



Rhode Island Department of Human Services
25 Howard Avenue, Building 57
Cranston, RI 02920
Phone: (401) 462-2121 Fax: (401) 462-6594

October 3, 2022

The Honorable Marvin L. Abney
Chairman, House Committee on Finance
State House
Providence, RI 02903

RE: Staffing and Operations Report for September 30, 2022

Dear Chairman Abney:

Please accept the attached report as the State's most recent update on staffing and operations for the reporting period of July 16, 2022, to September 15, 2022, as formally requested in Article 1 of the enacted SFY23 budget to show progress in recruiting and retaining staff at the RI Department of Human Services. As detailed in the budget, this report will provide an update every 60 days beginning August 1, 2022, and will cover the following topics:

- Newly filled and vacant positions by title, including lateral transfers
- Civil service information including number of eligible and available candidates as well as plans for future testing and the anticipated number of eligible and available candidates from future testing
- Current average caseload backlog
- Call Center average wait time
- Other Call Center statistics and insights

We appreciate your continued advocacy on behalf of those we serve, your interest in DHS staffing improvements and the progress made to address outstanding issues. Please contact me if you have any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kimberly Merolla-Brito". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Kimberly Merolla-Brito, Acting Director
RI Department of Human Services

CC: Sharon Reynolds Ferland, House Fiscal Advisor
Christopher O'Brian, Committee Clerk, House Committee on Finance



Staffing and Operations Report

September 30, 2022

The DHS team takes its charge seriously in promoting health, nurturing quality of life and providing stability to Rhode Island residents in need. This report provides an update on our efforts and progress to date.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

FOR DATA FROM JULY 16 THROUGH SEPTEMBER 15

This section reflects progress made in hiring and retaining staff at DHS. Reporting data reflects a 60-day window, with subsequent reports capturing data where the previous report concludes. Highlights for the Staffing and Operations Report dated September 30, 2022, include:

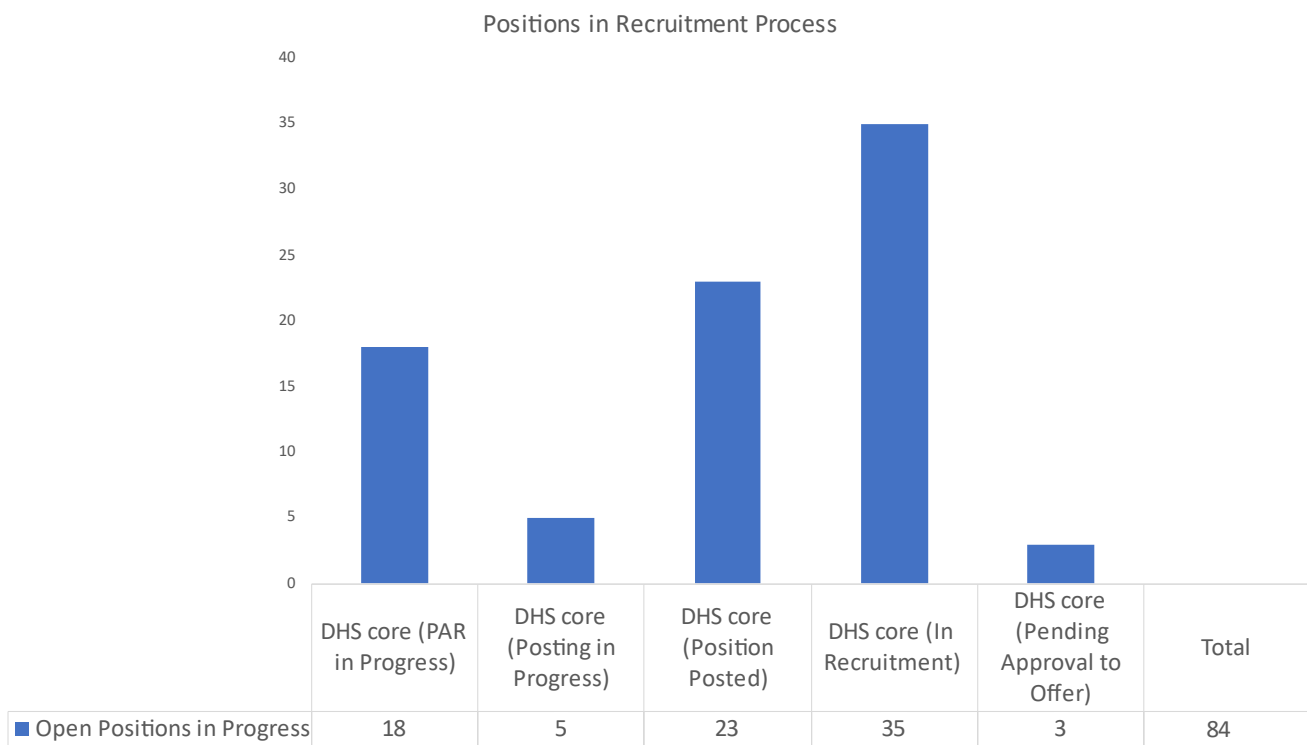
Total vacancies that became filled between July 16-September 15-----	36
Total filled that became vacant between July 16-September 15-----	25
Total NET increase of filled positions for July 16-September 15-----	11
Total HIRING ACTIVITY for July 16-September 15-----	50
Total REMAINING POSITIONS to be FILLED at DHS -----	119*
Total POSITIONS IN RECRUITMENT PROCESS (defined in report) at DHS -----	84

