

Introduction

In accordance with Chapter 151 of the Acts of 2020, this is the sixth 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 to fulfill its 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, delivers timely and accurate benefits, is compliant with the law, is available online, by phone, and in person, and uses taxpayer 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 eligible 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.

The following are the status and plans for each requirement where EOLWD owns the responsibility to act in Section 1790-3009 of Chapter 151 of the Acts of 2020 that relates solely to the “*development, implementation and deployment of an online delivery system for unemployment insurance compensation benefits*” as follows:

Ref	Bond Language	Current Status	Future Plan
3	Provided further, that prior to the selection of consultants and prior to and during the development, implementation and deployment of the online delivery system, the secretary of labor and workforce development and the consultants after so chosen shall consult with an advisory council of the state workforce development board established in section 7 of chapter 23H of the General Laws	As described in prior legislative reports, EOLWD has continued to consult with the Advisory Council on a bi-weekly basis on matters relating to accessibility, fair access, plain language, and adherence to unemployment law. During the past quarter, EOLWD has solicited the Advisory Council’s input specifically regarding the drafting of new letters and forms that will go to employers and/or their payroll agents, to help assure that the new forms and letters are accessible, legally compliant, and in easy to understand English and Spanish.	During the development, implementation, and deployment EOLWD looks forward to consulting with the council regarding their expertise and their community leverage in the areas of accessibility, access and adherence to unemployment law. More specifically, prior to the first go-live for tax revenue operations, EOLWD plans to invite the Advisory Council to participate in accessibility and fair access testing of the new system.
4	provided further, that the advisory council shall focus and provide feedback on the unemployment online delivery system including alternate methods of access for individuals with barriers to online systems	The council continues to provide input and questions regarding alternate methods of access for individuals with barriers to online systems. EOLWD has expressed concern to the council regarding their input on matters outside of the focus indicated in the bond language.	Ongoing

7	provided further, that the advisory council shall submit input to the secretary on the criteria to be utilized for the selection of the bid evaluation	The council has submitted to EOLWD various documents relating to recommended requirements and selection criteria that were incorporated into the RFR, were used for bid evaluation, and now have been incorporated into the draft contract(s) predominately as they relate to accessibility and access.	Requirement fulfilled and completed
8	provided further, that the secretary and the advisory council shall meet quarterly	<p>The secretary has met with the council on the following dates:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • March 18, 2021 • November 17, 2021 • February 25, 2022 • August 23, 2022 • December 6, 2022 <p>Is scheduled to meet with the council on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • March 28, 2023 	The secretary or the secretary's delegate will continue to meet with the council quarterly or as close to quarterly as calendars allows.
9	provided further, that the secretary shall submit quarterly reports on the progress of the development, implementation and deployment of an online delivery system for unemployment compensation benefits to the clerks of the house of representatives and the senate	<p>EOLWD has submitted reports on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • June 30, 2021 • October 19, 2021 • March 4, 2022 • July 8, 2022 • November 14, 2022 	EOLWD will continue to submit reports on a quarterly basis.
10	provided further, that the last quarterly report of 2021 shall include a plan for the deployment of the online system and 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	Since the prior report EOLWD has worked with our selected partners to fully develop, plan, and contract for the deployment of the online unemployment system. This plan has been shared with the Advisory Council including a demonstration of the design and access to the online system. This plan takes into consideration and has requirements and key performance indicators in the contract to address individuals with limited English proficiency and individuals with disabilities. The contract requires compliance with relevant federal and state	Requirement fulfilled and completed

	<p>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</p>	<p>requirements for unemployment delivery systems and standards and incorporates the current version of web accessibility standards.</p>	
<p>11</p>	<p>provided further, that 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</p>	<p>On September 19, 2022, a notice of public hearing was posted for an October 18, 2022, public hearing. The notice posted by EOLWD on the Legislature's website contained links to information on the development plans, timeline and a video demonstration of the accessibility and fair access aspects of the system for the public to view in order to allow sufficient time for the public to prepare testimony. The hearing was minimally attended and most of the attendees were members of the Advisory Council or others closely associated with the Advisory Council. No verbal testimony was provided. Only one submission of written testimony was provided the next day from the MA Employment Rights Coalition. A summary of the recommendations can be found following this status table.</p>	<p>Requirement fulfilled and completed</p>
<p>12</p>	<p>provided further, that not later than 120 days before the online delivery system becomes available for public use, the secretary shall submit a final report on the development of the system to the clerks of the house and senate that shall include, but not be limited to: (i) a summary of testimony received through the public hearing; (ii) a description of the recommendations</p>		<p>EOLWD will comply with this requirement not later than 120 days after the final release to the public of the overall unemployment system. It is important to note that the system will likely be released in two or more modular releases.</p>

	received; (iii) a description of actions taken as a result of testimony received; and (iv) if action was not taken on a recommendation, a description as to why no action was taken on said recommendation		
13	provided further, that after consultation with the advisory council, the final report shall also set forth a process for user acceptance testing and for soliciting, accepting and resolving stakeholder feedback for continual improvement, including a public service announcement plan to keep all stakeholders informed about access and changes to the online delivery system		EOLWD will comply with this requirement in advance of the final report and looks forward to consulting with the advisory council on the matters of acceptance testing and stakeholder feedback at the appropriate times throughout the development, implementation, testing, and deployment of the system.

Program Status:

The primary focus of the program remains the Commonwealth’s unemployment benefits delivery system and operations. On-schedule progress continues as follows:

1. The first modular phase of the project is the tax and revenue aspects of the unemployment system with a planned deployment date to the employer community and their authorized agents on June 26, 2023.
2. The entire project team has been re-trained on the latest standards and best practices by a company that is expert in fair-access, accessibility, and plain language. This same company continues to provide support to the project team throughout the development life cycles and is providing testing support.
3. The first phase of the project has been largely configured and is undergoing testing by EOLWD and external partners for accessibility, usability, and plain language prior to formal acceptance testing.
4. Plans are being formulated for external accessibility and usability testing in the early part of 2023 along with extensive EOLWD and employer engagement for overall system functionality testing.
5. EOWLD and public stakeholder organizational change management and system usage training planning has been established and engagement with the State’s largest employers and or their payroll agents is underway.
6. All letters and forms to be deployed during the June 2023 go-live have undergone extensive review, re-write and re-formatting for accessibility and access.

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 continues to provide EOLWD with input and EOLWD continues to address and incorporate input from the Advisory Council regarding accessibility and equity.