- 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 (a statement from you or another person or 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 Memos 2013-47 (Sept. 5, 2013); 2010-55 (Nov. 23, 2010).

If you need more time to get proofs, you can get an extension. If you have trouble, contact your local legal services program, **Appendix D**, for help..

Advocacy Reminders:

- ✓ If DTA schedules your appointment for a time that is bad for you, you can reschedule.
- ✓ DTA may ask you to provide 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).

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- ✓ 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 or your relationship to your children if you verified this information before. DTA Operations Memo 2010-55 (Nov. 23, 2010).
 - ✓ A single document can sometimes prove more than one eligibility factor. For example, a rent receipt can prove where you live and that you have rent expenses. DTA Operations Memo 2012-8 (Feb. 6, 2012).
 - ✓ DTA will accept documents that are scanned, faxed or photocopied from the original unless the document appears questionable. DTA Operations Memo 2012-33 (July 11, 2012).
 - ✓ DTA should send you a list of any proofs you are missing. DTA should give you time to provide the proofs. Operations Memo 2012-17 (Apr. 25, 2012).
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100 How should you send your proofs?

You can fax or mail your proofs to the Document Processing Center (DPC), or you can bring the proofs to the local DTA office. If you already have a case (open, pending or recently closed) at DTA you can use DTA Connect to send documents from your smartphone or online.

Be sure to write your DTA number or the last four digits of your social security number on every page.

- DTA Connect app if you have a smartphone or tablet and your DTA case is open, pending, or closed for less than 90 days. See **Question 104**. Messages and attachments you send go directly to your case record so your worker can look at them right away.
 - ▶ You can take pictures of documents and upload them directly to your case record (if the document is two-sided, be sure to photograph both sides).
 - ▶ You can update your address, phone number and email.

- DTA Connect.com from a smart phone or computer. **Question 104** explains how to create an account.
- Fax. This is fast and you get a fax receipt. The document goes to a Document Processing Center and may not get posted to your case for a few days. Fax to **617-887-8765**.
 - ▶ If your document is two-sided, be sure to fax both sides.
 - ▶ Keep your fax receipt and the original of the documents.
 - ▶ Social service agencies may let you use their fax machine free of charge.
- Mail. Mail documents to the Document Processing Center at

**Department of Transitional Assistance
P.O. Box 4406
Taunton, MA 02780-0420**

 - ▶ Try to make a copy of the document and mail the copy, not the original.
 - ▶ Keep a record of the date you mailed the document.
 - ▶ You can ask DTA to mail you pre-stamped envelopes addressed to DTA or get them at the local DTA office. DTA Online Guide Transmittal 2021-90 (Nov. 24, 2021).
- Bring proofs to the local DTA office.
 - ▶ DTA staff may ask you to submit documents through DTA Connect on an iPad at the office. Ask a worker if you have questions about the proofs you need or you need help with the iPad.

Advocacy Reminders:

- ✓ Don't send or give originals to DTA.
- ✓ Be sure to write your name, and either your DTA Agency ID number (if you know it) or the last four digits of your social security number

on every page. This is especially important if you are mailing or faxing a document.

- ✓ Do the best you can to keep a record of the date you sent or gave the document to DTA.

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

DTA must decide on your application within 30 days and either pay 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 supply enough proof, you have 30 days from the date of the notice to give DTA more proof.

If you are required to do job search to get benefits and DTA thinks you did not meet the job search requirements by day 30, DTA may grant benefits only for your children by the 30th day and in some cases may deny benefits altogether. See **Question 102. DTA may not be enforcing pre-benefit job search during the pandemic.**

102 Do you have to meet job search requirements before you can get benefits?

DTA may not be enforcing pre-benefit job search during the pandemic.

You may have to meet a job search requirement during the 60 days after you apply. DTA calls this “PATH” or Pathways to Self-Sufficiency. 106 C.M.R. § 702.125(G).

To meet the job search requirement for applicants, you must

- attend a TAFDC group orientation and verify at least two job contacts within 30 days of application, and
- make three additional job contacts within the next 30 days.

You do not have to meet the job search requirements if

- you are exempt from the Work Program or you are a noncitizen who cannot legally work for pay, see **Question 36**,
- you have requested an exemption on the basis of disability (and you have not requested a disability exemption before), see **Question 38**,
- you have another pending request for an exemption, see **Questions 39-43**,
- you have good cause for not doing job search, see **Question 58**,
- you are enrolled in an education or training activity or a substance abuse treatment program, *or*
- you have requested a domestic violence waiver. See **Question 43**;

What is the TAFDC pre-benefit orientation? The pre-benefit orientation provides information about DTA rules, Pathways to Work activities, and support services like child care and transportation.