**The FY23 Budget included funding for 20 additional positions that increased the FTE count for DHS from 753 to 773.*

Newly Filled and Vacant Positions

DHS continues to make progress in hiring candidates for priority eligibility positions. Since January 2022, DHS has **filled over 160 positions** through a combination of promotional opportunities, lateral transfers, and new hires. Between July 16, 2022, and September 15, 2022, **DHS** filled 36 positions and there were 25 positions that became vacant. Of the total 773 DHS FTEs (excluding Office of Healthy Aging and Office of Veterans Services), 84 of 119 vacant positions are currently in the recruitment process.

Of the total vacancies within DHS (including OCSS and ORS), **approximately 70 percent** of those positions are in the process of being filled as of **September 19, 2022 (payroll ending September 10, 2022)**. Different stages of the recruitment process include: PAR in progress; posting in progress, position posted; in recruitment; and pending approval to offer. The chart below highlights the number of positions in each stage of the recruitment process.



Recruitment and hiring activities change daily. Data is subject to change and may not reflect the latest status.

The recruitment process is a multifaceted process, for both union and non-union positions, that is intended to help ensure qualified candidates are hired to perform critical functions for DHS. It can take several weeks to several months until a position is filled and a pending start date is confirmed by a candidate.

For consistency, please see the definitions from DOA on the following terms:

Personnel Action Request (PAR) – *The Personnel Action Request (PAR) is the requisition that begins the process of filling a position. It is entered by a designated individual at the agency level and goes through several levels of approval. The specific approval process for DHS PARs includes DHS (CFO and Director), EOHHS, HR, Budget Analyst and Budget Management. Once all approvals are in place, HR and DHS work together to finalize the posting and the recruitment begins.*

PAR in Progress – The term ‘PAR in Process’ refers to PARs that have been entered into the system by DHS but have not yet completed the approval process.

Posting in Progress – Once the PAR is approved, the position is prepared to be posted on apply.ri.gov. DOA/HR confers with DHS to determine when the position should be posted and as a result of such discussion, HR prepares a draft posting for DHS approval. Once DHS finalizes and approves the posting, it is returned to DOA/HR for posting.

Position Posted – The position is posted on apply.ri.gov for the required 10 calendar days.

Pending Candidate Referral – After the posting closes, DOA/HR reviews applicant information to determine who is eligible based on Collective Bargaining Agreements (if applicable for the position). If the position is a non-union position, all applicants are referred to DHS.

