

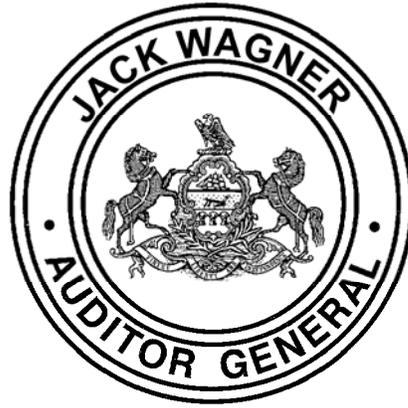
Compliance Audit

of the

Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
Department of Public Welfare
Monroe County Assistance Office

Audit Period

December 13, 2003 to December 2, 2005



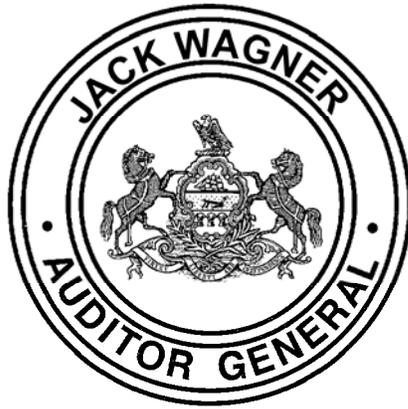
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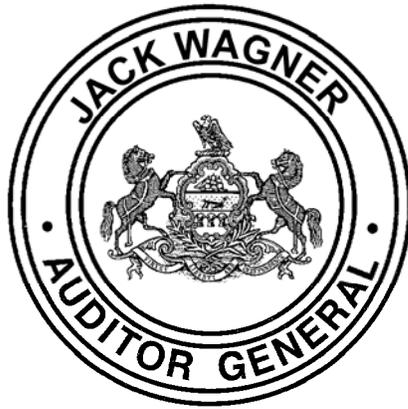
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CONTENTS

	Page
REPORT OF INDEPENDENT AUDITORS ON COMPLIANCE	1
BACKGROUND INFORMATION	4
OBJECTIVES, SCOPE, AND METHODOLOGY	5
FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	
I. Random Eligibility Audit Results	
Finding 1 - CAO personnel failed to follow applicable DPW procedures	9
Finding 2 - CAO lacks procedures for identifying instances where recipients fail to provide proper eligibility information.....	10
Finding 3 - CAO personnel failed to obtain and/or document information required in establishing recipient eligibility.....	11
II. Overpayment Control System	
Finding 4 - Untimely Verification and Referral of Overpayments and Over-Issuances Totaling \$5,144 Occurred as a Result of Procedural Deficiencies in the Overpayment Control System.....	13
AUDIT SUMMARIES	20
GLOSSARY	21
APPENDIX.....	22
AUDIT REPORT DISTRIBUTION LIST	23



Report of Independent Auditors on Compliance

The Honorable Edward G. Rendell
Governor
Commonwealth Of Pennsylvania
Harrisburg, Pennsylvania 17120

Dear Governor Rendell:

The Department of Public Welfare, through its County Assistance Offices, determines eligibility for cash assistance, medical assistance, and food stamp benefits according to established policies and procedures. By the authority of Pennsylvania Code, Title 55, Chapter 109, the Department of the Auditor General audits these County Assistance Offices.

This report contains the results of our audit of the Monroe County Assistance Office covering the period December 13, 2003 to December 2, 2005. Procedures included determining the County Assistance Office's compliance with Department of Public Welfare regulations, governing laws, and administrative rules regarding the disbursement of benefits and the management of the County Assistance Office. We examined, on a test basis, evidence in support of benefits provided, reviewed documentation of County Assistance Office actions and interviewed County Assistance Office personnel and welfare recipients. We also evaluated the Overpayment Control System.

Our report details findings and recommendations that resulted from our eligibility review and our review of the Overpayment Control System.

It should be noted, that as a result of Internal Revenue Code §6103, the Department of the Auditor General no longer has access to Income Eligibility Verification System Exchanges 4 and 5. Because this poses a scope limitation, exceptions may exist beyond those disclosed during our audit. In addition, overpayment amounts stated in this audit report are limited by the Department of Public Welfare's Automated Restitution Referral and Computation system, which does not calculate overpayments beyond a two-year period.

This report is intended for the benefit of the Monroe County Assistance Office management, Department of Public Welfare officials, and Office of Inspector General officials. It is not intended to be and should not be used by anyone other than these specified parties.

