

OFFICE OF THE SPECIAL MASTER

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

Report (#7) to the Court

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

During the past month I have continued to meet with the parties and with Deloitte Consulting to review implementation of the work plan to improve the timeliness of the processing of SNAP applications. A log of my activities is attached.

For the month of April, the Department of Human Services (“DHS”) reported timeliness percentages as follows: 90.2% for expedited SNAP applications and 90.2% for non-expedited SNAP applications. The expedited application percentage for April is slightly better than for March (87.8%) and the non-expedited application percentage is significantly better than for March (77.9%). The standard to be achieved on both an initial and continuing basis remains 96% for both categories, which DHS now is approaching due to a series of technological fixes, identification of causes for untimeliness and remedying them (as previously reported), an improved registration/indexing process, and the assignment of an increased number of DHS staff dedicated solely to the processing of SNAP applications. The month-to-month progress that has been made is shown on the accompanying chart entitled “Timeliness Over Time”.

The May 19 upgrade to the worker inbox and related programs was delayed because more testing of the technology is needed. This is a significant upgrade, but it is important that the necessary testing be complete and satisfactory before the upgrade goes live. The delay relates primarily to the technology, not the DHS training, which has been progressing satisfactorily. The new target date is June 23, which depends on successful testing. The upgrade should help to close the timeliness gap and assist DHS to maintain the 96% standard once

reached. Also, the upgrade should positively affect all social service programs within RI Bridges, not just SNAP.

As reported previously, DHS hired a business design consultant to assess workflow and related matters with the goal of moving applicants through the DHS lobbies more quickly and thereby processing applications faster. The consultant began work in April.

The call center has been a continuing focus of DHS. With my urging, DHS sought permission from the federal Food and Nutritional Service (“FNS”) to allow it to hire an off-site contractor to assist in handling calls for both SNAP applications and other applications for social services that are incorporated within the R. I. Bridges program. FNS has now approved the request of DHS, and new caller assistance should begin in June after training is complete. This should significantly reduce the wait time for applicants. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the number of calls relating to SNAP applications has decreased in the past month.

I expect the timeliness percentages will remain above 90% in May. My goal remains to achieve compliance in June 2018, although that goal may be affected by the delay in the worker inbox upgrade.

Respectfully submitted,

/s/ Deming E. Sherman

Special Master

June 1, 2018

cc Counsel of Record (by email)