In Recruitment – The posting has closed and candidates are referred to DHS. During this time, the DHS is reviewing candidates’ qualifications/screening to determine if they meet minimum qualifications. At this time in the process, interviews are conducted if appropriate.

Candidate Recommended for Hire/Pending Approval to Offer – The top candidate has been recommended by the DHS for hire in the Automated Applicant Tracking System (NeoGov). DOA/HR reviews and approves the hire recommendation and notifies DHS, which then makes a job offer to the candidate.

Candidate Accepted, Pending Start Date – The candidate has accepted the position and DHS is waiting on confirmation of when the employee will begin in their new role.

Filled – The candidate has accepted the position and has a confirmed start date for when they will move into the new role or join DHS.

Hiring Activity (July 16-September 15)

New hiring activity for the reporting period between July 16, 2022, and September 15, 2022, are comprised of back office and customer facing positions. DHS and DOA will continue to work together to align hiring/staffing discrepancies reported. These positions and titles include:

	Lateral Hires	Promotional Hires	New Hires
Chief of Public Affairs	0	0	1
Clinical Training Specialist	0	1	0
Customer Service Aides	2	0	2
Eligibility Technician I	0	0	24
Eligibility Technician II	1	2	0
Eligibility Technician III	0	3	0
Employment and Career Advisor	0	1	2
Human Services Business Officer	1	1	0
Quality Control Reviewer	0	2	0
Senior Case Work Supervisor	0	2	0
Social Caseworker, LTSS	0	3	1

Supervising Eligibility Technician	0	1	0
Total	4	16	30

*For consistency, please see the following definitions from DHS and DOA:

Lateral Transfer – A lateral hire is an employee moving to a new home office location within the same job classification title. For example, an Eligibility Technician I moving from a home office of Warwick to Middletown.

Promotional Opportunity – A promotional opportunity is when an existing DHS employee accepts a different position opening from within DHS.

When an existing DHS employee takes another position opening with DHS, the employee is promoted into their new role resulting in a new vacancy. For example, a Supervising Eligibility Technician is promoted into a vacant Senior Casework Supervisor position. While adhering to any collective bargaining agreements, DHS promotes the internal employee and now needs to recruit for the vacant Supervising Eligibility Technician. **Please note:** DOA considers a promotional opportunity to include the above but also includes when an employee from another state agency joins DHS and fills a vacant position, which increases DHS’ workforce.

New Hire – A new hire is a completed hire resulting in an increase to DHS workforce. This person is new to DHS (either from another state agency or new to state) and fills a vacancy at DHS not resulting in another vacancy to be filled. **Please note:** DOA considers new hires as those new to state service.

Recent Departures/New Vacancies Resulting

From July 16, 2022, through September 15, 2022, 25 departures and/or vacancies at DHS resulted:

- 1 Assistant Administrator of Vocational Rehabilitation
- 8 Eligibility Technician I
- 1 Assistant Administrator of Community and Planning Services
- 1 Child Support Enforcement Agent II
- 2 Employment and Career Advisor
- 1 Child Support Enforcement Agent I
- 1 Consultant Public Health Nurse
- 3 Customer Service Aide
- 1 Data Control Clerk
- 1 Eligibility Technician II Call Center
- 1 Junior Resource Specialist
- 2 Supervising Eligibility Technician
- 1 Interdepartmental Project Manager
- 1 Human Services Business Officer

PHE Staffing

Between July 16 to September 15, we have 10 filled PHE Eligibility Technician Is. PHE positions are included within the ‘Hiring Activity’ figures.

Start Date	Number of Positions Filled
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August 14, 2022	1
August 28, 2022	5
September 11, 2022	4
TOTAL	10

As of September 15, 2022, we have filled 3 Supervising ET temporary assignments who have all started in their roles.