Sincerely,

JACK WAGNER
Auditor General

January 11, 2006

**Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
Department of Public Welfare
Monroe County Assistance Office**

BACKGROUND INFORMATION
AND
OBJECTIVES, SCOPE, AND METHODOLOGY

Background Information

Department of Public Welfare

The Department of Public Welfare (DPW) provides money, food stamps, medical assistance and other services to needy recipients in Pennsylvania. DPW administers these services locally through a County Assistance Office (CAO), or in larger counties, through a District Office (DO). We conduct audits in all 67 counties throughout Pennsylvania.

DPW, through its Office of Income Maintenance, is responsible for analyzing, interpreting, developing and maintaining the regulatory policy for all federal and state funded public assistance benefit programs. DPW also provides policy clarifications to guide the application of its regulations.

DPW created the Cash Assistance Handbook (CAH), the Food Stamp Handbook (FSH), and the Medicaid Eligibility Handbook (MEH) to provide guidance to income maintenance caseworkers (caseworkers) at the CAOs and DOs. The handbooks give the caseworker direction on how to use financial and non-financial information to determine an individual's eligibility for cash assistance, food stamp, and medical assistance benefits. The CAH provides guidance on Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) and General Assistance (GA). TANF is a federally-funded program which provides money for dependent children who are needy because financial support is not available from their parents. The payment is made to parents or relatives who care for the children in family homes. GA is a state-funded program which provides money primarily to single individuals and childless couples who do not have enough income to meet their basic needs. The FSH provides guidance for administering the Food Stamp Program which is operated jointly by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, and DPW. The MEH provides guidance for administering the Medical Assistance Program to clients who are eligible for cash assistance, Nonmoney Payment, or Medically Needy Only benefits. DPW makes either direct payment to medical practitioners and vendors of services, medications, and medical supplies, or a capitation payment to contracted managed care organizations.

Objectives, Scope, and Methodology

The Department of the Auditor General (Department), Bureau of Public Assistance Audits conducts audits of CAOs to determine compliance with DPW regulations that pertain to recipient eligibility and the disbursement of cash and food stamps. Additionally, the Bureau reviews the CAO's management policies and their implementation as they relate to the areas we audited. Audit reports providing factual, relevant and useful information are then sent by the Auditor General to the Governor, DPW, the Office of Inspector General (OIG) and certain state legislators.

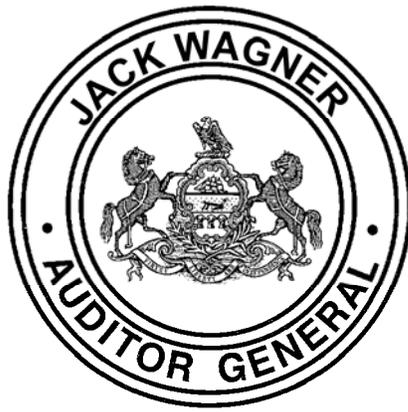
The audit included eligibility reviews of a sample of public assistance cases for the audit period December 13, 2003 to December 2, 2005. We also reviewed the CAO's implementation of procedures for the Overpayment Control System to determine compliance with regulations and policies.

Results from the eligibility reviews of the sample of public assistance cases as well as the procedural reviews apply only to CAO files, records, and systems. However, because DPW establishes the CAO policies and procedures as well as maintains their computer information system, the deficiencies and/or exceptions identified during our audit may need to be corrected by DPW. Therefore, our recommendations are directed to DPW as well as the CAO.

As previously noted, due to Internal Revenue Code §6103, the Department no longer has access to recipient resource information contained on the Income Eligibility Verification System Exchanges 4 and 5. (Exchange 4 contains information from the Social Security Administration earnings reference file and Exchange 5 contains information from the Internal Revenue Service unearned income file.) This poses a scope limitation, as the Department cannot ascertain whether the CAO is reviewing information from these two resources as required by Section 1137 of the Social Security Act. Furthermore, without access the Department is unable to verify that the CAO is using all recipient resource information in determining recipient eligibility and calculating benefit amounts.

Reviews of the public assistance cases and the Overpayment Control System detected instances of noncompliance; therefore, we submitted findings in these areas.

During the June 2, 2006 exit conference, the Department's staff reviewed these findings and recommendations with the CAO representatives. We have included CAO personnel comments, where applicable, in this report.



**Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
Department of Public Welfare
Monroe County Assistance Office**

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Findings and Recommendations

I. Random Eligibility Audit Results

During the course of our audit, we examined 132 out of 822 cases from the Monroe CAO to determine if personnel properly maintained case records in accordance with DPW's policies and procedures, and properly disbursed authorized benefits to eligible recipients in accordance with the rules and regulations established by DPW. We also notified CAO personnel when we discovered ineligible persons receiving assistance.

Title 55 of the Pennsylvania Code provides criteria for determining public assistance eligibility. Chapter 109 of Title 55 provides for the Department to audit the decisions of the CAOs against the rules and regulations established by DPW.

Our audit included an examination of the case record material as it relates to the proper interpretation and application of the rules and regulations of DPW pertaining to the recipient's eligibility for public assistance. The criteria for our review included, but was not limited to, DPW's:

- Cash Assistance Handbook (CAH);
- Food Stamp Handbook (FSH);
- Supplemental Handbook (SH);
- Income Eligibility Verification System (IEVS) Manual;
- Automated Restitution Referral and Computation (ARRC) Manual;
- Client Information System (CIS) Manual; and
- Operations Memorandum (OPS) & Policy Clarifications.

Our audit disclosed 37 exceptions in 28 of the 132 cases examined. The most significant exceptions are discussed in the following findings:

- CAO personnel failed to follow applicable DPW procedures (refer to Finding No. 1);
- CAO lacks procedures for identifying instances where recipients fail to provide proper eligibility information (refer to Finding No. 2); and
- CAO personnel failed to obtain and/or document information required in establishing recipient eligibility (refer to Finding No. 3).

Findings and Recommendations

Finding 1 - CAO personnel failed to follow applicable DPW procedures

Our audit revealed that exceptions occurred because CAO personnel failed to follow applicable DPW procedures. The most notable exceptions occurred as a result of the CAO personnel's failure to properly utilize the ARRC system.

The ARRC system is a data base system designed to track potential overpayments from the point of discovery through the verification and calculation process to the automated transfer of the established claim to OIG.

During our audit, we found that CAO personnel failed to compute overpayments timely on ARRC. When verification of an overpayment was received by the CAO, overpayments were not computed on ARRC within the required 60 days, resulting in five exceptions totaling \$1,609 in overpayments.

Chapter 910 of the SH and the ARRC Manual both provide guidelines for computing overpayments correctly and timely.

Recommendations

The CAO should instruct personnel to timely compute overpayments. All verified overpayments should be processed within 60 days of receipt of verification. The CAO should also implement internal control procedures to ensure the proper completion of the recommended tasks.

CAO Management Response

In a June 15, 2006 letter to Department personnel, the Monroe CAO Executive Director provided the following response:

“During the audit period, a staff meeting was held during which caseworkers were reminded to process overpayments within the established guidelines. The ARRC supervisor completed a desk reference which addressed the established timelines and training was completed. The pending ARRC lists continue to be reviewed monthly by the ARRC supervisor and office manager. It should be noted that a great majority of overpayments are completed timely.”

Findings and Recommendations

Finding 2 - CAO lacks procedures for identifying instances where recipients fail to provide proper eligibility information

During our audit, we disclosed that the CAO lacks procedures for identifying instances where recipients failed to provide proper eligibility information. This situation presents the possibility that welfare recipients may receive benefits to which they are not entitled. Specifically, recipients failed to appear at the CAO for scheduled interviews with auditors. The CAO then contacted these recipients who did not respond. Recipients may have moved and failed to report this to the CAO. Failure to provide proper information to the CAO resulted in six exceptions and case closures totaling \$1,124. All exceptions resulted in the CAO closing the recipients' benefits.

Lack of CAO procedures for identifying instances when recipients fail to provide information may continue to result in benefits being improperly disbursed.

Recommendation

The CAO should consider regularly reviewing a sample of cases to help identify instances where recipients are providing improper information. This would help to eliminate at least some improper disbursement of benefits.

CAO Management Response

In a June 15, 2006 letter to Department personnel, the Monroe CAO Executive Director provided the following response:

“This finding specifically relates to three cases with both cash assistance and food stamps where the clients moved from the area and whose cases were subsequently closed. Due to changes in the semiannual reporting requirements in August of 2005, all TANF clients were enrolled in SAR (OPS050706). This change contributed to the confusion about the time frames during which changes need to be reported to the CAO by the client. As clients become more familiar with semiannual reporting requirements as opposed to the ten day reporting requirements these types of errors should decrease. Additionally, supervisors review a sampling of cases each month as part of the Comprehensive Supervisory Review and Targeted Supervisory Review process to insure that the correct verification requirements are being met.”

