



Rhode Island Department of Human Services

25 Howard Avenue, Building 57

Cranston, RI 02920

Phone: (401) 462-2121 Fax: (401) 462-6594

October 18, 2023

The Honorable Patricia A. Serpa
Chair, House Committee on Oversight
State House, Room 101
82 Smith Street
Providence, RI 02903

Dear Chair Serpa:

Please accept the attached report as the state's most recent update on the RIBridges system, which covers the reporting period September 16, 2023 – October 15, 2023. This document provides monthly updates on the following topics:

- System Performance and Improvement
- RI Department of Human Services (DHS) Employee Training
- Pending Applications
- SNAP Timeliness and Lobby/DHS Call Center Summaries
- CCAP Off-Cycle Payments
- Correspondence with Federal Partners (if any)

We appreciate your continued advocacy on behalf of those we serve, your interest in the health of the RIBridges system and the progress made to address outstanding issues. Please contact me should you have any questions or concerns.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kimberly Merolla-Brito".

Kimberly Merolla-Brito, Director
RI Department of Human Services



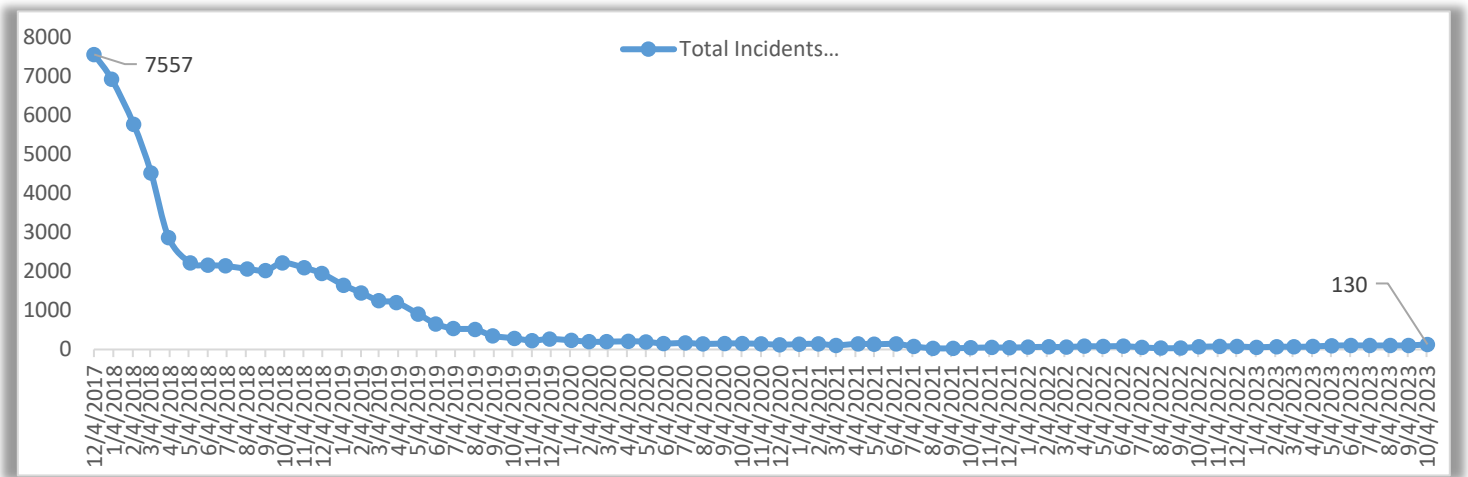
RI Bridges: Monthly Update

October 2023

Our team takes its charge seriously in promoting health, nurturing quality of life and being there for Rhode Islanders when needed. Our oversight of the work on the RI Bridges system is an important part of the equation. System stabilization remains a priority for DHS, and we continue our focus on ensuring full system compliance. This report provides an update on our efforts and progress to date.