Civil Service Information

The Civil Service Exam is hosted by the RI Department of Administration (DOA). DHS works closely with DOA to fill critical positions as each agency performs a crucial function in moving qualified candidates through the completion of the onboarding process. As of September 15, 2022, the number of eligible and available candidates includes:

- 240 active candidates on the Eligibility Technician I exam
- 220 active candidates on the Social Caseworker I exam

The application period has closed for the upcoming 2022 Eligibility Technician I exam. All candidates have been screened and 66 have been deemed qualified, and have been invited to participate in testing. Testing is set for September 30, 2022. As of September 15, 2022, approximately 112 individuals who had taken the civil service exam in 2019 have responded and have expressed interest in an ET-1 position with the State. These candidates were asked their current interest in permanent and/or "limited" ET-1 positions in June 2022, in addition to the "full-time" position interest they expressed, upon taking the exam in 2019.

For consistency, please see the definitions from DOA on the following terms:

'Active' Candidates – Refers to candidates who have passed the civil service examination with a score of 70 or more and appear in rank order of performance on this list.

'Certified' Candidates – Refers to candidates who have been reached on the list, based on their score/rank, and are eligible to be interviewed and considered for appointment by the Department's interview team.

'Available' Candidates – Refers to candidates on the list, who during exam administration, select "Regional Location" and "Position Type" preferences. These selections will influence their availability when "certified/reached" for Departmental interview.

Current Caseload*

Snapshot

Data on pending applications reflect a point in time. As of **September 13, 2022 (data previously reported in House Oversight RIBridges report)**, the number of pending new applications across all programs was **8,073**. The total overdue pending applications awaiting State action was **3,348**. DHS continues to process applications within the mandatory timeliness standard set by the federal government, which typically requires applications to be processed within 30 days with the exception of complex Medicaid and expedited SNAP. Approximately **82%** of the overdue pending applications (awaiting State action) are medical cases (undetermined medical, Medicaid-MAGI, Medicare Premium, Medicaid Complex). Importantly, resources being deployed for the unwinding of the public health emergency will also be targeting overdue undetermined medical cases for appropriate case processing.

	Not Overdue			Overdue			Total
	Client	State	Total	Client	State	Total	
SNAP Expedited	69	415	484	36	283	319	803
SNAP Non-Expedited	552	870	1,422	107	141	248	1,670
CCAP	21	406	427	12	59	71	498
SSP	0	79	79	0	7	7	86
GPA	13	62	75	2	8	10	85
RIW	153	351	504	27	58	85	589
Undetermined Medical	33	513	546	164	2,223	2,387	2,933
Medicaid-MAGI	38	39	77	130	159	289	366
Medicare Premium Payments	13	195	208	22	101	123	331
Medicaid Complex	7	88	95	30	253	283	378
LTSS	9	267	276	2	56	58	334
Grand Total	908	3,285	4,193	532	3,348	3,880	8,073

*Reporting as of September 13, 2022.

Please note that some undetermined medical cases awaiting state action have already been resolved but were added to this reporting metric as part of broader system fixes in 2022 to ensure an accurate accounting of applications. A future update will archive pending applications that require no further action. Upon the implementation of a future update later this year, DHS will prioritize resources as needed to help address any excess backlogs.

Caseload

Key Terminology

As the agency charged with administering health and human service public benefits, the Department must process applications that follow the federal government’s mandatory timeliness standard. While most programs have a mandatory 30-day threshold – the amount of time DHS has to process an application before it is considered overdue – there are programs with longer deadlines for processing before it is considered ‘overdue.’

Not Overdue—Refers to applications that are within the mandatory timeliness standard set by the federal government. Each program has its own timeliness standard before it is considered overdue.

Overdue—Refers to applications not yet processed and past the mandatory timeliness standard. Even if an overdue application is completed a single day later, it is tracked as overdue by the agency.

The chart below is an additional metric added to the 60-day staffing and operations report (data pulled from August 2022).