Findings and Recommendations

Finding 3 - CAO personnel failed to obtain and/or document information required in establishing recipient eligibility

During our audit, the verification for establishing recipient eligibility was absent from examined case records. For nine exceptions, case records and/or CIS information lacked detailed documentation of client and CAO actions. Documentation was missing regarding signatures and proof of identification on application forms. Finally, the social security numbers of Legally Responsible Relatives (LRRs) were missing or incorrect in three case records, or known to the CAO, but not entered into the IEVS.

The CAH, FSH, and IEVS Manual, Chapter 1, establish the procedures to be followed when obtaining and documenting recipient eligibility.

The above exceptions occurred because caseworkers failed to review application forms with clients. Also, weak internal controls exist for interviewing applicants and entering LRRs social security numbers into IEVS at application and reapplication. Failure to maintain current and accurate information contributed to poor case management.

Recommendations

The CAO should stress to caseworkers the importance of following established DPW policies and procedures for maintaining case records as designated in the above cited handbooks. The CAO should also stress the need to obtain proof of identification at application and have applicants sign and date the application forms.

CAO Management Response

In a June 15, 2006 letter to Department personnel, the Monroe CAO Executive Director provided the following response:

“Monroe CAO management began addressing these issues during the audit. Internal reviews have been done to ensure that signatures and client identification are secured at application. We now require that all client information received, whether by fax, mail or in person, is date stamped. Caseworkers are reminded to review LRR information at application and at reapplication. We acknowledge that there were three errors in this particular area but this represents a significant drop from previous AG audits.”

Findings and Recommendations

Status of Prior Audit Finding

Overpayments and Other Exceptions Totaling \$10,681 Occurred as a Result of Recipients Withholding Information and Case Record Maintenance Exceptions

Our current audit covering the period December 13, 2003 to December 2, 2005 disclosed that inadequate/incorrect recipient information and case record management exceptions continue to occur at the Monroe CAO; therefore, a repeat finding is warranted. Refer to Findings 1, 2 and 3 located on pages 9 through 11 for additional discussion on these issues.

Findings and Recommendations

II. Overpayment Control System

Finding 4 - Untimely Verification and Referral of Overpayments and Over-Issuances Totaling \$5,144 Occurred as a Result of Procedural Deficiencies in the Overpayment Control System

We reviewed the Monroe CAO Overpayment Control System to determine if CAO personnel properly investigated suspected overpayments, controlled and documented investigations, and referred verified overpayments timely. From 796 entries listed as pending, completed, or overpayment on the ARRC Daily Caseload Detail Report dated October 11, 2005, we selected 50 cases.

Our review disclosed the following exceptions:

- **In two cases, CAO personnel completed the calculation of the overpayment, but failed to complete the referral within 60 days.**

The SH, Section 910.51 provides that the CAO will refer all overpayments to the OIG within 60 days from the date the CAO verifies the overpayment occurred.

The section further provides that in order to recover through recoupment, the OIG must notify the client of the cash overpayment claim within six months of the date the CAO first identified the overpayment, or within one year of the date the CAO first identified the overpayment, as long as the delay in obtaining verification was caused by an outside source.

Although CAO personnel completed the calculation of the overpayment, deficiencies occurred because no controls were in place to refer overpayments within the required timeframes.

Failure to complete the Overpayment Referral Data Input form and forward it to the OIG within the required 60 days delayed and could have jeopardized the recovery of over-issuances of \$4,169.

- **In three cases, CAO personnel failed to complete the referral data preventing timely notification to OIG.**

The SH provides that the CAO will refer all verified overpayments to the OIG.

Findings and Recommendations

The section further provides that in order to recover through recoupment, the OIG must notify the client of the cash overpayment claim within six months of the date the CAO first identified the overpayment, or within one year of the date the CAO first identified the overpayment, as long as the delay in obtaining verification was caused by an outside source.

These exceptions occurred because the CAO staff did not have controls in place to refer overpayments within the required timeframes. Failure to complete the Overpayment Referral Data Input form and forward it to the OIG delayed and jeopardized the recovery of overpayments of \$752 and over-issuances of \$223.

Recommendations

The CAO should instruct personnel to compute all verified overpayments within 60 days of receipt of that verification. The CAO should also review internal control procedures for tracking wage information, computing verified overpayments, and reviewing computed overpayments.

