



Commonwealth of Massachusetts Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)

# Telephone Interviewing - Making It Work

California Food Policy Advocates  
11<sup>th</sup> Annual Food Stamp Forum  
Sacramento, CA  
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# Today's Agenda

- The Massachusetts Experience
- Implementation Considerations





## Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA)

- State Administered
- Central Office, 26 local full-service offices/centralized SSI office
- 3 satellite offices and 11 SNAP centers
- Current caseload - over 389,000 households, over 720,000 individuals (as of November 2009)





# Problem

- Participation Rate State Rankings
  - 1999 - third to last
  - 2000 - second to last
  - 2001 - LAST
  - 2002 - LAST
  - 2003 - LAST





## Solution???

- July 2002 - instructions to broadly apply the hardship waiver for interviews
- November 2004 - FNS grants waiver of face-to-face interview for all recertifications



# Impact of Implementation

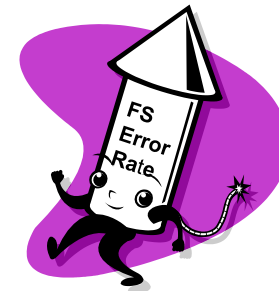
- Technical Problems



- Case Manager Resistance High



- Error Rate Skyrocketed





## Issue

- Technical - headsets, caller ID, blocked calls, long distance area codes
- Operational barriers
- Training

## Solution

- Headsets, phone upgrades
- Schedule adjustments, new office configurations
- Trained listening skills, job aids, part of training curriculum





## Issue

- Cultural resistance, fear of errors
- Other supports missing

## Solution

- Emphasis on customer service and participation rather than errors
- Revised SNAP application, pre-filled recertification forms, system enhancements, initiatives to streamline application processing



# Successes

- More successful first contact
- Shorter interview time
- Improved customer service
- Increased participation
- No impact on error rate





# Remaining Challenges

- Telephone systems
- Call centers
- Technical supports (e.g., document imaging)
- Eligibility worker buy-in



# No Interview Waiver

(November 2009)

- Recertification only
- All HH members elderly or disabled with no earned income
- Interview must be done if client requests one
- Completed recertification form and all mandatory verifications received timely
- Household continues to be eligible



## More Information

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