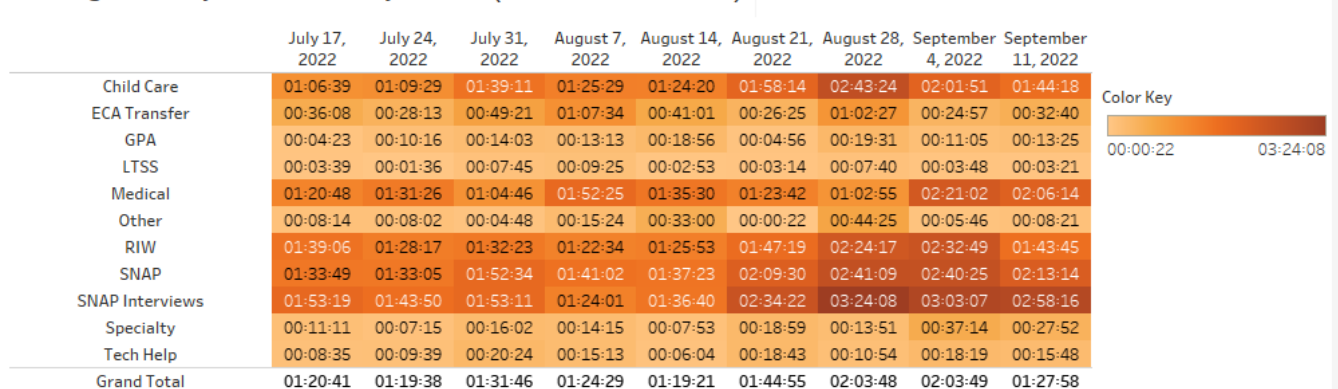
Refer to the chart on the right to see the mandatory timeliness standard per program. While the majority of cases per program are processed timely, a select number of cases awaiting customer or state action that become overdue may see a delay in authorization of benefits that is not reflective of the overall customer experience.

Program	Overdue Threshold for Applications	Avg. Number of Days from Applications Received to Authorized	Avg. Days from Overdue to Authorization
Expedited SNAP	7 Days	8	7
Non-Expedited SNAP	30 Days	15	12
Cash Assistance (RIW/GPA)	30 Days	16	8.5
Undetermined Medical	30 Days	N/A	N/A
Medicaid MAGI	30 Days	16	44
Complex Medical	45 Days	28	47
Long Term Care (LTSS)	90 Days	73	14

Call Center

For the period between **July 16, 2022, through September 15, 2022**, the average wait time to DHS staff was approximately **1 hour and 15 minutes**. The average wait time encompasses all calls (those opting for a call back and those that wait in queue) that are transferred and connect with a DHS worker. While the average wait time is longer than it should be, DHS is currently in the process of implementing call back functionality to reduce the amount of time customers spend waiting on the phone. During the reporting period, call back functionality was rolled out to the SNAP, SNAP Interviews, RIW, CCAP and Specialty queues; by the next reporting period, the functionality will be available on all queues. The charts below demonstrate the impact of call backs in lowering wait times for customers that opt to hang up and receive a call back.