CAO Management Response

In a June 15, 2006 letter to Department personnel, the Monroe CAO Executive Director provided the following response:

“On 10/28/04, the CAOs were notified that ARRC was not computing FS overpayments correctly (D1870) and were instructed to complete food stamp overpayments manually. This more time consuming manual process continued through 5/16/05 (D2099) and resulted in processing delays for some of the overpayments filed during this time. Staff has been reminded of their responsibilities to file and complete overpayments within the required times frames by training and the desk reference.”

- **In 14 cases, CAO personnel failed to update the ARRC system.**

Exceptions occurred because CAO personnel failed to update a pending ARRC disposition code to “N” when the CAO received case verification indicating that an overpayment did not occur. Exceptions also occurred because caseworkers failed to enter verified information into the ARRC system, preventing the ARRC system from

Findings and Recommendations

updating the disposition codes. Also, caseworker supervisors may have failed to use available reports and ARRC file information.

Failure change the disposition code in the ARRC system after verification was determined and failure to enter verified information into the ARRC system, which prevented the ARRC system from properly coding overpayments, resulted in inaccurate reports and impeded determining the number and status of overpayment investigations.

The ARRC Manual provides guidelines for updating disposition codes in the ARRC system after verification.

Recommendations

The CAO should require personnel to update the disposition codes in the ARRC system when verification is received to determine whether or not an overpayment exists. Also, the CAO should enter verified information into the ARRC system, to allow the ARRC system to update the disposition codes. Additionally, CAO management should require their staff to utilize ARRC reports to monitor the status of overpayments.

CAO Management Response

In a June 15, 2006 letter to Department personnel, the Monroe CAO Executive Director provided the following response:

“The problem with the ‘N’ code not being entered timely is in the process of being corrected.”

- **In 12 cases, CAO personnel failed to contact non-responding employers.**

These exceptions occurred when caseworkers failed to contact employers or employers failed to respond to initial requests for wage verification within 45 days of the initial request. Caseworkers failed to timely contact employers within ten days to verify employer addresses.

Failure to contact employers timely may have delayed procedures to recover incorrectly disbursed benefits. Also, failure to contact employers hindered procedures to send a second PA78 request.

Findings and Recommendations

These exceptions occurred because caseworkers failed to adhere to the overpayment investigation required timeframes. Additionally, CAO supervisors failed to review the “Non-Responding Employer” list. Caseworkers did not contact non-responding employers due to a lack of procedural controls.

Chapter 910 of the SH and the ARRC Manual provide procedures and guidelines for contacting non-responding employers.

Recommendations

The CAO should instruct personnel to contact employers within 10 work days after reviewing the “Non-responding Employer” list. Caseworkers should also verify employer addresses.

CAO Management Response

In a June 15, 2006 letter to Department personnel, the Monroe CAO Executive Director provided the following response:

“The Monroe CAO has also established procedural controls to ensure that the non-responding employers are contacted and addresses verified.”

- **In 10 cases, CAO personnel failed to ensure a second Request for Employment Information was sent timely.**

Exceptions occurred because CAO personnel failed to ensure a second PA78 was sent timely. Potential overpayments discovered through IEVS result in an automatic generation of a PA78. However, if no response is received after the first PA78 is sent, the CAO is required to manually request income verification after contacting the employer.

Chapter 910 of the SH and the ARRC Manual provide procedures and guidelines for contacting non-responding employers.

These exceptions occurred due to weak internal control procedures for overpayment investigations. Exceptions may also have occurred as a result of the previous finding. The second PA78 request was not sent as a result of personnel failing to contact non-responding employers.

Findings and Recommendations

Recommendations

The caseworkers should send second PA78 requests for income verification to the employer as required by DPW policies and procedures. Also, CAO personnel should review reports generated for follow-up and address verification within the required timeframes. Finally, CAO personnel should verify employer addresses and make any corrections before sending a second request.

CAO Management Response

In a June 15, 2006 letter to Department personnel, the Monroe CAO Executive Director provided the following response:

“Procedural controls are also in place to ensure that the second PA78 is sent timely.”

- **In nine cases, CAO personnel failed to document contacting the non-responding employer in the case record.**

ARRC Daily status 500 provides the requirements for documenting non-responding employers in case records.

These exceptions were the result of weak internal controls and procedures for investigating non-responding employers.

Failure to complete required case record information impeded investigation of potential overpayments.

