

## Introduction

In accordance with Chapter 151 of the Acts of 2020, this is the eleventh 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 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 measured by the US Department of Labor on federal performance measures in providing services to the workforce including timely and high-quality services, accessibility, and equity.
- **Operate efficiently and ensure program integrity:** Ensure that benefits are being disbursed for eligible and legitimate unemployment claims and eliminate ineffective or unnecessary business processes to improve streamlined service to customers.
- **Provide accurate, timely and responsive reporting:** Ensure that data is accurate and provided timely, flexibly responding 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	<p>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.</p> <p>During the past quarter, some members of the Advisory Council have been active participants and reviewers in the development of improved communications from DUA to the workforce and employers relating to unemployment benefits delivery. The Advisory Council is providing insights, edits, and comments to ensure that all correspondence is compliant with unemployment law, uses plain language and adheres to accessibility standards.</p>	EOLWD plans to continue to consult with the Advisory Council for expertise and community perspective in the areas of accessibility, access, and adherence to unemployment law.
4	provided further, that the advisory council shall focus and provide feedback on the unemployment online delivery system including alternate methods of access	The Advisory Council continues to provide input and questions regarding alternate methods of access for individuals with barriers to online systems.	Ongoing

	for individuals with barriers to online systems		
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 Advisory Council submitted to EOLWD various documents for recommended requirements and selection criteria that were incorporated into the RFR, were used for bid evaluation, and were incorporated into the contract for a new system as they related to accessibility and fair 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 Advisory Council on the following dates:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• March 18, 2021</li> <li>• November 17, 2021</li> <li>• February 25, 2022</li> <li>• August 23, 2022</li> <li>• December 6, 2022</li> <li>• March 28, 2023</li> <li>• August 9, 2023</li> <li>• November 29, 2023</li> <li>• March 20, 2024</li> <li>• July 17, 2024</li> </ul> <p>At the release of this report, the most recent meeting with the Secretary was scheduled for October 16, 2024.</p>	The Secretary will continue to meet with the Advisory Council quarterly or as close to quarterly as calendars allow.
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 previously submitted reports on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• June 30, 2021</li> <li>• October 19, 2021</li> <li>• March 4, 2022</li> <li>• July 8, 2022</li> <li>• November 14, 2022</li> <li>• March 1, 2023</li> <li>• August 17, 2023</li> <li>• November 2, 2023</li> <li>• March 21, 2024</li> </ul>	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		Requirement fulfilled and completed

	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		
11	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		Requirement fulfilled and completed
12	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 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		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 be released in two or more modular releases.

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.
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### **Program Status:**

EOLWD successfully launched the portion of the new unemployment system that supports employer registration and administration, and tax administration delivery system and operations (known as Release 1 – Tax) on September 12, 2023. Since going live, the system has been working as expected and feedback from the employer community remains positive. Our vendor, FAST Enterprises, continues to meet or exceed expectations on all system Service Level Agreements such as system availability, system performance, resolution of issues found, and customer feedback.

EOLWD began efforts for the development and deployment of the unemployment benefits system (known as Release 2-Benefits) on December 6, 2023, which will continue for approximately 18 months. The final release of the new unemployment system, deployment of Release 2, is currently estimated to go live in May 2025, assuming the extensive testing for compliance, quality, accessibility, and usability ensures a prepared system is ready for Massachusetts workers and employers.

During the third calendar quarter of 2024, development and configuration of the new system continued to ensure compliance with all state and federal laws and regulations. Additionally, a new Accessibility vendor was procured to provide accessibility testing services to the project team. The Accessibility vendor was onboarded and initial rounds of accessibility testing began in September, the goal of which is to validate that all web content meets accessibility guidelines. Usability testing also began in September. Usability testing is being conducted to validate the user experience and make sure the new system is easy to use for DUA customers. Four rounds of Usability testing were planned, with testing scheduled to finish in November. The business testing phase began as scheduled on September 30<sup>th</sup>. During the business testing phase, DUA employees test the functionality of the new system to make sure it is working as expected. Business testing is scheduled to continue into March 2025.

### **Progress on Accessibility and Engagement with the Advisory Council**

EOLWD appreciates the input and collaboration with the Advisory Council regarding accessibility for the unemployment benefits system. EOLWD continues to meet with the Advisory Council every other week throughout the initiative. 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. Advisory Council members were provided with the opportunity to review and provide feedback on the accessibility procurement prior to its publication. All Advisory Council members were also offered the opportunity to participate in Usability testing. A number of the Council members participated in Usability testing and their input has been valuable.