SYSTEM PERFORMANCE + IMPROVEMENT

Due to a focused effort on consistent and stable system operations, the number of new and existing incidents (when the system does not operate as expected for a DHS customer, worker or provider) has decreased by 98 percent since December 2017. As of October 5, 2023, there were 130 open incidents. While the current open incidents represent minor technical bugs discovered within RI Bridges, this total is partially impacted by the Rhode Island Works (RIW) technical discrepancy referenced later in this report that has no impact on the customer experience. Open incidents can also be indicative of other factors such as updates having unintended bugs and system enhancements helping flag new discrepancies, which collectively helps the agency make improvements to the system. DHS will continue to closely monitor open incidents, but the current total remains well below other historical points.



DHS STAFFING

DHS continues to progress in hiring candidates for identified critical positions. From January 2022 through December 2022, DHS filled 196 positions through a combination of promotional opportunities, lateral transfers, and new hires. The cumulative hiring count beginning January 1, 2023, at DHS, is 150 positions. Since the last report in September 2023, DHS hired seven employees who have started in their new roles. These include:

- 1 Clinical Training Specialist
- 1 Eligibility Technician III
- 1 Employment Career and Advisor
- 1 Supervising Eligibility Technician
- 3 Eligibility Technician I

DHS TRAINING

Training Overview

Training Topic	Training Date	# Of Training Hours	# Of New Staff	# Of Current Staff
Modified Adjusted Gross Income (MAGI) (4 – full day sessions)	9-18-23 thru 9-22-23	18	0	18
SNAP ABAWD For Supervisors (2 – three-hour sessions)	9-18-2023	6	0	8
Computer Literacy: Basic Excel and Word (2 – three-hour sessions)	9-18-2023	6	0	21
Setting Boundaries (1- one-hour session)	9-19-2023	1	0	7
LTSS Office Hours (1 – one-hour session)	9-20-2023	1	0	8
Coaching for Managers (1 – one-hour session)	9-21-2023	1	0	12
Ex Parte Learning Series (2- full day sessions)	9-25-23 thru 9-26-23	9	0	14
RIW Office Hours (2 – one - hour sessions)	9-26-2023 10-10-2023	2	0	15
CCAP Office Hours (1 – one – hour session)	9-26-2022	1	0	13
Immigration Training (1 – two-hour session)	9-26-2023	2	0	39
Customer Service Aid Learning Series (2 – full day sessions)	9-28-23 thru 9-29-23	9	0	3
New Hire Orientation (3 – full day sessions)	10-2-23 thru 10-5-23	13.5	6	0
Multicultural Competency Learning Series: Module One (1 – one-and-a-half-hour session)	10-2-2023	1.5	0	10
Community Medicaid Learning Series (4 – full day sessions)	10-6-23 thru 10-13-23	18	0	20
Appeals Learning Sessions (4- three-hour session)	10-12-2023 10-13-2023	12	0	76
	Totals	101	6	264*

Note: the asterisk number included projected attendance to trainings that have been scheduled and staff are registered to attend

Self-Directed Learning: Learning Management System			
Rhode Island Learning Center Trainings (These trainings are self-directed)	Course Title	Number of staff Enrolled	Number of Staff Completed
	FTI-2023	1,021	520

* This number is duplicated. Our participants are enrolled in various trainings.	HIPAA, and Confidentiality-2023	1,021	534
	Asset Verification System	151	117
	Customer Portal	365	262
	Community Medicaid: Supplemental AVS Video	100	55
	Domestic Violence 101	329	186
	Medical Renewal Refresher	288	184
	OCSS: Child Support Refresher Process	288	183
	Sept. 22 Knowledge Transfer 7.40	466	222
	Sept. 22 Knowledge Transfer 7.41	466	218
	Nov. 22 Knowledge Transfer	368	177
	Dec. 22 Knowledge Transfer	363	194
	March 2023 Knowledge Transfer	366	196
	April 2023 Knowledge Transfer	374	191
	June 2023 Knowledge Transfer	377	145
	Sept. 2023 Knowledge Transfer	373	201
	Oct. 2023 Knowledge Transfer	368	53
	RIW Miniseries	189	130
	SNAP: Case Maintenance	372	238
	SNAP: Case Notes	301	194
	RIbridges: Scheduling Refresher	296	198
	RIbridges: Visit Record	366	212
	SNAP: Reinvestment Updates	360	173
	SNAP: Eligibility Determination	276	195
	SNAP: ABAWD	337	208
	SNAP: ABAWD Refresher	303	224
	SNAP: ESAP	366	253
	VCC: EAD Telephonic Signature	56	24
	VCC: LTSS Telephonic Signature	53	16
	VCC: Telephonic Signature	131	46
	VCC: Call Back Functionality	125	64
Totals	10,615*	5,813*	

