



COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA
DEPARTMENT OF LABOR AND INDUSTRY
HARRISBURG, PENNSYLVANIA 17120

THE SECRETARY

January 24, 2013

Dear Legislator:

In December I informed you of the extraordinary surge in phone calls placed to the unemployment compensation service centers (UCSCs), which resulted in a corresponding surge in busy signals encountered by your constituents. The purpose of this letter is to provide you with an update on the efforts of the department, and the progress that has been made, toward a resolution of this problem.

As you might recall, in October 2012 over 11.6 million calls were placed to UCSCs; and in November 2012, there were over 15.5 million calls. This surge in call numbers occurred at a time when the level of claim submission actually was down. In response, the department has engaged in an intense and focused analysis of all potential causes for the multiplication of calls. Our investigation has identified two primary factors accounting for the dramatic increase in calls: (1) the use of automatic re-dialing technology; and (2) technical problems with the phone system.

The availability of digital programs or applications that can continuously re-dial a phone number is relatively new. The extraordinary volume of calls that these applications generate effectively chokes the phone system, preventing callers from connecting with UCSC representatives. Obviously, the department cannot prevent claimants from utilizing such programs, and the advent of this technology creates a new challenge for the department in managing its impact on the phone system. Through media outlets, the department has sought to educate claimants about the problem and discourage claimants from using such applications. Many legislators have helped to pass that message along to their constituents. Thank you.

Identified technical issues with the phone system have been corrected. When the new phone system was implemented in October 2012, a call routing function was improperly configured, resulting in an imbalance in the distribution of calls to UCSCs across the state. This routing problem made it more difficult for UCSCs to manage incoming calls. Moreover, the effect of the call distribution imbalance was compounded at the Erie UCSC, where for technical reasons phone queues were unable to fill to normal capacity. A significant portion of calls originating from southeast Pennsylvania were being serviced by the Erie UCSC and were adversely affected by this queuing problem. This call routing malfunction was resolved on January 8, 2013.

The department has also made operational adjustments within UC in an effort to meet the demands caused by extraordinarily high call volume. The newly dedicated fax line for claimant inquiries appears to be working well. Claimants are receiving a return call from a UCSC representative within three days of sending a fax. Because UCSC representatives have an

opportunity to review claimants' circumstances prior to placing the return call, this form of service is proving to have an efficiency advantage for claimants.

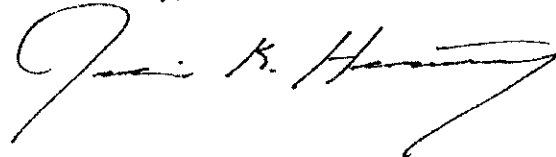
A comparison between November 2011 and November 2012 illustrates the challenge the call volume anomaly has presented to the department. While the claims workload in November 2012 was 16.3 percent *less* than in November 2011, the UCSCs faced a 422 percent *increase* in phone calls in November 2012. Call volume to UCSCs statewide dropped to under 6.8 million in December, but we are looking continuously for ways to improve service to claimants. We believe we are making positive strides in that direction.

January historically has been the busiest month of the year to UCSCs. Therefore, we ask that you continue to encourage your constituents to please (1) refrain from using any program that automatically redials a UCSC; (2) visit www.uc.pa.gov to quickly check the status of a claim or get answers to questions; (3) if possible, place calls to UCSCs later in the day and later in the week, when call volumes are lower; and (4) if possible, fax UC inquiries to (717) 525-5160—a UCSC representative will return the call within three days. While the PA CareerLinks® UC phone lines continue to be available to claimants, we recommend sending a fax rather than standing in line at a PA CareerLink®.

With your continued assistance in educating claimants on the tips listed above, UCSC representatives will be more available to assist claimants and call volume will continue to decrease. The department understands the importance of providing quality service to your constituents. We will continue to analyze phone data and the efficiency of our processes. We will continue to look for opportunities for improvement.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me or Legislative Director David Greineder at (717) 787-5087.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Julia K. Hearthway". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.

Julia K. Hearthway
Secretary