



Rhode Island Department of Human Services
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November 29, 2022

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

RE: Staffing and Operations Report for November 29, 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 September 16, 2022, to November 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

Importantly, I want to bring attention to previously reported FTE counts in prior reports, which contained inconsistencies that could not be reconciled until now due to improving reporting metrics. Beginning with this Staffing and Operations Report, DHS will be using payroll data as the basis of FTE counts at the agency. It is our intention to remain fully transparent with the legislature on the status of hiring at DHS. I understand this will make it more challenging to see hiring progress since August 1, 2022, and for this I have bulleted the FTE counts for the August and September reports using payroll data.

- Amended FTE count for August 1, 2022 report: 635
- Amended FTE count for September 30, 2022 report: 639
- FTE count for November 29, 2022 report: 656

Changing the basis of the report is an important pivot because we are now only counting individuals who have received a paycheck, helping provide a more accurate, consistent, and reliable measure of staffing levels.

We appreciate your patience as we continue to make adjustments to this report in an effort to provide a thorough overview of the staffing and operations outlook at this agency. Once again, thank you for 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,

Handwritten signature of Kimberly Merolla-Brito in black ink.

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

November 29, 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 September 16 THROUGH November 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 November 29, 2022, include:

| | |
|--|-------|
| Total vacancies cited in 'DOA Leave Report' between Sep. 16-Nov. 15----- | 3* |
| Total NET increase of filled positions for Sep. 16-Nov. 15----- | 17† |
| Total HIRING ACTIVITY for September 16-November 15----- | 32†† |
| Total REMAINING POSITIONS to be FILLED at DHS ----- | 117 ‡ |
| Total POSITIONS IN RECRUITMENT PROCESS (defined in report) at DHS ----- | 56 |

*The Leave Report is a report from the DOA that lists all employees who left DHS (includes staff from OCSS, OHA, ORS and VETS; DHS uses filters to remove VETS and OHA departures) since January 2022. It is not intended to be compared with other stats/data points DHS uses in this report

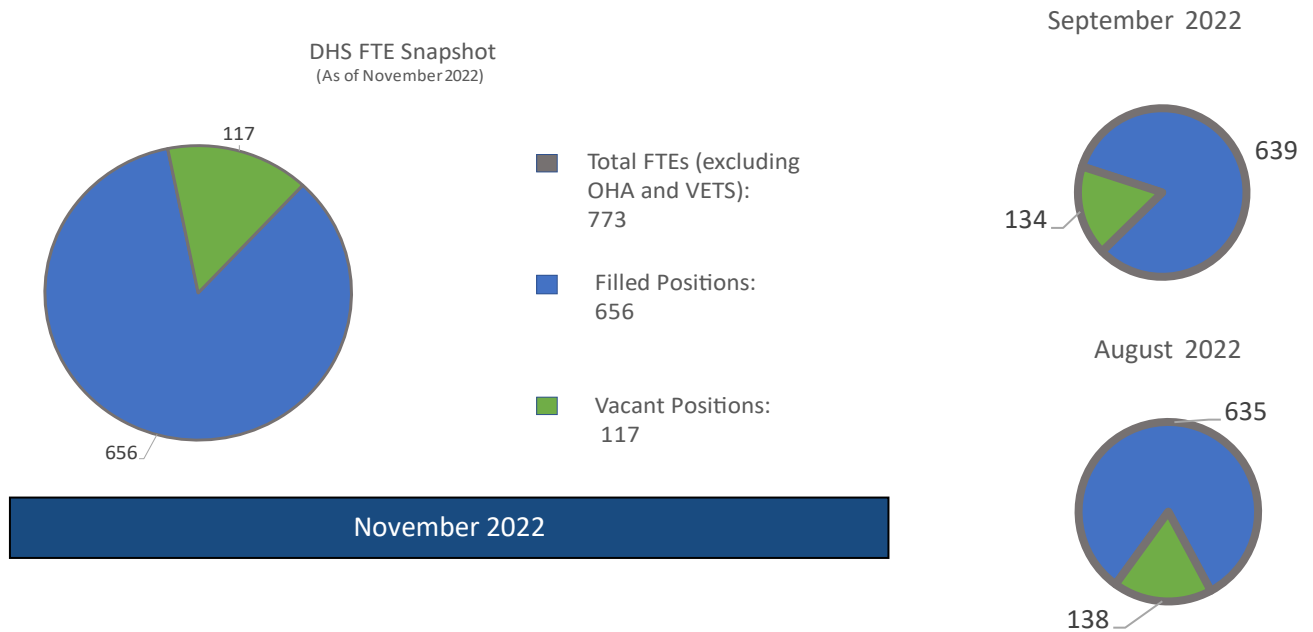
† Prior reports used a hybrid tracker that introduced irreconcilable data from payroll and HR.

