



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

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KATIE DISHNICA
DIRECTOR

DUA ADVISORY COUNCIL MEETING

Thursday, August 22, 2024

Meeting Minutes

Council Attendees: Richard Marlin, John Drinkwater, Sam Larson, Grace Lee, Renee Harper, Chris Carlozzi

EOLWD/DWD/DUA/Public Attendees: Katie Dishnica, John Saulnier, Jeannie Pena, Jason Salgado, Rena Kottcamp, Emma Hornsby, Wendy Filosi, Houda Amoakuh, Paul Fitzgerald, Mark Costello, Laura Santiago, Lisa Hemmerle, Josh Cutler, John Cronin

A virtual meeting was held via Zoom.

A motion was proposed to approve the July 2024 meeting minutes.

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

Executive Update

Katie Dishnica, Director of DUA, provided the Executive Update.

The first update is regarding identity verifications. DUA started a backlog reduction plan at the end of May. A claim is considered to be backlogged if it is over twenty-one days old and issues have not been resolved. When DUA started this project, we had almost three thousand adjudication level identity verifications that needed to be processed. We currently have seventy-four today. We are making progress with that plan since it was implemented. As of May 23rd, DUA has processed 79,352 verification issues and 16,800 of those required staff investigation. Our other issue reduction efforts are technical updates, such as updating business rules for our data analytics. We've had a lot of success in that area. We've been leveraging a Department of Revenue Bank matching system and have made progress in that area. DUA continues to adjust as needed, but the backlog numbers for the adjudication level are better now. Unfortunately, when you tackle a backlog issue in one area, it affects other areas. Right now, some of the pressure goes to hearings, and then it ends up with Board of Review, and then potentially our legal department feels it.

DUA does have a plan in place to address issues within the hearings department. A live adjudication component was launched as part of the backlog reduction plan. If a claimant has an identity verification issue or general issue on their claim because they didn't go to login.gov or USPS, or they are running into issues with responding to DUA, they can call our call center. The agent will review the case, make sure that we have all the documents needed, and then it will be passed on to an adjuster who will adjudicate the case in real time. So, the claimant has the option of being able to have the issue addressed right on their call. DUA started that process as of July 29th.

Another area that DUA is focusing on in the live adjudication phone queue is no response surveys. Claimants who call in are being surveyed to get a better understanding as to why they didn't verify through login.gov or USPS. Some of this may be attributed to an extra click at the end of the identity verification process that says, yes, send my information over to DUA that they could be missing. The point of this survey is to get a better understanding of the user experience, to see if there's any changes that can be made to our system, or work with DOL to have changes made in login.gov to make it a little bit more user-friendly and get responses from claimants. DUA would also like to launch the survey in our Reemployment Center. The survey questions will need to be updated to account for an in-person audience. Once updated, the survey will be implemented. In order to address identity verification issues in the hearings department, DUA has reassigned eleven Job Service Representatives. The representatives will be focused on triaging any identity verification appeals and resolving the issue without a hearing if they're able to. They are expected to start the triage work by Thursday, August 29th.

Questions

Question by Rich Marlin: Can claimants go to any post office now? Is that the way it works? I actually have two members who are having issues with identity because they both moved and now, they have to bring something proving their new location.

Answer by Katie Dishnica: It's any retail post office.

Question by Rich Marlin: Any full-service post office?

Answer by Katie Dishnica: Yes.

The second update is regarding the revenue side of DUA. A fix has been put in. We were hearing from some people that wages were not getting attached to claims. What we've identified is that is because employers and or Third-Party Agents have been filing with the wrong unit number. So, they're putting in a unit number that doesn't apply and that resulted in the wages not being attached to a claim. The fix will correct some records that are already in the system and prevent it from happening in the future. That's one of the items that are going in this week. There is also the service pack, which was discussed at the last meeting. As a reminder, that will be implemented September 9th. A status update will be provided at the next meeting on all of the features that DUA is adding into EMT on the revenue side and how they are functioning. That primarily affects employers, how staff can search for employers, and how things are presented on our screens.

As of July 31st, DUA has slowly increased our enforcement activity. We're stabilizing. We want to make sure that we're pacing ourselves so the staff can process everything.

To clarify, enforcement can be a certified assessment, a request for court judgment, a lien, levies, or things of that nature. DUA has entered into an expanded agreement with the Integrity Data Hub. This will allow us to tackle employer-related fraud. We are really excited about this. The Data Hub has been great on the claimant side, but there's not a lot of information out there about employers. This will allow DUA to share information related to fictitious employers, and we are going to likely use some program integrity grant funds that are available to us. That will help us implement and operationalize it, and we'll have some insight on the employer side of claims.

The third update is regarding Phase II (the claimant side) of EMT. DUA is in the process of identifying our testers and trainers. A number of demos were given over the course of the last month. Everyone's really excited for the new system. We're close to being completed with the definition status or how the system is built up. The team works with our vendor to define certain functions. We'll be able to start testing as soon as all the definitions are in.

The fourth update is regarding IVR migration. This will be in production on September 19th. DUA is currently testing Telecert, Direct Deposit, and PIN level quality. Those functions are around 50% completed. DUA has not yet started payment status updates. We are on track for this to go live in September. This is the second half of the project, and now we're shifting gears to when a claimant calls in to do their weekly certification over the phone through the Telecert system.

Katie Dishnica also mentioned again to the Council Members the opportunity to lead a presentation for the group or to provide suggestions for presentation topics. EMT has been asked to provide an update to the Advisory Council at a future meeting.

UI Trust Fund Update

Lisa Hemmerle, Director of the Department of Economic Research, provided an update on the UI Trust Fund for the August quarterly report issued on August 15.

- This is for the balances ending June 30th. Key findings on the year include employer contributions through quarter two estimated at approximately \$709M with a 2024 projected year-end total estimated to be \$1.38B.
- The benefits for 2024 quarter 2 are currently at \$489 and the year-end total estimated is approximately \$2.4 billion.
- The year began with the unemployment insurance trust fund balance at \$2.91B. The current balance at the end of quarter two was \$2.64B, and the year-end projected balance is approximately \$2.03B. This is for the balances ending June 30th and the key findings on the year include employer contributions through quarter two estimated at approximately \$709 million with a 2024 projected year-end total estimated to be \$1.38 billion.
https://lmi.dua.eol.mass.gov/lmi/UnemploymentInsuranceTrustFund?_ga=2.154427704.126201910.1725904835-285382922.1713364253

The next meeting will be scheduled for Thursday September 19, 2024. Please let Katie or Sara know if you are unable to attend. Meeting adjourned.