

**OFFICE OF THE SPECIAL MASTER**

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

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**Report (#8) 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 timeliness of the processing of SNAP applications. A log of my activities is attached.

For the month of May, the Department of Human Services (“DHS”) reported timeliness percentages as follows: 92.7% for expedited SNAP applications and 92.5% for non-expedited SNAP applications. The expedited application percentage for May is slightly higher than for April (90.2 %) and the non-expedited application percentage for May also is slightly higher than for April (90.2 %). DHS processed 4,195 applications in May of which 3,883 were processed timely. This means that in May DHS was short of the 96% timeliness goal/standard by 144 applications. This has been accomplished by DHS through a combination of technological fixes, identification of causes for untimeliness and remedying them, an improved registration/indexing process, and the assignment of an increased number of DHS staff dedicated solely to the processing of SNAP applications. Over the past 6 months DHS has continued to add eligibility and customer services staff that has resulted in more employees processing SNAP (and other) applications. The month-to-month progress is shown on the accompanying chart entitled “Timeliness Over Time”.

The June 23 upgrade (sometimes referred to as a “release”) to the worker inbox and related programs unfortunately was delayed because more testing of the technology was

needed. The new target date is July 21. This is a complicated upgrade that requires substantial testing, and it includes improved features for both the eligibility technicians (“ETs”) and their supervisors. Among other things, there will be a “dashboard” on each computer screen that will enable the ETs to see quickly what applications need to be processed forthwith and will enable them to check those applications that are awaiting back-up documents or a client interview. It essentially will eliminate the paper process that is currently used. A supervisor will have the capability to check on all applications in process and can determine what applications are nearing the required dates for timely processing.

After my most recent meeting with Deloitte, I have a reasonable expectation that the release will be properly tested and implemented on July 21. I also think that the upgrade should help to close the timeliness gap and, more significantly, assist DHS in maintaining the 96% standard once reached. The upgrade affects all programs in the R. I. Bridges system and should positively affect the processing of applications for those programs as well.

The business design consultant hired by DHS has been working with DHS employees to improve workflow with the goal of moving applicants through the DHS lobbies more quickly and thereby processing applications faster. The results of the consultant have been successful to date, and “wait times” in the lobbies have been reduced. DHS is collecting data on this to enable an objective evaluation of the situation.

With respect to the call center, DHS, with the approval of FNS, hired a vendor on a short-term contract to assist in handling calls for both SNAP applications and other applications for social services that are incorporated in the R. I. Bridges program. The vendor will be situated off site. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the number of calls relating to SNAP applications has

decreased in the past month and wait times have also decreased. DHS should have data in another month that will evidence the impact of the vendor.

I expect the timeliness percentages will remain at about 90% in June, although there may be a small dip from May after an outage that occurred in early June affected several state computer systems, including that of DHS. This interrupted the processing of applications and it is expected that it will contribute to a reduction in timeliness. This outage had nothing to do with UHIP/R. I. Bridges, but apparently was the result of a cyber attack.

Respectfully submitted,

/s/ Deming E. Sherman

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Special Master

July 2, 2018

cc Counsel of Record (by email)