†† Total hiring activity includes all lateral, promotional, and new hires at DHS (includes OCSS and ORS) for the reporting period.

‡ The FY23 Budget included funding for 20 additional positions that increased the FTE count for DHS from 753 to 773. The 117 figure uses payroll data as the basis for the FTE count and should only be compared with figures using the same methodology.

Newly Filled and Vacant Positions

DHS continues to make progress in hiring candidates for priority eligibility positions. From January 2022 through November 15, 2022, DHS **has filled over 175 positions** through a combination of promotional opportunities, lateral transfers, and new hires. Between September 16, 2022, and November 15, 2022, **DHS filled 32 positions**. **Using the payroll data closest to the reporting period for this report, you can find a Snapshot of the FTE count at DHS, which will fluctuate from each payroll period as new staff join; are promoted; retire from state service; accept opportunities elsewhere or otherwise leave state service. Payroll data only counts individuals who have received a paycheck and/or are on leave.**



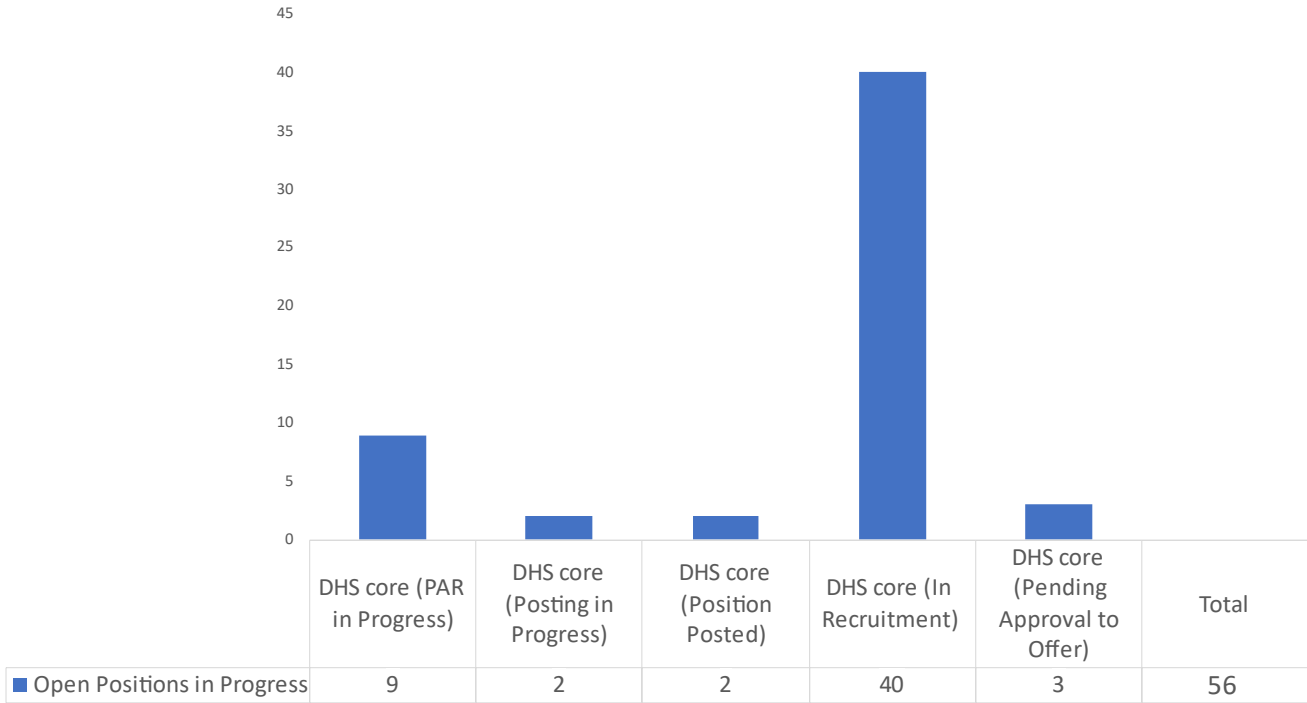
Beginning with the November 29, 2022, Staffing and Operations Report, we will be using payroll data as the basis of FTE counts at DHS. Previous reports used a hybrid tracker for FTE counts that created irreconcilable data points in previous reports. Through payroll information, DHS anticipates FTE counts to be a more accurate, consistent and reliable measure of the workforce. This change results in an amended FTE count for previous reports:

- Amended FTE count for August 1, 2022 report: 635
- Amended FTE count for September 30, 2022 report: 639
- FTE count for November 29, 2022 report: 656

Of the total 773 DHS FTEs (only includes DHS core, OCSS, and ORS), **56 of 117** vacant positions -- or approximately 48 percent -- of those positions are in the process of being filled as of **November 15, 2022** (payroll ending 11/05/2022).

