



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

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DIRECTOR

DUA ADVISORY COUNCIL MEETING

Thursday, March 21, 2024
Meeting Minutes

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

A virtual meeting was held via Zoom.

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

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

Katie Dishnica, Director of DUA, started the meeting by announcing the Advisory Council's new council member, Grace Lee. Mrs. Lee introduced herself to the Advisory Council.

Grace Lee: Mrs. Lee is a Regional President for M&T bank. In 2014, she left the legal profession to enter banking. Grace previously served with the District Attorney's Office as the head of the Civil Rights Division. Also, with the U.S. Department of Education at the Office of Civil rights. Grace also worked in Labor and employment at a law firm, and with the state treasurer's office for eleven years as the State Deputy Treasurer.

Katie Dishnica asked if the council members would like to introduce themselves to Grace Lee.

Rich Marlin: Mr. Marlin is with the MA Building trades unions. Rich has been on the DUA Advisory Council for many years.

Chris Carlozzi: Mr. Carlozzi is the Director of NFIB, National Federation of Independent Business. NFIB represents small business owners from all industries around the state with under ten employees.

John Drinkwater: Mr. Drinkwater is Director of government affairs with the Union of Painters and Allied Trades District Council 35. The union represents 4,000 workers across NH, MA, ME, VT in painting, dry wall finish, glazing, and glass work industry.

Sam Larson: Mr. Larson is a Vice President at Associated Industries in MA. He is originally from the legislature; however, he has been with AIM for three years. AIM represents medium and large size businesses across the state of MA.

Renee Harper: Mrs. Harper is currently a CFO for Non-profit Education Resource Strategy, an organization that works with school districts around the country to improve educational outcomes for black and brown children. Prior to that she was a Vice President and Controller for Liberty Mutual.

Executive update

Katie Dishnica, Director of DUA provided an executive update.

The first update is regarding tax intercepts. Tax Intercepts are turned on. DUA has commenced state tax intercepts for both regular UI and PUA benefits. Claimants with eligible UI debt who had their state tax refund intercepted by DOR will receive a letter from DOR stating the amount that was intercepted. New for this year is that the claimant can request a refund. The claimant may be entitled to a refund of this intercept for three reasons. The claimant is deceased, the claimant filed their state tax return with a spouse and the spouse is entitled to a partial refund, or the person did not collect UI for the associated tax year and believes the intercept was in error (ID theft/fraudulent claim related). All persons requesting a refund should complete the online state tax intercept refund form via mass.gov. Constituents can go to mass.gov/dua and search intercept refund.

<https://www.mass.gov/forms/state-tax-intercept-refund-request-form>

Questions

Question by Rich Marlin: Are claimants notified now that there is a potential intercept of their taxes?

Answer by Katie Dishnica: They are notified well in advance. They are notified in September and October that their taxes will be intercepted unless they requested a review and DUA determined after the review that their taxes shouldn't be intercepted. They will receive notice again from DOR.

Question by Rich Marlin: Did we get many reviews?

Answer by Katie Dishnica: I don't believe so. That would be hard to measure since they may not request a review. The constituent may have called or completed the fraud reporting form that would remove them from the list.

The second update is regarding Log in.gov/USPS. It went live last month. As of March 1st, we have had over 7,800 verifications completed from 3/1-3/18. Over 6,000 went to login.gov and 1,700 to their local post office. We have tools in a multilayered approach for ID verification. Overall, it's going well. We are an early adopter, 9th in the country, so we were intentionally cautious during implementation and will make data driven decisions on how to make small changes to improve our service levels. There has been some confusion from claimants who receive a letter from login.gov/USPS saying that they are approved or verified. We are working with DOL to add clarifying language that a verification letter from the vendor is not an approval for UI. We want to verify individuals as quickly as possible, but we have to make sure we are paying the proper people and that does take time. We have been asked by USDOL to share what we are doing here in MA with their Region 1 Workforce Executives. We had an increase in identity issues that required staff to take a closer look at them. There is still work to be done.

Questions

Question by Rich Marlin: Is there anything else the claimant has to do once they go to the Post Office to get that done? Is there another step they need to take?

Answer by Katie Dishnica: If there is something they need to do then they will hear from DUA. Custom fact finding will be sent. In some cases, there could be a situation where a claimant states they live in Dorchester, but it comes through as Boston. This could delay the claim due to the rules. DUA is looking into relaxing the rules but is currently being cautious.

Question by Renee Harper: How much fraud has DUA been able to prevent in general?

Answer by Katie Dishnica: We can get this information for you.

The third update is in regard to a certificate of compliance for businesses. DUA is working on an enhancement to EMT that will allow all certificate of compliance requests to be self-service, including unregistered employers. DUA is working with partner agencies to drive all certificate of compliance requests to self-service. Updated instructions will be posted by the end of next week.

The fourth update is in regard to a new call center platform. Improvements to our service levels are one of our top priorities. DUA is migrating our call center to a new platform that is an industry leader in Call Center and Open Channel Communications.

Five9 highlights

- Callbacks enabled for all queues
- Custom and scheduled reports (sent via email to designated recipients)
- Ability to track call drivers by utilizing disposition codes
- Custom Scripts (serve as on-screen reminders for agents)
- Message of the Day (ad hoc messaging-UI down, maintenance, check delays)
- Custom queue messaging while waiting in queue

The platform roll-out will consist of three phases. While the timeline is still fluid, our goal is to have all phases completed by the end of the fiscal year.

The fifth update is regarding EMT and phase 2 release. DUA is working toward a May 2025 release date. The project team has held spotlight sessions and various demos with the business units. Katie had the opportunity to attend the NASWA SIDES (SIDES stands for State Information Data Exchange System) conference in Pittsburgh last week to talk to other states and some of our Third-Party Agent stakeholders to get an understanding of the various exchanges and they are working to decide which exchanges to incorporate. She is excited that this will improve speed, accuracy, and security.

UI trust fund

Lisa Hemmerle, Director of the Department of Economic Research, provided an update on the UI trust fund. The March 2024 Trust Fund update is through the month of February 2024.

- As of 2/2024 the end balance of the UI Trust fund is \$2.55B
- The YTD preliminary employer contributions \$64.66M
- YTD DUA paid \$452.37M for Regular UI for 174,000 initial and continuing claims.

<https://www.mass.gov/uitrustfund>

Discussion/ Questions:

Question by Chris Carlozzi: Outlay projections are growing despite the low unemployment rate, moving us to schedule F. What are the drivers behind those outlays growing? Any specific factors?

Answer by Lisa Hemmerle: We are still looking into this. It is being driven by a higher number of continuing and initial claims every year and the high weekly benefit rate increasing every year. Statewide average weekly wages go up every year. If you look at the public data, more people are able to apply every year.

Meeting adjourned.

Next meeting Thursday April 18, 2024, 9:30am. Please let Katie or Sara know if you are unable to attend.