

OFFICE OF THE SPECIAL MASTER

Gemmell v. Hawkins – C. A. No. 16-350 WES

Report (#3) to the Court

This Report is filed pursuant to Section IV.A.4 of the Order Appointing Special Master (“Order”).

During this past month I have focused primarily on two matters: the DHS corrective action plan (as required by Section III of the Order) and the timeliness and accuracy of the reporting of timeliness data. A log of my activities is attached.

DHS has developed the work plan attached hereto to address the deficiencies that were identified in prior reports. These deficiencies are based on interviews I conducted with parties that have an interest in the SNA program, including social service personnel, DHS, Deloitte and others. I discussed these deficiencies with DHS and Deloitte, and there was general agreement that these areas need to be addressed to improve timeliness.

The plan includes both technological and staffing improvements, and I will be monitoring this plan, or any amended version of it, closely. Some of the fixes are short term; others are longer term. The portion of the plan that relates to fixing the worker inbox (which is the means by which SNAP applications are allocated to the eligibility technicians (“ETs”)) was to be part of the March upgrade, but it now appears that while the upgrade should be ready, there will be additional time necessary to train the ETS who will be using the inbox and convert the data in the system to the new inbox before it goes on line. This is a disappointment because I think it is key to more timely processing of SNAP applications, but it is better to implement the fix when it is ready than prematurely. Since some of the goals in the plan are longer-term, I am encouraging

DHS to continue to implement short-term fixes to meet the objectives set forth in the Stipulation and Order of Settlement sooner rather than later.

The ACLU has expressed concerns about the plan, including the need to better correlate the tasks identified with the reasons for lack of timeliness, and also the length of time to complete it. I will be addressing these and other concerns with DHS. The ACLU has also made some suggestions for improving timeliness that I will discuss with DHS as well. In the meantime, DHS is continuing to take steps to improve timeliness, which include hiring more ETs (DHS is in the process of hiring and training an additional 70 ETs to process applications for the several programs included in RI Bridges, 17 of which were hired last week), continuing use of overtime to process SNAP applications, engaging a business design consultant to examine workflow so improvements can be made, and continuing to use a separate area in the Providence office dedicated solely to SNAP applications.

DHS issued a timeliness report for December that shows improvement in the processing of both expedited (about 84%) and non-expedited (about 77%) SNAP applications, although in both cases it falls short of the objective of 96% timeliness processing. Everyone agrees that this is unacceptable. There is an issue concerning the accuracy of the numbers in the report and over the treatment and elimination of the backlog that existed at the commencement of my appointment. I am turning my attention to this to resolve the dispute so that the focus will be on meeting the 96% processing standard set forth the Stipulation and Order of Settlement (12)

Respectfully submitted,

/s/ Deming E. Sherman

Special Master

February 3, 2018

cc Counsel of Record (by email)