Please refer to the chart below to see the status of these positions in the recruitment process.

Positions in 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, 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. [The remaining vacant positions—not currently in the recruitment process—will be reflected in subsequent reports in tandem with payroll reporting.](#)

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

(September 16-November 15)

New hiring activity for the reporting period between September 16, 2022, and November 15, 2022, are comprised of back-office and customer-facing positions. For this reporting period, DHS hired 32 employees:

Please note DHS and DOA will continue to work together to align hiring/staffing discrepancies reported. Position titles and the types of hire are outlined below:

| | Lateral Hires | Promotional Hires | New Hires |
|---|---------------|-------------------|-----------|
| Administrator of Family and Children Services | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| Assistant Business Management Officer | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Chief Program Development | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Data Control Clerk | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Eligibility Technician I | 0 | 0 | 21 |
| Eligibility Technician II Call Center | 0 | 4 | 0 |
| Eligibility Technician II Lobby | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| Human Services Business Officer | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Principal Clerk | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| Total | 0 | 7 | 25 |

*For consistency, please see the definitions from DHS and DOA in the Hiring Terminology section. Positions listed in ‘Hiring Activity’ are filled but may not be reflected in the FTE count above since not all have received their first paycheck at time of reporting.

Hiring Terminology

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 then 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.

FTE Impact from Hiring Activity

Hiring at DHS fluctuates on a daily basis as employees join DHS; receive promotions; are transferred; or otherwise leave state service. The chart below focuses on the status of job classifications impacted by ongoing hiring activity, between Sept. 16-Nov. 15, using payroll as a basis with changes from previous reports marked.

| Title | Sep. 30, 2022 | Nov. 29, 2022 | Change +/- |
|---|---------------|---------------|------------|
| Administrator Family And Children's Services | 3 | 4 | +1 |
| Administrator, Operations Management | 2 | 1 | -1 |
| Assistant Administrator Community And Planning Services | 8 | 7 | -1 |
| Associate Director (DHS) Program Operations | 1 | 2 | +1 |
| Child Support Enforcement Agent I | 13 | 11 | -2 |
| Child Support Enforcement Agent II | 19 | 17 | -2 |
| Clinical Training Specialist | 4 | 5 | +1 |
| Data Control Clerk | 1 | 2 | +1 |
| Eligibility Technician | 123 | 140 | +17 |
| Eligibility Technician II (DHS - Call Center) | 30 | 25 | -5 |
| Eligibility Technician II (DHS - Lobby) | 26 | 33 | +7 |
| Employment And Career Advisor | 13 | 12 | -1 |
| Human Services Business Officer | 8 | 7 | -1 |
| Junior Resource Specialist | 3 | 4 | +1 |
| Principal Clerk | 2 | 3 | +1 |
| Productivity Project Director | 7 | 8 | +1 |
| Senior Case Work Supervisor | 10 | 11 | +1 |
| Senior Human Services Business Officer | 2 | 3 | +1 |
| Senior Word Processing Typist | 10 | 9 | -1 |
| Social Case Worker | 25 | 24 | -1 |
| Supervising Eligibility Technician | 23 | 25 | +2 |

| | | | |
|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------|
| Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor I | 22 | 19 | -3 |
| | Total filled FTEs: 639 | Total filled FTEs: 656 | +17* |

All data is preliminary and subject to change. The total accounts for new staff (marked as +) in direct relation to new departures (-) resulting in an aggregate tabulation of new hires at DHS – not to be compared with 'hiring activity' since those include employees with start dates not yet on payroll.

Recent Departures/New Vacancies Resulting

From September 16, 2022, through November 15, 2022, the Department of Administration's Leave Report indicated there were three departures and/or vacancies at DHS core (including ORS and OCSS). As the keeper of record for hiring across state agencies, DOA records show departures and new vacancies resulted in:

- **1 Child Support Enforcement Agent**
- **1 Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor**
- **1 Principal Clerk**

Please note the Leave Report provided by DOA may not align with other data points in this report because it is not connected to payroll, which serves as a basis of the DHS Staffing and Operations Report. Additionally, the different HR/payroll systems used by the state have delays due to legacy tracking methods that have not been updated.

Staff on Leave Snapshot

For the current report dated November 29, 2022, the Department has 656 employees on payroll – of which approximately 28 staff members are currently on leave.