What happens if you don't meet all the job search requirements? The consequences of not meeting the job search requirement are harsher if DTA says you are "Work Ready." DTA will say you are "Work Ready" if you worked in the past 12 months and either have a high school diploma or equivalency plus English proficiency or have some college or a specialized certificate such as CNA training.

If you are subject to the job search requirement and DTA thinks you are "Work Ready," DTA will

- deny benefits for you and your children if you do not attend a DTA group orientation and verify at least two job contacts during the 30 days after application,
- terminate your benefits 60 days after application if you have not verified three more job contacts.

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In a two-parent case where both parents are subject to the job search requirement, the entire family is ineligible at day 30 if a parent DTA thinks is “Work Ready” does not meet the job search requirements. DTA Online Guide (Work Ready Client Responsibilities).

If you are subject to the job search requirement and DTA does not think you are “Work Ready,” DTA will

- approve benefits for you and your children within 30 days of application only if you attend a TAFDC group orientation and verify at least two job contacts during that time,
- approve benefits by day 30 only for your children if you do not attend the TAFDC group orientation and verify at least two job contacts during the 30 days after application,
- approve ongoing benefits for you and your children 60 days after application only if you have attended the TAFDC group orientation and verified a total of five job contacts,
- terminate benefits for you and pay benefits only for your children 60 days after application if you have not attended the TAFDC group orientation and verified a total of five job contacts.

In a two-parent case, if both parents are subject to the job search requirement, DTA does not think either parent is “work ready,” and one parent does not comply, both parents are ineligible and benefits are paid only for the children. DTA Online Guide (Initial Job Search Client Responsibilities).

Advocacy Reminders:

- ✓ Applicants requesting an exemption because they are disabled, caring for a disabled family member or pregnant should not be subject to the applicant job search requirement.
- ✓ Be sure to tell DTA if you need help because you have difficulty doing job search or writing down job search contacts because of language or other issues.
- ✓ You should not have to borrow money or spend the little money you have to meet the job search requirement. Be sure to tell DTA if you

have difficulty doing job search because you do not have a phone, cannot afford to put minutes on your phone, do not have access to the internet, do not have money for transportation, or do not have child care for your children. See DTA Online Guide (Initial Job Search Client Responsibilities/Work Ready Client Responsibilities).

- ✓ DTA will send you an appointment notice for the TAFDC group orientation on a specific date. If you can't attend that session, you can go to another session (see above for the days and times of the sessions). If there is a good reason you cannot attend a group session when they are scheduled, you can ask DTA to meet with you at a different time. Sometimes DTA will do the orientation over the phone. Be sure to tell DTA if you cannot get to the DTA office for the TAFDC group orientation because you do not have money for transportation or do not have child care for your children. Also be sure to tell DTA if you can't go to the orientation because you are working.
- ✓ If you get to the orientation late, DTA may say you have to come back another day. See DTA Online Guide Transmittal 2016-53 (Sep. 30, 2016; DTA Online Guide (TAFDC Group Orientation Attendance Tracking)). If that is a problem for you, explain the problem and ask if you can join the orientation late and catch up later on what you missed, or ask to meet separately with the DTA worker or Full Engagement Worker.
- ✓ If you were looking for a job before you applied and can give DTA a list of the contacts you made, there is good argument you should not have to prove additional job search to get approved for benefits.
- ✓ DTA sometimes says you don't have to do job search if you are working.
- ✓ There is no job search requirement for SNAP or MassHealth. DTA should approve you for SNAP and MassHealth whether or not you meet DTA's job search requirements.

103 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. DTA is supposed to screen you to determine if you qualify for an immediate needs payment. DTA Operations Memo 2013-35 (July 26, 2013).

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” SNAP (food stamp) benefits. If not, you can get an advance on your TAFDC benefits to pay for food.

MassHealth

DTA can give you a temporary MassHealth card.

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

Talk to your worker, a supervisor, an Assistant Director or even a Director.

- You can call your DTA worker to ask about your case. Your worker’s name and phone number should be on any notices you get from DTA. You can get the worker’s name and get connected to the worker by calling the DTA Assistance Line at 1-877-382-2363.

- If you cannot reach your worker you can call your worker’s supervisor, an Assistant Director, or even the Director (see **Appendix B** to get names and telephone numbers).
- You have a right to a copy of anything that is in your file. 106 C.M.R. § 701.330; DTA Transitions, Nov. 2012, p. 4.

Use your smartphone or tablet -- DTA Connect app.

