



THE COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS
EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF LABOR AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT
DEPARTMENT OF UNEMPLOYMENT ASSISTANCE

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DUA ADVISORY COUNCIL MEETING

Thursday, April 17, 2025
Meeting Minutes

Council Attendees: Richard Marlin, John Drinkwater, Sam Larson, Chris Carlozzi, Renee Harper
EOLWD/DWD/DUA/Public Attendees: Katie Dishnica, David Gold, Richard Jeffers, Corey Mescon, Ashley Thompson, Lisa Hemmerle, Josh Cutler, John Saulnier, Jeannie Pena, Jason Salgado, Mark Costello, Laura Santiago, Paolo Franzese, Rena Kottcamp, Wendy Filosi, Rory McAnaney

A virtual meeting was held via Zoom.

A motion was proposed to approve the February 2025 meeting minutes.

- Motion was seconded.
- Vote on Motion – all in favor to approve.

UI Trust Fund Update

Lisa Hemmerle, Director of Economic Research, provided the UI Trust Fund report. The UI trust fund report is for April and the quarterly report.

- 1st quarter 2025 employer contributions through March were \$100M, with a year-end estimated balance of \$1.63B.
- The 1st quarter benefits paid through March 31, 2025, were approximately \$655M. The year-end balance is estimated to be \$2.43B, with the balance of the trust fund estimated to be \$1.66B on a cash basis.
- The model was updated but still at Schedule D for 2025, and Schedule E for 2026.

<https://mass.gov/uitrustfund>

Questions/Discussion

Question Chris Carlozzi: I noticed in the past couple reports that DOL keeps track of improper payment. Our percentage rate is 22%. Is that tracked as well in these annual reports on the state level?

Answer by Katie Dishnica: We do track it however I don't know if it is tracked for what Lisa is reporting on. I did get your request for information and hope to have it for the next meeting.

Chris Carlozzi: I was curious since DOL targets under 10% for improper payments. We seem to be higher than that. The inspector general released a report looking at recovery of overpayments and surveyed all the other states as well, but MA did not respond. Was there a reason we did not respond to the survey?

Answer by Katie Dishnica: I believe REGIS was the company that conducted the survey. I found that we responded to everything that came from them. This specific survey on recovery I don't have a record of. Only sixteen states responded. I don't know why we didn't respond and I'm curious to know why so many other states didn't either. I don't have a record of us not responding. We can talk more about the improper payments at the next meeting.

Presentation by Rick Jeffers, Executive Sponsor of EMT

The EMT project kicked off in July of 2022. The first release was for employers in September of 2023. The second release for claimants is in May of 2025. The EMT system has had updates to make it more user friendly and accessible to employers and claimants. For example, a person who is visually impaired can still navigate the system using a screen reader. A full review and rewrite of DUA correspondence was done to improve clarity and understanding. Online portals, correspondence, claim applications, and requests for additional information have been rewritten in plain language to reduce unnecessary questions, eliminate confusing jargon, and streamline customer interactions. The online portal will support English and Spanish to improve customer access. Claimant correspondence will be translated into twelve of the most common spoken languages in the Commonwealth. The new system will also be mobile-friendly.

DUA has done extensive testing of the new system. During the first phase of testing, thirty-nine DUA business testers were brought in to confirm functionality. Over 10,660 scenarios were tested, passed, and defects resolved. End-to-end testing was done in the second phase to make sure the system functions the way it should from start to finish, and letters and reports are generated correctly. Performance testing was done in the third phase. This involved stress testing the system to confirm capacity and to test high volumes of critical functions. Security and penetration testing was then conducted. This involved preventative vulnerability testing and tests user security roles and permissions.

When the new online portal goes live in May, UI Online will be fully decommissioned. Employers and TPAs will use the new system for all self-service functions. Employers and

TPAs will use the Commonwealth's sign on solution MyMassGov and multi factor authentication or MFA to access their accounts. Employers can respond to Fact-Finding online. All employers the claimant worked for in the last year will be notified when a new claim is filed.