Training Descriptions

New Hire Orientation: The goal of the session is to provide new employees with all the pertinent information they need to begin working at DHS and to familiarize them with organizational policies and procedures. Besides introducing employees to the RIBridges system, participants learn:

- The organizational hierarchy
- DHS's mission and vision
- A broader understanding of DHS programs and services
- Policies and procedures regarding payroll, dress code, and other practices
- Rules, regulations, and laws surrounding Federal Tax Information (FTI), Civil Rights, Voter Registration, and Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA)
- Basic navigation and data collection training in RIBridges

Rhode Island Works (RIW) Office Hours: RIW Office Hours provide staff with an open forum to ask general system, policy, or case specific questions related to RIW cases they are processing.

Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) Office Hours: CCAP Office Hours provide an open forum for staff to ask general system and policy questions or case-specific questions related to child care that are being processed

SNAP Able Bodied Adults without Dependents (ABAWD) for Supervisors: This session provides participants with an overview of SNAP ABAWD changes, specifically, age categories, qualifying ABAWDS and new exception definitions. Through scenario-based learning, participants enhance skills related to decision making, problem solving, and communication.

From Arrival to Integration: Learning Immigration Laws for Newcomers Training: This session provides an opportunity to collaborate and engage in discussions with experts and professionals in the field of immigrant and refugee services to gain insights and best practices for screening and determining eligibility for public assistance. Participants gain an understanding of the refugee resettlement processing, resettlement services in Rhode Island, the various immigration statuses, demographic trends, cultural perspectives, and available resources for refugees and immigrants offered through the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR).

Computer Literacy Trainings: This training provides participants with a tutorial on using Word and Excel. Aimed at helping participants understand the commands and functions available within these programs, the training program helps participants learn functions that help improve their efficiency when using these programs.

Modified Adjusted Gross Income (MAGI) Learning Series: The MAGI Medicaid Learning Series provides participants with an overview of the Medicaid hierarchy, and introduction to MAGI Medicaid policy and process. The session also provides additional information to help participants familiarize them to RIBridges screens related to MAGI as well as information on inter-agency units. The learning series includes the MAGI Medicaid Learning Lab, where participants apply learning concepts in the RIBridges production environment with support from a cross-agency team. The team is made up of staff development (trainer) and operations (supervisor) with the goal of providing hands-on experience.

Long Term Services and Supports (LTSS) office hours: LTSS office hours are led by Rose Leandre, LTSS Administrator. LTSS social case worker supervisors, eligibility technicians, and supervisors who are processing LTSS applications are encouraged to attend. Participants are encouraged to bring questions related to LTSS case processing and any recent updates made to the special circumstances and level of care pages for the LTSS program.

Setting Boundaries: This session aims to help participants effectively manage priorities and boundaries as part of a broader time management training aimed at helping participants be successful in their roles. In this class, participants learn a few

boundary setting best practices, how to define limits, setting expectations with others, and staying consistent with boundaries.

Coaching for Supervisors: In this session, supervisors and senior staff are provided with tools and tips to help them foster professional relationships with staff in a way that encourages, motivates, and supports their colleagues and the work they do each day.

Customer Service Aid Learning Series: The Customer Service Aide (CSA) training, facilitated over two full day sessions, provides participants with an introduction and overview of CSA job responsibilities. It also provides a summary of the different DHS programs, an overview of the backend of the system, and an outline of the front and back office functions. This training dives into processing application registration and expedited SNAP. The session also covers case association, scanning and indexing, scheduling appointments and asset verification.

Ex Parte Learning Series: The Ex Parte Virtual Learning Series provides participants an overview of Ex Parte policy and the Integrated Eligibility System (IES) when an individual faces possible closure to their current Medicaid. It also describes the different forms of Medicaid that could potentially be accessed through special circumstance questions.