These positions are filled and active on the payroll but represent a portion of the workforce who are out of the office and not currently contributing to the day-to-day operations of the agency. While it is important to recognize that these employees are acting within their employment rights and that these rights will continue to be honored across state government, approved staff leaves reduce the agency's 'actual' workforce since there are less employees performing duties than the FTE count may suggest.

Below, please find a snapshot of current staff on leave based on the closest payroll period. Please note these numbers fluctuate every pay period as staff return and other leaves are pending approval.

| | |
|--|--------------|
| Staff on Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA/PIL Leave) | 7 |
| Staff on Intermittent FMLA Leave | 13 |
| Staff on Maternity Leave | 5 |
| Staff on Worker's Compensation Leave | 3 |
| | Total |
| | 28 |

PHE Staffing

As of November 20, **we have filled 44 of 60 PHE Eligibility Technician positions.** PHE positions are included within the 'Hiring Activity' figures. Please refer to the chart below to see the status of PHE staffing.

| Position Titles | Status |
|---|------------------------|
| Eligibility Technician Is | 37 of 40 filled |
| Supervising Eligibility Technician (SET) temporary assignment | 3 of 6 filled |
| ET II Call Center | 4 of 14* filled |
| TOTAL | 44 of 60 filled |

**All Call Center positions must be promotional opportunities. Due to a lack of interest in Call Center positions from the current candidate pool, the DHS is facing challenges filling these positions. Executive leadership is exploring solutions to help expedite the filling of these positions.*

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 November 9, 2022, the number of eligible and available candidates includes:

- 230 active candidates on the Eligibility Technician I exam (*As of November 9, 2022, a total of 112 candidates have responded as remaining interested in the position*)
- 210 active candidates on the Social Caseworker I exam

As of November 9, 2022, a total of 55 candidates have taken the newly offered Eligibility Technician I (ET-I) civil service examination, which is being established as a "reserve candidate list" to the current ET-I list described above. Candidate notification of test results for recent examinees will be issued this month

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. For the current November 2022 Staffing and Operations Report (**data previously reported in the monthly House Oversight RIBridges report**), the number of pending new applications across all programs was 9,215. The total overdue pending applications awaiting State action was 4,274. 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.

Pending applications have remained elevated during this snapshot due to ongoing challenges, however, total cases awaiting state action have plateaued representing an approximate increase of less than 1 percent from October 12, 2022 (increase is higher if comparing from September 14, 2022, caseload data). Ongoing challenges include current staffing capacity, seasonal staff availability, the increased onboarding activity associated with the influx of new staff, enhanced quality control measures, the return of SNAP related processes, and an IT discrepancy that previously counted resolved cases.

With a November 18 scheduled release to address the IT discrepancy, DHS expects to see a slight decline in the backlog with totals not yet available at the time of this report. As DHS continues to hire critical front facing and back operations staff, DHS anticipates a more consistent decline in the reported backlog over the next reporting period as 50 ET Is will have been onboarded and trained on MAGI or SNAP. As they continue to develop policy knowledge and case processing skills, case completion is projected to increase from 20 cases to 50 cases per week, helping assure that approximately +2,500 Rhode Islanders receive or maintain benefits.

| | Not Overdue | | | Overdue | | | Total |
|---------------------------------|-------------|-------|-------|---------|-------|-------|-------|
| | Client | State | Total | Client | State | Total | |
| SNAP Expedited | 42 | 409 | 451 | 29 | 53 | 82 | 533 |
| SNAP Non-Expedited | 584 | 1,041 | 1,625 | 134 | 448 | 582 | 2,207 |
| CCAP | 12 | 322 | 334 | 23 | 256 | 279 | 613 |
| GPA Burial | 0 | 3 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 |
| SSP | 0 | 75 | 75 | 0 | 27 | 27 | 102 |
| GPA | 18 | 53 | 71 | 1 | 14 | 15 | 86 |
| RIW | 111 | 252 | 363 | 42 | 132 | 174 | 537 |
| Undetermined Medical | 26 | 552 | 578 | 176 | 2,597 | 2,773 | 3,351 |
| Medicaid-MAGI | 37 | 51 | 88 | 142 | 178 | 320 | 408 |
| Medicaid Premium Payment | 9 | 380 | 389 | 27 | 238 | 265 | 654 |
| Medicaid Complex | 10 | 84 | 94 | 34 | 269 | 303 | 397 |
| LTSS | 11 | 249 | 260 | 2 | 62 | 64 | 324 |
| Grand Total | 860 | 3,471 | 4,331 | 610 | 4,274 | 4,884 | 9,215 |

