



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

MAURA HEALEY
GOVERNOR

KIM DRISCOLL
LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR

LAUREN E. JONES
SECRETARY

KATIE DISHNICA
DIRECTOR

DUA ADVISORY COUNCIL MEETING

Thursday, July 18, 2024
Meeting Minutes

Council Attendees: Richard Marlin, John Drinkwater, Sam Larson, Grace Lee, Renee Harper
EOLWD/DWD/DUA/Public Attendees: Katie Dishnica, David Gold, John Saulnier, Jeannie Pena, Jason Salgado, Rena Kottcamp, Emma Hornsby, Wendy Filosi, Houda Amoakuh, Paul Fitzgerald, Mark Costello, Laura Santiago, Lisa Hemmerle, Josh Cutler

A virtual meeting was held via Zoom.

A motion was proposed to approve the May 2024 meeting minutes due to not having a quorum for the June meeting.

- 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 recession readiness. DUA has been proactive in scrubbing fraudulent claims. Scrubbing makes the SSN available for the legitimate claimant to file. This effort was started May 7th and over 600,000 social security numbers have been removed from fraudulent claims. This will allow constituents to file a new claim without issue. Although the social security number is removed, this does not prevent a different fraudster from filing a new claim. This will put DUA in a better position should there be an economic downturn in the future.

Question by Grace Lee: Is 600,000 the entire universe or is it the remainder of what needed to get done?

Answer by Katie Dishnica: That is the entire universe. We wanted to start small. We started with 100,000 in the first batch, and then increased to another 230,000, and then the most recent batch was 250,000, and collectively 600,000.

The second update is regarding the timely reporting of wages by employers. A letter to employers will be issued this week. To support timely and complete reporting of wages and to address SSA delays in issuing of SSNs, DUA made an update to allow wage records to be filed when an SSN/ITIN is unavailable at the time of filing. EMT assigns a temporary ID to these records and posts them to the account. About three hundred employers took advantage of this. A web notice is being issued to remind employers to update the temporary IDs before their next filing so the correct taxable wage base can be applied.

The third update is regarding the new Five9 call system. The call center has been fully migrated. IVR is still being worked on. Some of the new features include:

- Messaging in thirteen languages to assist LEP claimants navigating the prompts (four languages provided previously).
- Informational messaging in place while on hold.
- New messaging prompts to route claimants to the unit that can better assist them and reduce transfers.
- Callbacks provided in all queues. After one hour, callbacks are required to ensure better service levels as well as a cost-saving measure.

The fourth update is that DUA is currently experiencing our seasonal spike in unemployment. Along with increases in claims comes increases in fraud. We have been preparing for this and shifting staff as needed.

The fifth update is regarding disaster unemployment. DUA received notice from USDOL in May that a major disaster was declared in MA. On 5/15/2024, President Biden approved a major disaster declaration for Massachusetts as it recovers from the September 2023, severe storm and flooding. We were advised by DOL to launch a disaster unemployment program. DUA started to work on this program and did do testing. We have since been told by FEMA and DOL that we are not required to implement the program. This work has better prepared the agency for future events.

The sixth update is regarding the IDV backlog reduction. To prepare for the seasonal spike in claims DUA focused our efforts on Identity verification backlog (meaning issues over 21 days). There has been an 89% reduction in ID Verification backlog issues. DUA is moving those cases along quicker than last month.

The seventh update is regarding EMT. Phase I, or the employer side, is in use. Phase II, or the claimant side is in progress. DUA is implementing a service pack in EMT. A service pack is basically a software update. The goal of regression testing is to confirm to that system functionality is working normally and the service pack didn't inadvertently break something. Testing scenarios are being identified this month.

While waiting for Lisa Hemmerle to provide the Trust Fund update, Josh Cutler introduced himself to the council members. Mr. Cutler is the Undersecretary at EOLWD and will attend the Advisory Council Meetings to observe and strengthen communication.

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.

UI Trust Fund Update

Lisa Hemmerle, Director of the Department of Economic Research, provided an update on the UI Trust Fund for the month of July.

- The preliminary ending trust fund balance as of June 30 was \$2.64B. The YTD preliminary employer contributions through the end of June 2024 were \$776.13M.
- YTD benefit payments by DUA were \$1.16B for Regular UI for 451,000 initial and continuing claims.

Due to scheduling conflicts, the next meeting will be scheduled for Thursday August 22, 2024. Please let Katie or Sara know if you are unable to attend.

Meeting adjourned.