



UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE
MARYLAND HOUSE BILL 1002
REPORT JUNE 1, 2021

Pursuant to Maryland House Bill 1002 (2021), the Division of Unemployment Insurance (DUI) is required to provide, in accordance with State Government Article § 2-1257, a plan to ensure that call center staffing is adequate to allow an individual to reach a departmental employee or contractor to ask questions.

During non-pandemic times, claimants are able to reach a live DUI agent on the telephone with little to no wait. But, during the pandemic when claims went from an average of 3,175 new claims per week in 2019 to a peak of over 109,653 in 2020, claimants have had much longer wait times. This problem has been exacerbated by the repeat-caller phenomenon. In the private sector, repeat callers can be blocked. As a government agency, DUI cannot do that. Instead, those callers fill the cues and add to the wait times of all callers.

Based on the Erlang Calculation regarding call centers, in order to handle 30,000 calls per day -- an approximate number of calls for a peak day during the pandemic -- with an average handle time of 20 minutes by a live staffer, DUI would have needed to add 1,775 call center staffers. This calculation is based on a Monday through Friday, 8-hour per day schedule, with two 15 minute breaks and 30 minutes for lunch. Even if this were logistically possible, it would have cost DUI \$5,533,563 per month to hire 1,775 permanent or contractual staff.

Instead, DUI contracted with a third-party, Accenture, and added over 1100 temporary call center staffers to increase call center capacity. This was the fastest way to quickly add many call center staffers at once. It would have taken much longer, and required many staff hours to augment the call centers through DUI's normal recruitment processes -- even for only the number of staffers Accenture provided.

In addition to our traditional staff and Accenture, DUI has implemented several methods for claimants to receive information about their claim.

- First, DUI has a robust self-service tool that claimants can use via their BEACON portal. Claimants and employers can receive correspondences and respond to “Action Items” through BEACON without the aid of a live agent.
- Second, DUI upgraded its outdated Interactive Voice Response (IVR) telecommunications system to a Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) to enhance UI services by phone to claimants (i.e., filing weekly certifications and obtaining essential UI information).
- Third, claimants can use a virtual assistant, set up by Accenture, to receive responses to general questions about the claims process.
- Fourth, claimants can use the Salesforce inquiry form to ask specific questions about their claims and receive responses.

- Finally, DUI's website maintains updated answers to claimant and employer Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs), and informational pamphlets regarding their rights and responsibilities. DUI has added video tutorials to its website to further help customers find answers to their questions without having to call a live agent.

The Department plans to continue to utilize expanded call center hours and maintain the augmented call center staffing to meet the continued demand under this pandemic. At this time, there are no plans to roll back any of the enhanced features, policies, or contracts we have implemented. The Department will continue to reevaluate its policies and staffing needs in this regard to continue to address capacity needs under this pandemic.