**Reporting as of November 9, 2022. Please note that cases that have been resolved but are still being counted will be removed in the next report.*

NEW Hire FTE Impact on Pending Applications

The Department currently has 43 Eligibility Technicians needing supervisory approval (ETSAs), who are collectively processing about 350 cases per week. All ETSAs have completed new hire training and have begun either SNAP or MAGI training. Of the total 43 ETSAs, only 29 have reached enough proficiency to start working within the RIBridges system to process cases. The other ESTAs are completing 1 or 2 cases per day as they become more proficient from direct coaching and support.

| # of ETSAs | Assigned to: | Outcomes |
|------------|---|---|
| 4 | Incoming calls at the Call Center | Each Assigned Group is averaging about 80 cases per week* |
| 4 | outbound calls (branch based) | |
| 17 | SNAP applications, recertifications, or interim reviews | |
| 4 | Processing MAGI applications | |

**ETSAs require supervisory approval because they have not completed their probation period. As a result, a review by a supervisor for final eligibility determination is required, adding time but assuring accuracy in processing.*

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 report (data pulled for the November 2022 Staffing and Operations Report).

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 | 10 | 10 |
| Non-Expedited SNAP | 30 Days | 19 | 17 |
| Cash Assistance (RIW/GPA) | 30 Days | 19 | 12 |
| Undetermined Medical | 30 Days | N/A | N/A |
| Medicaid MAGI | 30 Days | 14 | 45 |
| Complex Medical | 45 Days | 28 | 45 |
| Long Term Care (LTSS) | 90 Days | 74 | 16 |

Call Center

For the period between **September 16, 2022, through November 15, 2022**, the average wait time to DHS staff was approximately **1 hour and 20 minutes**. DHS recognizes this average wait time remains longer than it should be and has implemented call back functionality to reduce the time customers spend waiting on the phone. The average wait time encompasses all calls (those opting for a call back and those that wait in queue) that are transferred and connected with a DHS worker.

Importantly, it should be noted that the availability of call back functionality changes on a daily basis due to staff availability and call volume. In order to reach all those in the queue by the end of the day, DHS makes it available strategically in the morning until capacity is reached. Wait times increased during this reporting period because we were not able to consistently offer call backs. To help address current limitations, we have secured a resource through Knowledge Service that will provide improved customer access to the functionality by way of full adoption of the place in line call backs.

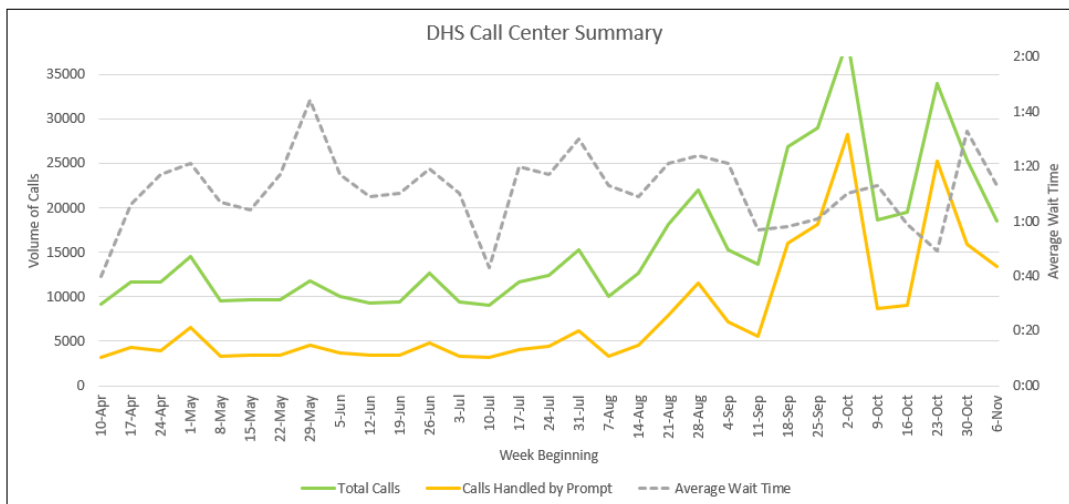
The charts below demonstrate the impact of call backs in lowering wait times for customers that opt to hang up and receive a call back.



During this time period, there were approximately 51 staff members supporting the Call Center with approximately 41 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).

Call center summary



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.

Impact of NEW FTE to Call Center Activity

As the agency continues to make progress in filling critical positions, the Department added four ET II Call Center staff to the Call Center based on the latest payroll data. These additional staff members are, at a minimum, providing customer service to five customers a day resulting in approximately 100 more customers who are receiving support from DHS.

###