

Report on State Agency
Call Center Staffing
Solution Pursuant to
Item 85 in the 2022
Appropriations Act

Authority: Item 85 of the 2022 Appropriations Act directs the Department of General Services (DGS), in conjunction with the Virginia Information Technologies Agency (VITA), to inventory state agency call center staffing solutions currently in place and make recommendations on the benefit of developing a statewide standing call center staffing contract.

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OBJECTIVE

Item 85 of the 2022 Appropriations Act directs the Department of General Services (DGS), in collaboration with the Virginia Information Technologies Agency (VITA), to inventory state agency call center contractual staffing solutions currently in place and make recommendations on the benefit of developing a statewide standing call center staffing augmentation contract. The budget item requires DGS and VITA to report their findings and recommendations to the Chairs of the House Committee on Appropriations and Senate Committee on Finance and Appropriations by December 31, 2022.

BACKGROUND

During the 2022 General Assembly session, item 85 of the introduced budget was amended to include the above language directing DGS and VITA to study call centers used by state agencies. Such language was added in response to a policy recommendation contained in the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission's (JLARC) November 2021 report, "Operations and Performance of the Virginia Employment Commission." JLARC noted that the Virginia Employment Commission (VEC) did not have adequate staffing in call centers to respond to increased volume during the pandemic, resulting in poor call center performance. However, JLARC reported that VEC recently has taken steps to increase call center staffing and better manage high-volume calls by contracting with an additional third-party vendor.

SURVEY OF STATE AGENCY CALL CENTERS

To assist in collecting data for this report, DGS and VITA created and distributed a survey to state agencies to identify (i) whether such agencies have a need for a call center, (ii) how such agencies are addressing any such needs for a call center, and (iii) if such agencies have a call center. If agencies do have a call center, (a) where such call centers are located, (b) how such call centers are staffed, and (c) the procurement method used for such call centers, among other information.

The survey contained 38 questions, some of which were conditional based upon the specific response provided by the agency. Of the 38 questions, three requested information regarding the responding agency and representative responding to the survey; five inquired about the responding agency's current call center utilization; three asked about the location of the responding agency's current call center, if any; 19 inquired about the responding agency's current staffing solutions; and eight inquired about additional parameters related to the responding agency's current call center, if any. The survey was distributed to the directors of 102 agencies, of which 106 agency responses were received. Each

agency was asked to submit one response for each call center solution they currently have, so some agencies provided more than one survey response.

Survey Questions and Responses:

Questions 1-8: Agency information and current call center utilization

After collecting basic information on the responding agency and the responding agency's representative, the survey asked whether the responding agency uses a call center. A total of 74 (or 68 percent) of the responding agencies confirmed they currently utilize a call center and, of that total, 62 (or 91 percent) verified that the call center is part of the ongoing agency operations. Only 7 (or 10 percent) of the responding agencies indicated they are utilizing the call center as part of a temporary need in response to a specific situation. Of the responding agencies that stated that they do not currently use a call center, three (or 9 percent) indicated they have considered establishing a call center. Additionally, the survey requested that the responding agencies provide specific information about the support services administered through their call center(s). The responding agencies identified a wide range of such services. The list below identifies the most commonly referenced services:

- Information technology support (during and after business hours)
- Fraud, compliance, and ethics reporting
- Financial aid support
- Campus police and security support
- Human resource support
- Electric service distribution and operations support
- Building maintenance operations support
- E-Z Pass customer support
- Transportation customer support
- Medicaid program support
- State park reservation support
- Procurement system support
- Community college administrative and student support
- Food assistance program support
- Business expansion support
- Retirement services support
- Public utility support
- Fleet program support
- Social service program support
- Crisis support
- Rent and mortgage relief and program support

- Court debt collections support
- Delinquent collections support
- Tax related support
- Private security and bail bonds support
- Timber harvesting support
- Motor vehicle customer support
- Wildlife activity constituent support
- Elections support

Questions 9-11: Information related to call center locations

The survey results showed that 55 (or 85 percent) of the responding agencies' call centers are housed in Virginia. Responding agencies that indicated their call centers are not located in Virginia identified locations including the following for their current call centers:

- Alabama
- California
- Kentucky
- Missouri
- North Carolina
- Oregon
- Wisconsin
- Across multiple states

Of the existing call center operation locations, the responding agencies indicated that 20 (or 31 percent) are located in an agency office building and 23 (or 36 percent) are located in a privately owned building. Regarding the remaining 21 (or 33 percent) of call center operations located in Virginia, the responding agencies indicated that such operations are provided via approved telework, from remote locations, or via a hybrid arrangement of approved telework and remote locations.

