

**BRIEFING SHEET**[Report 20-13](#)
September 2020**State Auditor**
[Joe Chrisman](#)

Unemployment Insurance Call Centers

Department of Workforce Development

Background

Under the provisions of 2019 Wisconsin Act 185, we reviewed the Department of Workforce Development's (DWD's) management of the Unemployment Insurance (UI) program's call centers, through which some individuals file initial claims for unemployment benefits. DWD operates one call center, and two entities under contract with DWD operate two additional call centers.

Key Findings

- In recent years, DWD modified its information technology systems to allow more individuals to file online their initial claims. Individuals may file through a call center only in certain situations.
- From April 26, 2020, through August 22, 2020, only 6.6 percent of initial claims were filed by individuals who telephoned the call centers.
- From March 15, 2020, through June 30, 2020, 38.3 million of the 41.1 million total telephone calls (93.3 percent) to the call centers were blocked or received busy signals and, therefore, did not reach the call centers; 6.2 percent of calls were abandoned by individuals before speaking with the call centers; and 0.5 percent of calls were answered.
- From March 15, 2020, through July 31, 2020, DWD's expenditures for staff at the program's three call centers totaled \$9.3 million, including \$6.3 million for the two entities operating call centers.
- DWD increased its call center staff from 90 on March 31, 2020, to 188 on July 31, 2020. Over time, DWD increased the number of hours per week that the program's call centers were available to help individuals to file claims.
- DWD contractually required one entity operating a call center to provide at least 500 full-time equivalent staff positions in that entity's call center, which began answering calls on May 20, 2020. However, not until the week of July 19, 2020, were that many positions working in this call center.
- As of July 30, 2020, Wisconsin's call center was open for the second-highest number of hours per week among the call centers operated by seven midwestern states.

Recommendations

We recommend DWD include in its weekly reports to the co-chairpersons of the Joint Legislative Audit Committee the total number of telephone calls that were unable to reach the call centers, develop a records disposition authorization for its telephone call data, and require the two entities that operate call centers to report certain contractually required information on their performance.

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