- DTA Connect is a free mobile app. Download DTA Connect for iPhones and iPads at the App store; download DTA Connect for Androids at Google Play.
- Log-in to the DTA Connect app is easy. You only need your Social Security number and year of birth.
- You can see your case information on the DTA Connect app if your case is active (open), pending, or is closed but was open in the past 12 months. Domestic violence survivors with Heightened Level of Security or who have a block on their DTA online or telephone services, see **Question 106**, cannot see case information on DTA Connect.
- Information you can get using the DTA Connect app includes
 - ▶ case status, monthly benefit amount, next benefit issue date, and EBT card balance,
 - ▶ alerts about appointments or deadlines,
 - ▶ copies of notices sent in the past 12 months,
 - ▶ whether documents you sent in the past 12 months have been processed.
- You can also use the DTA Connect app to send information to DTA or request an EBT card. See **Questions 82 and 100**.

Create a DTA Connect account online. Go to DTAConnect.com on a computer, smartphone or tablet. Create a log in ID. You will need an email address.

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- In addition to the information you can get through the DTA Connect app, with a DTA Connect online account you can get your deposit history. You can also complete a SNAP Interim Report or Recertification.

Interactive Voice Response (IVR) system. You can get some information about your case by calling the IVR. This is an automated system, not a live person. It is available round the clock, every day of the week. To reach the IVR, call the DTA Assistance Line at 1-877-382-2363. You will need to enter your social security number, DTA Agency ID or EBT card number, and your year of birth to get information about your case.

- The IVR can tell you
 - ▶ if your case is open, closed, or denied,
 - ▶ the amount of benefits you will receive and your next payment date, *and*
 - ▶ your EBT card balance..

DTA Ombuds Office. If you need more information or you are not satisfied with the information you get, call the DTA Ombuds Office, 617-348-5354. The Ombuds Office was created to help applicants and recipients fix problems they may have with their DTA case. You can also file a complaint with the Ombuds Office.

Advocacy Reminder:

- ✓ Wait times on DTA's Assistance Line can be a problem, especially for people with limited cell phone minutes. Social service agencies can help by offering use of their phones. If you prefer, you can go to the DTA office.

105 Is your information kept confidential?

DTA must not release information about you without your written permission. 106 C.M.R. § 701.320, 950 C.M.R. Ch. 33; 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.

You may want to block access to DTA Connect and the IVR if you fear someone may try to access your information without your permission. You can do this by checking a box at application or re-evaluation. You can also call ask your worker for the block at any time. DTA Online Guide (Heightened Level of Security Indicator).

Advocacy Reminders:

- ✓ DTA staff are authorized to discuss your case with your advocate if you or your advocate have sent a release to DTA. You or your advocate can fax the release to 617-887-8765 or you can send the release through DTA Connect. The release does not have to be in a specific form. It can be a handwritten note.
- ✓ An advocate may be able to talk to the Ombuds Office, see **Question 116**, or the worker or supervisor without a release by setting up a three-way call with you, DTA and your advocate.
- ✓ DTA does not need your permission to release information about you in connection with a criminal investigation or similar purposes.

106 Can domestic violence survivors and others get extra confidentiality protections?

You can ask DTA for an online services “block.” This will prevent anyone including you from having access to your DTA Connect or automated information on the DTA Assistance Line. See DTA Online Guide (Heightened Level of Security Impact).

For more protection (and more inconvenience), you can ask DTA for a Heightened Level of Security indicator because of domestic violence or any other reason, such as fear of gang violence. DTA Operations Memo 2010-50 (Nov. 1, 2010); DTA Online Guide (Heightened Level of Security Indicator). This will flag your case so that

- DTA will not discuss your case with you 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 the Ombuds Office by phone.
- You will not be able to view your information on DTA Connect.
- DTA will be able to discuss your case with your lawyer or advocate only if you put the name of your lawyer or advocate on the form requesting the Heightened Level of Security.

Advocacy Reminders:

- ✓ DTA modified the Heightened Level of Security restrictions during the pandemic because DTA offices are not fully open. During the pandemic, you can contact the DTA Ombuds for help at 617-348-5354 or call a Domestic Violence Specialist.
- ✓ The Heightened Level of Security restrictions 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 **Questions 28** and **43**, and help you make a safety plan.
- ✓ Massachusetts also has an Address Confidentiality Program to give you a substitute mailing address if you do not want to give DTA your real address. The program will retrieve your mail from the substitute address and forward it to your actual address. To qualify for the program you need to show that disclosure of your address would threaten you or your children's safety and that the abuser does not know your address. See <http://www.sec.state.ma.us/acp/acpidx.htm>; DTA Online Guide (Address (RFA)).