Recommendations

The CAO should require personnel to obtain a correct address when an overpayment verification request is returned due to an incorrect address, verify that employer address in IEVS is correct and document in the case record the date the overpayment was identified as well as the date and response to third party verification requests.

Findings and Recommendations

CAO Management Response

In a June 15, 2006 letter to Department personnel, the Monroe CAO Executive Director provided the following response:

“As noted previously, procedural controls are in place to ensure that a correct address is obtained and response to third party verification documented in the case record. All narratives are now entered online immediately when any action is taken on a case.”

Status of Prior Audit Observation

An Understated Food Stamp Totaling \$185 Occurred as a Result of Procedural Deficiencies in the Overpayment Control System

Our current audit covering the period December 13, 2003 to December 2, 2005 disclosed that procedural deficiencies continue to exist at the Monroe CAO in the execution of the Overpayment Control System; therefore, a finding is warranted. Refer to the bullets in Finding 4 on pages 13 through 17 for additional discussion on these issues.

**Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
Department of Public Welfare
Monroe County Assistance Office**

**AUDIT SUMMARIES
GLOSSARY
AND
APPENDIX**

Audit Summaries

Random Eligibility Audit Results

	Cases at CAO	Cases Reviewed	Cases with Errors
<u>Current</u>	822	132	28
<u>Prior</u>	649	269	40

Other Results

<u>PROGRAM</u>	<u>No. of Cases</u>	<u>Monetary Effect</u>
Overpayment Control System:		
CAO personnel failed to make referrals timely.	2	\$4,169
CAO personnel failed to complete referrals data timely.	3	975
CAO personnel failed to update the ARRC system.	14	0
CAO personnel failed to contact non-responding employer timely.	12	0
CAO personnel failed to request employment information timely.	10	0
CAO personnel failed to document contacting non-responding employers.	9	0
Total:	<u>50</u>	<u>\$5,144</u>

Glossary

Administrative Underpayment:

Cash and/or food stamp benefits to which recipients were entitled but did not receive because of County Assistance Office error.

Case Closure:

Equal to one month of cash and/or food stamp benefits that were not paid/issued to recipients as a result of the Department's audit establishing recipient ineligibility.

Client Information System:

The on-line data base which contains the information necessary to authorize cash, Medicaid, and food stamps.

Closed Case:

A case that is no longer being issued welfare benefits.

Countable Income:

Income that is not exempt or excluded from benefit determination.

Legally Responsible Relative:

A spouse or the biological or adoptive parent of a TANF dependent child, a TANF minor parent, or a GA unemancipated minor child under age 19 or a GA minor parent. This term does not include putative fathers.

Reimbursement:

Money owed by recipients for cash benefits they received while waiting for a lump sum payment from sources such as a lawsuit, insurance, Supplemental Security Income, etc.

Supplemental Security Income (SSI):

A federal program funded by general tax revenues and administered by the Social Security Administration. Provides cash to aged, blind, and disabled persons who have little or no income to meet basic needs for food, clothing, and shelter. Received in lieu of cash grants from Public Welfare; however, SSI recipients can qualify for food stamps and medicare. Both children and adults can qualify for SSI.

Support Pass-Through:

An increase in the recipient's cash benefits which occurs when the Domestic Relations Office forwards child support money for recipients to the Department of Public Welfare. Because food stamp benefits are based on a recipient's income, this increase in cash benefits may result in a concurrent, but not equal, decrease in the recipient's food stamps.

Appendix

Abbreviations Used in Report

AG	Department of the Auditor General
ARRC	Automated Restitution Referral and Computation System
CAH	Cash Assistance Handbook
CAO	County Assistance Office
CIS	Client Information System
DO	District Office
DPW	Department of Public Welfare
FS	Food Stamps
FSH	Food Stamp Handbook
GA	General Assistance
IEVS	Income Eligibility Verification System
LRR	Legally Responsible Relative
MEH	Medicaid Eligibility Handbook
OIG	Office of Inspector General
OPS	Operations Memorandum
SAR	Semi-Annual Reporting
SH	Supplemental Handbook
SSI	Supplemental Security Income
TANF	Temporary Assistance to Needy Families

Audit Report Distribution List

This report was originally distributed to the following:

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This report is a matter of public record. Copies of this report may be obtained from the Pennsylvania Department of the Auditor General, Office of Communications, 318 Finance Building, Harrisburg, PA 17120. If you have any questions regarding this report or any other matter, you may contact the Department by accessing our website at www.auditorgen.state.pa.us.