The new system will now be available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. Claimants will be able to file a claim, check the status of their claim, correct or report wages, track and report work searches, respond to eligibility questions, apply for the Training Opportunities program, and file an appeal and submit appeal related documents. A customized chatbot will be able to answer questions. If a claimant has the UI Online website "bookmarked" or "added as a favorite", they will automatically be redirected to the new website at go-live.

DUA has launched a new website within mass.gov to communicate changes and information to claimants and employers. Short videos of common tasks will be available on the site in English and Spanish. DUA has held meetings and given demonstrations to employers and TPAs. Claimants have been sent email communication about the new system and DUA has partnered with MassHire and provided additional how-to guides. There will be more to come before the new system goes live. Claimants will have resources for any questions.

Discussion on open items from the previous meeting

DUA is responsible for repaying the settlement installment payments of \$2.034B, and the Covid assessment collections. As of January 2025, DUA collected \$1.396B in assessments. The total repayment is just over \$3B with an estimate of \$1.6B to \$1.8B due, with just over eight years remaining for the recovery assessment. The settlement installment payments are being paid out of the UI Trust Fund. Annual interest payments which amount to \$70M in the first year are not paid out of the UI Trust Fund. A&F will decide how to repay that.

Question by Chris Carlozzi: Future years as well are not coming out of the UI Trust Fund?

Answer by Katie Dishnica: It is not. I have a chart with the full schedule.

Question by Chris Carlozzi: \$400M or so over ten years?

Answer by Katie Dishnica: Yes, that's correct

Executive Update

Katie Dishnica, Director of DUA, provided an executive update.

The first update is regarding the Board of Review. The Board of Review positions should be posted by Monday, April 21st, at the latest and then we can start the subcommittee.

The next update is regarding service levels. One of the ways claimants can get their questions answered is by calling our call center. It was previously discussed that we struggled with service levels. DUA has hired one hundred forty temporary vendor staff for the implementation of EMT. On February 20th, DUA entered into an emergency contract. DUA will be extending this contract for an additional six months to offer additional support for go live of EMT. This brings DUA to one hundred ninety call center representatives. The waiting time for callers has improved and ranges from a thirty-second wait time to up to seven minutes when representatives are off the phones doing training for EMT. DUA has also seen an improvement to the queue full disconnects, which is when the queue is at full capacity and callers are unable to speak to a representative. In January during the peak season, DUA lost about 10,000 calls per day. Currently, DUA loses between five hundred and six hundred calls per day. In comparison, in February when the new contract started, there were 6,100 disconnected calls per day and in March, 646 disconnected calls per day. DUA is continuing to improve our service levels.

The next update is regarding personnel changes. During the pandemic DUA hired hundreds of extra staff, or limited duration full-time employees. As of March 2025, those employees have been converted to DUA full-time employees. Training during the pandemic was shortened. Recently, DUA has been training those employees on a more in-depth level to better prepare them for their roles. In addition, DUA has increased the number of days in the office for employees hired after 2020 and focused on coaching and mentoring employees. The increase in representatives on the phones has allowed DUA to remove adjusters who were previously answering phones due to the disconnected calls and allow them to work on adjudicating issues. This has helped reduce the adjudication backlog.

Discussion/Questions

Question by Rich Marlin: The week of May 4th people are going to get paid on Thursday instead of Tuesday? I'm assuming you have blanketed people with notifications.

Answer by Katie Dishnica: DUA has a communications plan in place that includes messages in the system, banners, and get ready emails to make them aware of the delay. This is similar to when there is a bank holiday.

Question by Chris Carlozzi: Do you keep data or records of the percentage of attendance-based cases that are adjudicated?

Answer by Katie Dishnica: Let me get those numbers for you. To be clear, they were terminated due to not showing up for work. Are you interested in the number of approvals?

Chris Carlozzi: Yes.

Katie Dishnica: The two open items I have for the next meeting are a deep dive of the improper payments and the data regarding approvals of discharge issues due to attendance. **Next meeting May 15, 2025, 9:30am. Please let Katie or Sara know if you are unable to attend.**