Community Medicaid learning Series: Through these full day sessions, participants gain an understanding of the difference between the two Medicaid coverage groups as well as eligibility requirements for community Medicaid. Participants also learn to integrate learning concepts within RIBridges, learn to interpret Medicaid eligibility results in RIBridges, and explore health plan enrollments at Managed Care Organizations (MCO).

Multicultural Competency Learning Series: The Multicultural Competence Modules offer contextualized, scaffolded anti-oppression educational workshops for DHS employees. There are four foundational modules that introduce participants to frameworks, concepts, and strategies so DHS personnel are better equipped to advance its diversity, equity, and inclusion strategic goals individually and collectively. Each module is presented weekly and each session is 1.5-2 hours. The format for the sessions includes facilitated dialogue, with individual and group activities.

Appeals Learning Session: This in-person training class is designed for supervisors, senior supervisors, and all eligibility technicians, with a focus on the appeals process in RIBridges. Specifically, participants will discuss the process when a customer (or authorized representative) requests an opportunity to present their case to a higher authority if they believe their eligibility determination is incorrect.

PENDING NEW APPLICATIONS

The State continues to prioritize access to benefits. As of October 12, 2023, the total number of pending new applications across all programs was 6,257. The total overdue, pending applications awaiting State action has remained stable from September 2023, reflecting a 1.8% difference. This highlights the impact of effective operational changes despite challenges associated with shifts in federal policies and the ongoing Medicaid Redetermination work. The total current pending caseload is within the typical range DHS processes, but some variances should be expected as the workload associated with Medicaid Redeterminations steadily increases.

With regards to RI Works (RIW), the reported caseload is an estimate based on a manually retrieved total until a system fix can be implemented later this year, which would then accurately report information from data pulls. The technical discrepancy, expected to be fixed by the end of the year, has no impact on the customer experience.

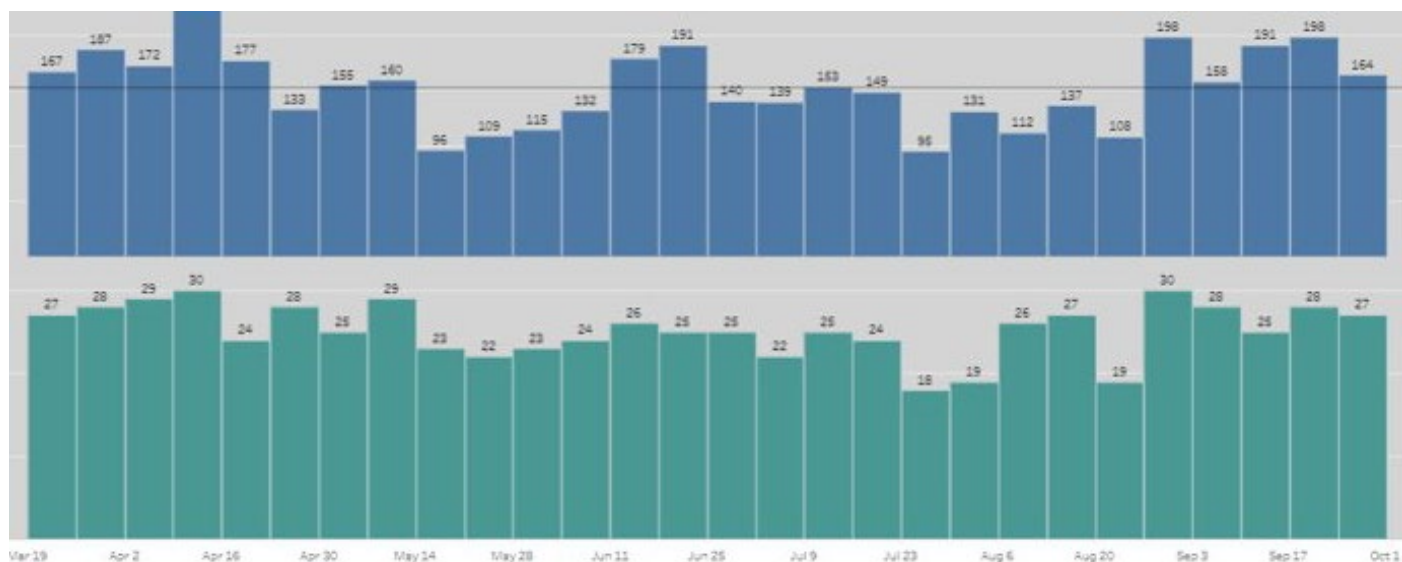
DHS also continues to see progress in the way that erroneous, aged and duplicate applications are excluded from the overall pending Undetermined Medical backlog. Our IT vendor and state team are continuing analysis on the existing overdue undetermined medical (1,816 cases) and prioritizing recommendations for closure, purging and merging of duplicate cases. DHS has cleared the majority of cases needing to be archived, and the Department continues to target incomplete applications – submitted via the Customer Portal – while performing outreach to customers.

