

Charles D. Baker
Governor

Karyn Polito
Lieutenant Governor



Marylou Sudders
Secretary

Mary Sheehan
Acting Commissioner

Report on Agency Paper Reduction Efforts

April 2022



DEPARTMENT OF TRANSITIONAL ASSISTANCE REPORT ON AGENCY PAPER REDUCTION EFFORTS

APRIL 2022

OVERVIEW

Section 32 of Chapter 158 of the Acts of 2014 required the Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA) to “develop, implement and maintain a plan to reduce the use of paper records and documentation and to eliminate the sole reliance on such paper records for its operations.”

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSITIONAL ASSISTANCE MISSION

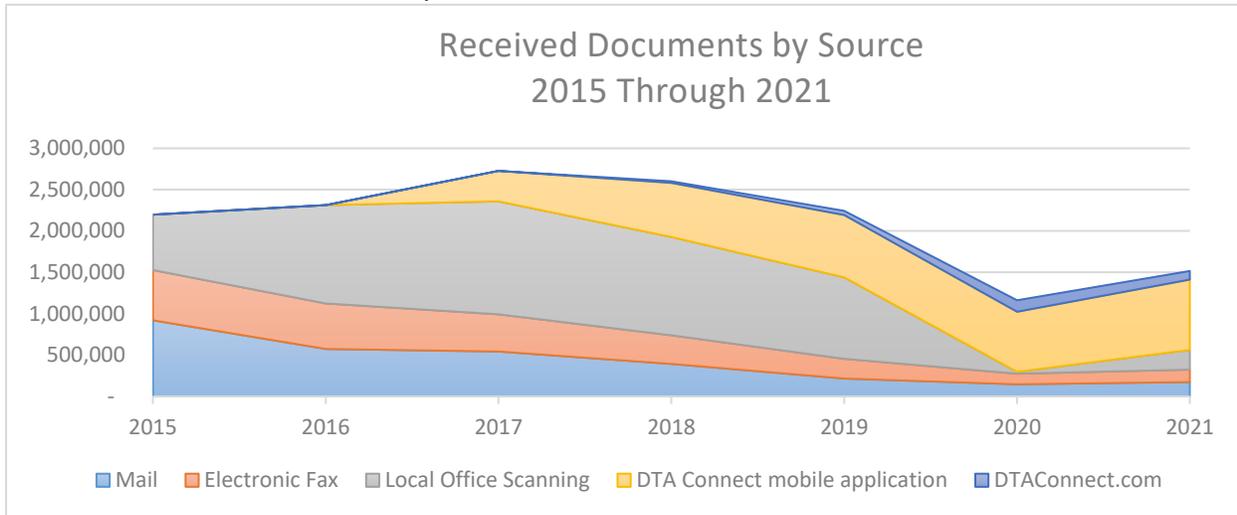
DTA’s mission is to assist and empower low-income individuals and families to meet their basic needs, improve their quality of life, and achieve long-term economic self-sufficiency. DTA offers a comprehensive system of programs and supports to help individuals and families achieve greater economic self-sufficiency, including food and nutritional assistance, economic assistance, and employment supports. DTA serves one out of every seven people in the Commonwealth including working families, children, older adults, and people with disabilities.

ELECTRONIC DOCUMENT MANAGEMENT CENTER

In 2014, DTA partnered with the Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS) and MassHealth to implement an Electronic Document Management Center (EDMC). Located in Taunton, EDMC serves as the backbone of DTA’s paper reduction efforts. In conjunction with DTA’s business process redesign, EDMC was established with a focus on streamlining client case processing by DTA caseworkers throughout the Commonwealth.

Today, EDMC plays a vital role in the day to day operations of the agency. All physical mail sent to local offices is rerouted to EDMC for digital scanning and indexing. DTA monitors the volume of documents handled by the EDMC each year. The following chart displays annual volume of documents handled by EDMC by document source from 2015 through 2021, including documents received via the DTA Connect platform.

Chart 1. Received Documents by Source



* Each document averages 7 pages

Note: the DTA Connect mobile application was launched in 2017. The DTA Connect web application was launched in 2018.

Since 2015, there has been a significant shift in the type of documentation that is handled by the EDMC each year. The amount of paper-based documentation that is mailed or faxed has decreased significantly. In 2015, paper-based documents accounted for about 70% of the documents received by EDMC. In 2021, paper-based documents accounted for just 21% of the documents received. Conversely, paperless documentation has become much more prevalent as the agency has continued to strengthen its access-on-demand service model. Almost 80% of the documents processed by the EDMC were sent via paperless sources in 2021, with nearly 60% of documents being submitted via the DTA Connect mobile application.

PUBLIC HEALTH EMERGENCY RESPONSE AND IMPACT ON PAPER REDUCTION

In 2021, DTA continued to focus on modernizing its operations and investing in further technology upgrades to its DTA Connect platform. Through this work, DTA has significantly expanded access for the vast majority of families and individuals receiving services, allowing for virtually all business with the agency to be done without having to visit a local office. In 2021, more than 219,000 new users have begun using the DTA Connect mobile application.

The Department rolled out key technology upgrades to streamline clients experience and further improve benefit processing, including:

- Telephonic signature to decrease processing times of applications and recertifications;
- Proactive text messaging and emailing to provide up-to-date case information for applicants and clients;
- Optical Character Recognition (OCR) technology to accelerate document processing; and,
- New self-service features on the DTA Assistance Line in up to 6 languages.

Building on the efficacy of the agency's proactive case-related text messaging, DTA worked with community partners and sister agencies to connect DTA clients with critical federal and state resources that helped support the health and economic stability of whole families. In calendar year 2021, the agency sent more than 13 million text messages and 1.8 million emails to clients about case-related information or updates from the agency's partners. Throughout 2021, DTA's text message outreach campaigns included sharing information about COVID-19 vaccine availability and safety in partnership with the Department of Public Health (DPH); pandemic-related housing supports through the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD); and the Child Tax Credit and Earned Income Tax Credit.

To support clients with limited access to technology and those who cannot safely access DTA's wide array of remote services, DTA reopened its 20 local offices in June 2021 under a new operating model that focuses on guided self-service options. A client visiting a DTA office is now greeted by a staff member trained in a new customer service model, which allows clients to conduct their urgent business today while also offering them the opportunity to learn about the many remote service options they can use for future business. DTA's broad expansion of options to conduct business with the agency has drastically reduced wait times in our lobbies and has brought daily foot traffic in the offices down to about 20% of what it was pre-pandemic.

RESULTS OF PAPER REDUCTION EFFORTS

DTA continues to make significant progress towards modernizing its business practices and reducing the Department's reliance on paper documentation. The agency is committed to exploring and pursuing innovative ways to build on its access-on demand model and leveraging new technologies that offer clients more convenient, accessible ways to submit documents to the Department from their home computers or mobile devices. As the agency looks towards the future, beyond the COVID-19 pandemic, it will maintain many of the innovations and enhancements that have been implemented in recent months that improve the agency's service delivery, improve convenience for applicants and clients, and also continue reducing the Department's use of paper-based documentation.