Questions 12-30: How agencies staff their call centers and agencies' procurement method associated with each staffing classification

This portion of the call center survey asked the responding agencies to identify how they staff their call centers. The survey asked agencies if their call centers are staffed with state employees or contract employees, or whether they have instead outsourced the staffing. The survey responses indicated that state employees provide staffing for 33 (or 50 percent) of the responding agencies' call centers, and that 30 (or 94 percent) of such employees are full-time state employees while 14 (or 44 percent) of such employees are part-time state

employees. The responding agencies indicated that they spend approximately \$100,000 to \$1.8 million annually, depending upon the agency, on salaries for the full-time state employees that staff their call centers. Further, the responding agencies indicated that they spend approximately \$16,000 to \$250,000 annually, depending upon the agency, on salaries for the part-time state employees that staff their call centers. Only 22 (or 34 percent) of the responding agencies indicated they utilize contract employees to staff their call centers, and they indicated they spend approximately \$24,000 to \$700,00 annually, depending upon the agency, for such services. Additionally, of the 22 that indicated they do utilize contract employees for staffing, 13 (or 68 percent) of those agencies utilize an established contract to acquire contract employees. The responding agencies indicated that they utilize the following contract satisfy their call center operational needs:

- 46362 (Virginia Department of Transportation)
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- DCR-120120-USD (Department of Conservation and Recreation)
- VCCS-MULTI-21-PPEA-Blackboard (Virginia Community College System)
- DGS-201222-KAG (Department of General Services)
- VA-170822-SAIC (Virginia Information Technologies Agency)
- ELECT-180424-ALL (Department of Elections)

Finally, 24 (or 40 percent) of the responding agencies indicated they outsource their call center staffing. They indicated that they spend approximately \$3,000 to \$298 million annually, depending upon the agency, to outsource their call center staffing. The majority (11) of the responding agencies indicated they outsource their call center staffing indicated that they did so using a Request for Proposals (RFP), while seven agencies indicated they did so using sole source, emergency or other procurement methods to acquire the service. The responding agencies identified 16 contractors as providing the outsourced staff. Only one such contractor was identified by multiple agencies.

Questions 31-38: Focused on the responding agency's current call center needs

The survey asked agencies to provide their call center operational hours. A slight majority, 27 (or 53 percent), of the responding agencies indicated they require their call centers to be operational 24 hours per day, seven days per week, while 24 (or 47 percent) indicated they only need their call centers to be operational during normal business hours on Monday through Friday. The responding agencies indicated that 37 (or 64 percent) of their call centers offer multi-lingual

support and 49 (or 84 percent) support interactions with people who have disabilities. Of the responding agencies 42 (or 72 percent) indicated they provide scripts for their call center operators and 51 (or 88 percent) have reporting available that captures information such as daily/weekly/monthly call volumes, average wait time, average call handle time, etc. Eighty-two percent of the responding agencies indicated that they utilize service level commitments and that they monitor the following criteria:

- Response time
- Satisfaction level
- Resolution time
- Average call handle time
- Quality
- Call volume
- Call capture rate
- Average Speed to Answer (ASA) calls, chats and emails
- Governing regulations

Finally, some of the responding agencies highlighted the following unique aspects of their call centers:

- Additional security and access requirements are in place for operators
- Integration has occurred with phone system programs or applications
- Specialized job aides and internal processes have been created based on agency operations
- Some call centers handle inbound calls only, outbound calls only, or a hybrid of both
- Legislation provides guidelines for certain call center operations
- Agencies have specialized training programs in place
- Specialized technical knowledge requirements apply to certain operators
- Some call centers are primarily operated by home-based staff
- Call center operations and staffing fluctuate based on business needs

CONCLUSION

The data gathered through the survey provides an inventory of call center operations and needs, staffing and fulfillment, and additional parameters that are essential to call center operations for executive branch agencies, as they currently stand. Based upon the information provided by agencies in response to the call center survey, it is evident that there are a variety of call center operations among agencies with varying needs to meet their missions. The data gathered through the survey shows that the call center needs of executive

branch agencies are more complex than anticipated. DGS and VITA are unable to determine at this time if a statewide standing call center staffing augmentation contract would be beneficial as there are many factors to take into consideration, such as market availability of vendors who can meet the various needs of different agencies, the potential impact on the call centers staffed by state employees, and if those call centers would be disbanded and outsourced. The Virginia Department of Human Resources (DHRM) needs to be consulted to gain a better understanding of the financial impact to laying off call center employees who are state employees. DGS and VITA will need to continue efforts to investigate to determine if a statewide call center staffing contract would be beneficial to the Commonwealth.