On February 8, 2023, DHS launched a pilot called Processing Wednesdays intended to prioritize call center staff to process applications, update customer files, complete reports and other operational tasks, which supports efforts to reduce the backlog. All regional offices remain open with regular services available according to their posted schedule.

As of October 1, 2023, DHS continues to see more cases completed or worked on Processing Wednesdays when compared to cases worked on regular Wednesdays (about 100 cases) prior to launch. The increased number of tasks completed on average, aided with the support of Processing Wednesdays, have helped reduce the backlog and directly reduced the need for customers to seek additional support by phone or in-person.

DHS’s operational adjustments and initiatives, such as Processing Wednesdays, have contributed to an approximate 43% reduction¹ in overdue pending applications awaiting state action since January 2023. Please refer to the chart below for the latest available data regarding the pilot and caseload.

TASKS COMPLETED ON WEDNESDAYS



The top bar graph represents tasks completed on a Wednesday. Please note cases worked on Processing Wednesdays for July 2023 saw a decline because eligibility technicians were attending critical training related to Long Term Services and Support (LTSS). The bar graph at the bottom represents the number of available Call Center staff for the specified Processing Wednesday.

-see next page-

¹ January 2023 (4,274) to October 2023 (2,400) pending applications awaiting state action declined by 1,872 cases, which is a 43.8% reduction from 4,274.

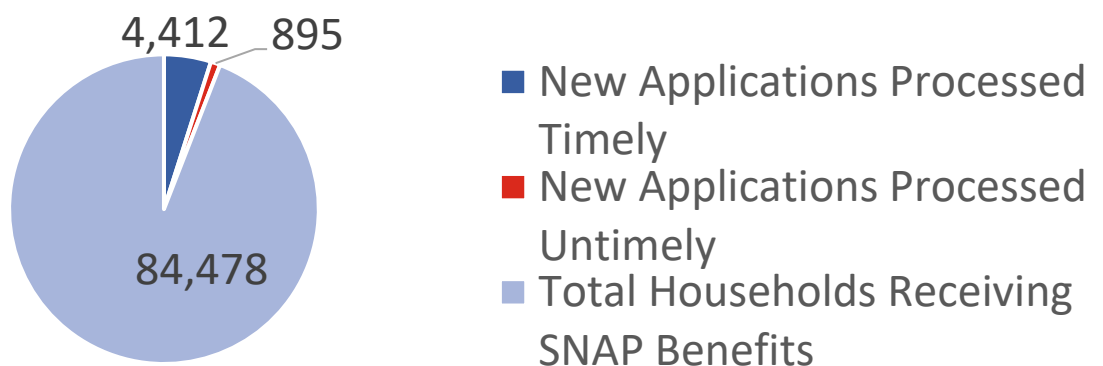
	Not Overdue			Overdue			Total
	Client	State	Total	Client	State	Total	Grand Total
SNAP Expedited	39	417	456	32	91	123	579
SNAP Non-Expedited	566	535	1101	46	50	96	1,197
CCAP	15	298	313	11	68	79	392
GPA Burial	0	14	14	0	3	3	17
SSP	0	64	64	0	2	2	66
GPA	27	117	144	15	11	26	170
*RIW	182	209	391	24	29	53	444
Undetermined Medical	28	477	505	66	1,816	1882	2,387
Medicaid-MAGI	25	30	55	20	19	39	94
Medicare Premium Payments	8	238	246	4	14	18	264
Medicaid Complex	7	120	127	9	247	256	383
LTSS	9	203	212	2	50	52	264
Grand Total	906	2722	3628	229	2,400	2,629	6,257

