

Introduction

In accordance with Chapter 151 of the Acts of 2020, this is the third quarterly report from the Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development (EOLWD) regarding the comprehensive modernization and transformation for “the deployment of an online delivery system for unemployment insurance compensation benefits.” In addition to focusing on unemployment, EOLWD has continued its focus on post-pandemic and long-term re-employment goals to provide the workforce and employers of Massachusetts with a seamless and efficient job-loss-to-job gain experience. EOLWD is thankful to the Legislature for providing the funding to enable EOLWD’s mission to achieve the following goals:

- **Provide outstanding service to the workforce and businesses of MA:** Provide an improved customer experience, that is accessible to all, is compliant with the law, and available online, by phone, and in person. Deliver timely and accurate benefits and use the taxpayer’s money efficiently.
- **Be a national leader:** Be among top performing states on federal performance measures focusing on timely and high-quality services and ensuring accessibility and equity in providing services to the workforce.
- **Operate efficiently and ensure program integrity:** Ensure that benefits are being disbursed to valid and legitimate unemployment claims and eliminate ineffective or unnecessary business processes to better provide streamlined service to customers.
- **Provide accurate, timely and responsive reporting:** Ensure that data is accurate and is provided timely and can flexibly respond to stakeholder needs and inquiries.

Chapter 151 of the Acts of 2020 also requires EOLWD to address the following content and actions:

1. *“Shall include a plan for the deployment of the online system”*

The plan for deployment of the online system is still under development because EOLWD is currently in the process of evaluating vendor bids. EOLWD will provide this information in a future report once a vendor partner is selected and a mutually agreeable deployment plan is developed.

2. *“An update on the progress of the development of the online delivery system, including a demonstration of the design and access to the online system and alternate methods of access for individuals with barriers to access, including, but not limited to, individuals without internet access, individuals with limited English proficiency or individuals with disabilities; provided further, that the design shall comply with federal and state requirements for unemployment delivery systems and standards for digital accessibility, including the most recent version of web accessibility standards”*

As indicated above, EOLWD will provide an update on progress and a demonstration of the proposed design and access, including alternative methods, once a vendor is selected and a mutually agreeable deployment plan is developed. EOLWD would like to assure the Legislature that the Request for Response¹ to the vendor community imposed clear and strict requirements around compliance with federal and state requirements for unemployment delivery systems and standards for digital accessibility, including the most recent version of web standards. In fact, prior to the formal issuance of the procurement documents the public, and most notably the members of UI Bond Bill Advisory Council, had an opportunity to comment on and discuss with EOLWD all accessibility and access related aspects of the procurement documents.

3. *“Not later than 90 days of the submission of the development plan, the secretary shall hold a public hearing and solicit testimony on the plan; provided further, that not less than 30 days’ notice shall be given for said public hearing.”*

EOLWD will hold a public hearing on the development plan once a vendor has been selected, a mutually agreeable deployment plan is developed, and such plan has been submitted to the Legislature.

¹ A “Request for Response” or RFR is more commonly known as a “Request for Proposals” or RFP in commercial terminology. RFR is a unique term to the Massachusetts Executive Branch procurement rules as defined by the Operational Services Division. However, the purpose and goals of an RFR are identical to those of a commercial RFP.

Program Status:

The primary focus of the program remains the Commonwealth's unemployment benefits delivery system and operations. Since the November 2021 report, significant progress has been made, and the program is on schedule, as follows:

1. EOLWD received six qualified bids in response to the RFR that was described in the prior two quarterly reports and released to the vendor community on October 1, 2021. EOLWD is currently evaluating the bids, using an established evaluation and scoring approach that puts a significant focus on accessibility and equity. The Source Selection Team (SST), comprises key executives from EOLWD, the Executive Office of Technology Services and Security (EOTSS), and the Massachusetts Office on Disability (MOD). The SST has been actively reviewing proposals and will be meeting with each of the bidders during the month of March. EOLWD expects to name an apparent successful bidder and enter negotiations with the vendor in early to mid April.
2. Approaches and procurement plans for the modernization and transformation of the EOLWD contact center technology and operations will be finalized after the successful and timely execution of the unemployment and re-employment priorities. The same holds true for the modernization and transformation of the EOLWD overall financial management systems.

Progress on Accessibility and Engagement with the Advisory Council

EOLWD continues to work with the Advisory Council regarding accessibility for the unemployment benefits system. The Advisory Council has provided EOLWD with input in many forms, including recommended scenarios for bidders to demonstrate to the SST as part of the evaluation and selection process. EOLWD continues to address and incorporate input from the Advisory Council regarding accessibility and equity.