



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA
Virginia Employment Commission

Demetrios J. Melis
Commissioner

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November 1, 2023

TO: The Honorable Governor Glen Youngkin
The Honorable Richard Saslaw, Chairman, Senate Commerce and Labor
The Honorable Terry Kilgore, Vice Chair, House Commerce and Energy
The Honorable Adam Ebbin, Chairman, Commission on Unemployment
Compensation

FROM: Demetrios J. Melis, Commissioner

RE: Information Technology and System Usability Report

Executive Summary

In accordance with the Appropriation Act, Item 370N from Special Session I, 2023, of the Virginia General Assembly, the Virginia Employment Commission is providing its summary report on user feedback and planned and completed system changes to the Unemployment Insurance benefits information technology system. The VEC instituted its new technology system (VUIS), for filing benefits in November of 2021 and accepted the project in 2022.

From contract award to launch, the development of VUIS took approximately twelve years to complete. The technology was designed for administering federal unemployment programs, rather than as a customer centric product. As a result, some adjustments have been required to be made to the product since its launch. For instance, the system was not designed to address pandemic related programs, which resulted in conversion issues when moving from the VEC's old system to VUIS. These adjustments and conversion issues extended the acceptance process as they required various changes to be made to the system before the VEC could accept the project from the vendor.

Through the Customer Contact Center team, local Virginia Career Works center staff, social media staff, and the Chief Customer Advocate team, the agency has collected feedback directly from customers on the usability of VUIS. In addition to the agency's own information, the VEC has engaged the VCU Wilder School's Performance Management Group (PMG) to survey

claimants on their understanding of the unemployment insurance process, including the usability of VUIS.

Across all methods of feedback, the most common problem that occurred for users was registering or logging into the online portal. With the extensive amount of unemployment insurance claims filed as identity theft during the pandemic, Virginia, like other states, has needed to set its business rules for identity verification to be stringent and require additional verification methods. Online filing activity is monitored daily, and we continue to refine our systems and processes to further improve the ease of use and customer experience. These focused efforts have led to a 73% increase in initial claims filed online since January of this year. Initial claims filed online for the fourth quarter of 2023 continue to trend upward and stand at 45%.

To address remaining impediments to logging into the online portal the agency is expeditiously working to implement an alternative third-party login method, in accordance with a court order, for customers to access our online services. It is anticipated to go live by the end of calendar year 2023. This effort will significantly increase online claim filings resulting in more timely eligibility determinations and receipt of customer's first payments.

The forthcoming improved access to our online services will provide even further downstream customer service and experience improvements for our customer contact center (CCC), addressing the second most common feedback theme, challenges with getting through to a customer service representative. Over half the calls fielded by the CCC relate to problems registering or logging into our online portal. The resulting reduction in call volumes by over 50% will dramatically decrease wait times and improve the ability of callers to reach a customer service representative.

We have taken steps to educate and inform VEC customers and stakeholders regarding the general unemployment insurance program and the requirements for qualifying. Although this may seem secondary to a usability survey, it is critical that the online portal provide tools and access to claimants to understand the questions that are being asked as well as a basic understanding of the UI process. The following represent some notable VEC communication, outreach, and education initiatives:

- Created tutorial videos available on our website and YouTube channel on creating an account online and explaining the UI process. Additional informational videos are being created to explain common problem areas that claimants encounter.
- Customer Advocates conducted educational outreach across 10 regions of the Commonwealth meeting with a variety of partners, stakeholders, community groups, and other state agency service providers to further educate the various representatives on UI qualifications and answer questions. This additional approach exemplifies efforts to ensure knowledge penetration through additional communication mediums and methods.

- Updated the UI Customer Manual to make it easier to understand and focus on the claim filing and job search process.
- Conducting further reviews and analysis to continue improvements to our website based on the feedback received to date.

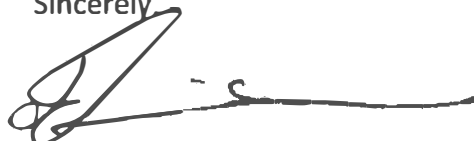
Planned and Completed System Changes

The VEC continues to review its security parameters and make the necessary technical changes regarding identity verification and allowing access to the system. The agency works to isolate suspicious activity through multiple factors including, the Integrity Data Hub shared by the U.S. Department of Labor. The agency will continue to report its findings to the Commission on Unemployment Compensation and post quarterly updates to its website regarding usability. Other measures the agency is taking to improve usability and communications are listed below:

- Informational explanatory icons have been placed throughout the application process to further assist claimants.
- The CCC's Interactive Voice Response system (IVR) is now able to retrieve information from our database and securely provide real-time status updates on a variety of customer inquiries.
- The agency is developing integration of a secondary login method to provide a more robust and secure alternative which is expected to improve identity pass rates for customers that are unable to access through the primary login.
- The VEC continues to monitor and evolve fraud prevention strategies to include partnering with other agencies to assist in identity verification efforts to allow for better customer accessibility while continuing to prevent fraudulent access. This approach is expected to be of greatest positive impact to Virginia residents.

Please do not hesitate to contact me at demetrios.melis@vec.virginia.gov or (804) 786-3001 with any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Demetrios J. Melis', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Demetrios J. Melis
Commissioner