Analysis continues on the existing overdue undetermined medical (1,816 cases) and the state team and vendor are prioritizing recommendations for closure, purging and merging of duplicate cases. DHS is also targeting incomplete applications submitted via the Customer Portal.

*This is an estimate as of October 12, 2023, of pending applications for RI Works and is subject to change.

SNAP TIMELINESS

In September 2023, **84,478** households received benefits. Approximately, **83** percent of new SNAP applications were processed in a timely manner. Approximately 17 percent of new applications were processed untimely.



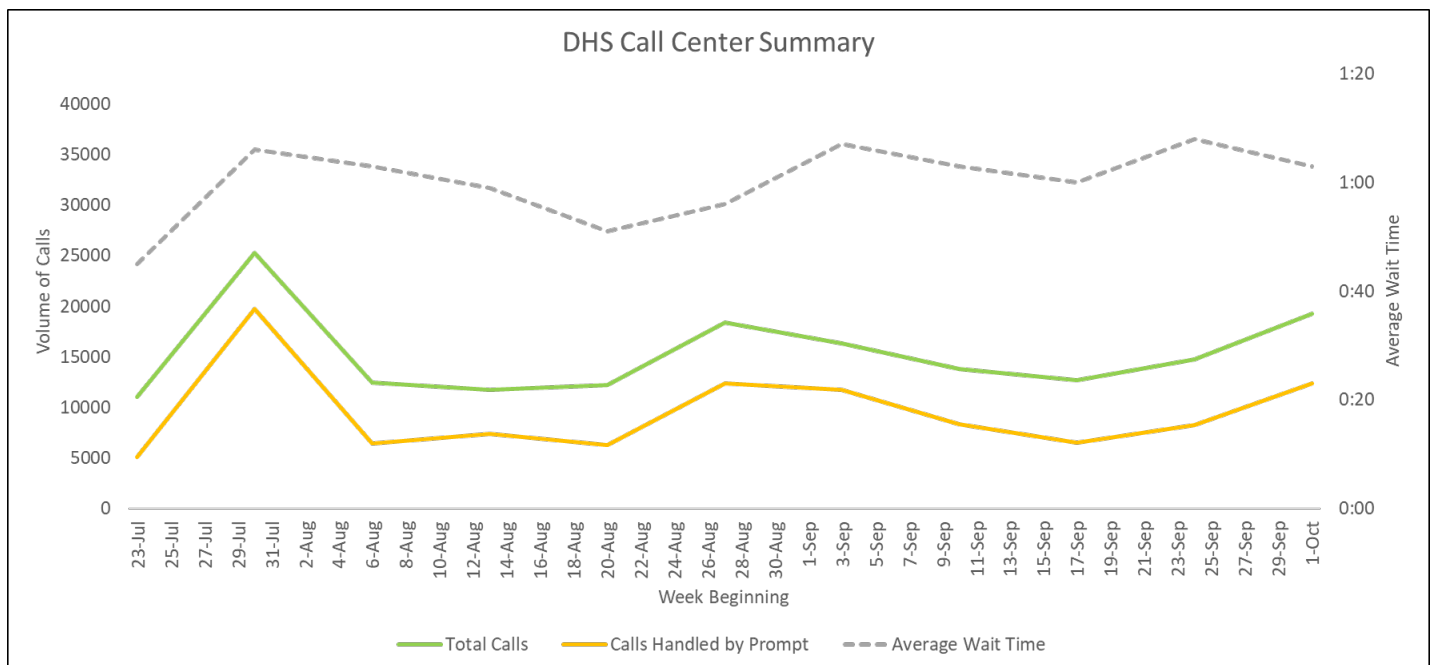
CALL CENTER

Between the weeks beginning August 27, 2023, and October 8, 2023, the average wait time to connect to DHS staff was approximately **1 hour and 5 minutes**. DHS recognizes this average wait time remains longer than it should be and the agency has implemented several initiatives to improve efficiencies.