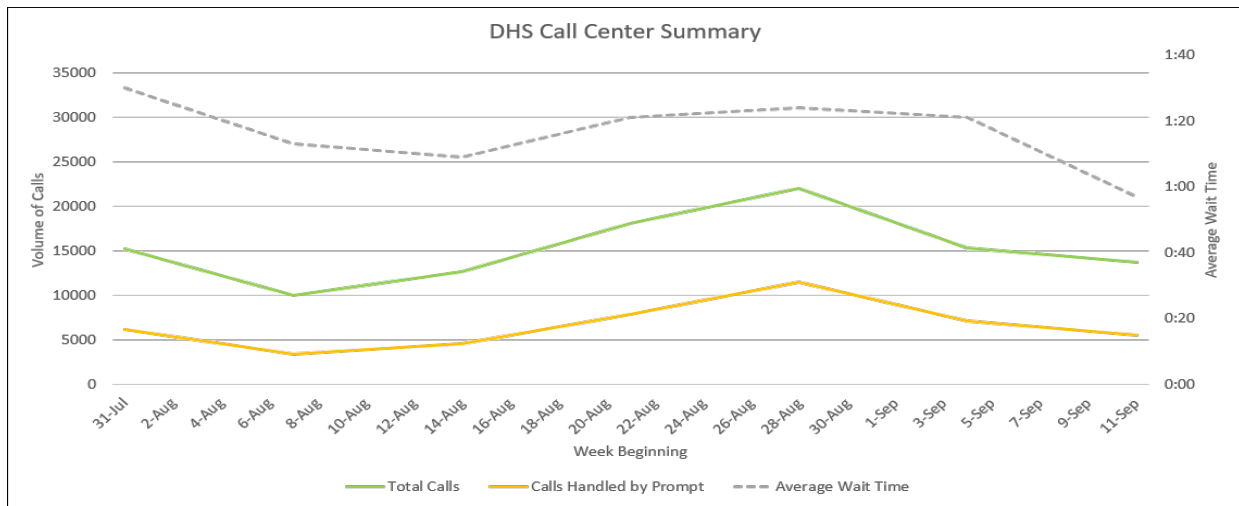
Average Weekly Wait Times by Queue (callbacks excluded)



Average Weekly Wait Times by Queue (callbacks included)

	July 17, 2022	July 24, 2022	July 31, 2022	August 7, 2022	August 14, 2022	August 21, 2022	August 28, 2022	September 4, 2022	September 11, 2022	Grand Total
Child Care	00:43:49	00:39:54	00:45:29	00:37:16	00:40:16	00:53:38	01:11:34	01:11:36	00:57:12	00:50:06
ECA Transfer	00:36:08	00:28:13	00:48:42	01:06:24	00:41:01	00:25:37	01:01:37	00:24:57	00:32:40	00:38:28
GPA	00:04:23	00:10:16	00:14:03	00:13:13	00:18:56	00:04:56	00:19:31	00:11:05	00:13:25	00:10:55
LTSS	00:03:39	00:01:36	00:07:45	00:09:25	00:02:53	00:03:14	00:07:40	00:03:48	00:03:21	00:05:03
Medical	01:20:48	01:31:26	01:04:46	01:52:25	01:35:30	01:23:42	01:02:55	02:21:02	02:06:14	01:24:05
Other	00:08:14	00:08:02	00:04:48	00:15:24	00:33:00	00:00:22	00:44:25	00:05:46	00:08:21	00:12:42
RIW	01:39:06	00:52:59	00:46:37	00:41:19	00:44:30	00:48:18	01:21:18	01:20:59	00:51:21	00:57:40
SNAP	01:33:49	01:33:05	01:52:34	01:41:02	01:37:23	02:09:30	01:50:05	01:38:02	01:04:43	01:34:37
SNAP Interviews	01:53:19	01:43:50	00:56:21	00:45:42	00:50:08	01:00:36	01:48:59	01:45:11	01:05:25	01:28:13
Specialty	00:11:11	00:07:15	00:16:02	00:13:47	00:09:38	00:18:01	00:13:43	00:33:18	00:25:35	00:15:36
Tech Help	00:08:35	00:09:39	00:20:24	00:15:13	00:06:04	00:18:43	00:10:54	00:18:19	00:15:48	00:13:02
Grand Total	01:18:44	01:14:33	01:21:19	01:13:15	01:10:00	01:24:43	01:28:40	01:24:07	00:57:35	01:15:10

During this time period, there were approximately 54 staff members supporting the Call Center with approximately 28 of those employees taking 5 calls or more per day (*this metric does not reflect all customer facing activities staff undertake, however, future reports may introduce other data points to better reflect work performed*).



The call center typically sees a pattern of high call volume toward the beginning and end of each month. Since call volume may vary from day-to-day, DHS on occasion publishes a website notification to announce high call volume days and any changes to operational hours for the day.

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