DHS’s call back functionality, available strategically in the morning, helps reduce the time customers spend waiting on the phone. Customers who choose to use this functionality wait around 17 minutes on the phone and are assisted the same day. Customers may experience longer than usual wait times during high call volume days if they are not able or do not choose to opt into the implemented call back functionality. The call back functionality is available to customers across all programs.

Additionally, to assist with managing increased Medicaid call volume, on August 15, 2023, DHS launched a pilot to support Medicaid Modified Adjusted Gross Income (MAGI) callers by routing appropriate Medicaid calls from the DHS Call Center to the HSRI contact center. Initial reports are showing faster customer service through decreased wait time for MAGI callers.

DHS continually assesses its available resources and has started to shift additional resources to manage the SNAP volume through the initial success of this pilot. The busiest week at the Call Center was the week beginning October 1, 2023, with **12,389** calls to DHS. DHS continually monitors and reviews Call Center data to effectuate appropriate operational changes to achieve its goal of reducing wait times to 30 minutes.



Recent changes in average Call Center wait times reflect the ongoing Medicaid Redetermination efforts statewide and aligns with the increased cohort of active renewals requiring action from the customer.

CCAP OFF-CYCLE PAYMENTS (PENDING)

Below are the total number of batch payments made to child care providers for current reporting period through October 15, 2023.

Batch	Date Issued	# of Providers	Amount after Union/PAC removed
7	9/7/2023	496	\$2,473,586.21
7A	9/8/2023	21	\$86,095.19
7B	9/15/2023	37	\$68,260.73
8	9/21/2023	515	\$2,333,770.93
8A	9/22/2023	19	\$62,400.77
8B	9/29/2023	26	\$95,694.01

	Providers	Payments
Total Batch (7, 7A, & 7B)	554	\$2,627,942.13
Off-cycle (7A & 7B)	58	\$154,355.92
Provider off-cycle/total	11.69%	-
Payments off-cycle/total	6.24%	-

	Providers	Payments
Total Batch (8, 8A, & 8B)	560	\$2,491,865.71
Off-cycle (8A & 8B)	45	\$158,094.78
Provider off-cycle/total	8.74%	-
Payments off-cycle/total	6.77%	-

UPDATE ON RECERTIFICATIONS PROGRESS

Medicaid recertifications began on April 1, 2023, with a cohort of approximately 9,400 recertifications sent to customers. For the month of October, DHS is processing a total of **15,731 case renewals**, with approximately **7,600 case renewals requiring action from the customer**.

Medicaid renewal cases are anticipated to steadily increase in alignment with the increase of passive renewals, which require no action from customers. DHS continues to work with numerous State agencies, Managed Care Organizations, advocates, and community-based organizations to reach and inform as many affected Rhode Islanders as possible. Outreach also continues to inform families with children that their renewals will not start until January 2024.

The Executive Office of Health and Human Services awarded mini-grants to enlist the support of community partners to reach the broadest group of Rhode Islanders, with special attention paid to those most at risk in the renewal process. Some of these groups include individuals that may have barriers to obtaining this information, and those that may need assistance to complete the process.

In addition, the state has continued to update the staycovered.ri.gov website with notices, marketing collateral, and other resources such as a data dashboard to help support the Medicaid renewal process. In May 2023, DOA awarded a contract to Deloitte to provide data processing support so that DHS eligibility technicians can focus on Medicaid redeterminations through July 2024. Currently, all temporary support staff have been recruited and onboarded to provide data processing support to the DHS Eligibility Technicians working on Medicaid Redeterminations.

CORRESPONDENCE WITH FEDERAL PARTNERS

The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services and the USDA Food and Nutrition Service are important partners to the State. DHS continues to communicate regularly during the monthly touchpoints to review progress made.

-end-