



The Senate

STATE CAPITOL
HONOLULU, HAWAII 96813

Friday, April 10, 2020

MEMORANDUM

TO: Senate President Ronald D. Kouchi
FROM: Senate Special Committee on COVID-19
RE: Senate Special Committee on COVID-19 Report

Dear Senate President,

Please see the attached report prepared following the April 9, 2020, Senate Special Committee on COVID-19 meeting with the following:

- Department of Labor and Industrial Relations
- Governor's Office on Homelessness
- Behavioral Health Services Administration
- Partners in Care
- Special Master Judge Daniel Foley (Ret.)
- Department of Public Safety

Sincerely,

Senator Donovan M. Dela Cruz
Senator Jarrett Keohokalole
Senator Michelle N. Kidani

Senator Donna Mercado Kim
Senator Sharon Moriwaki
Senator Kurt Fevella

Attachment

Cc: All Senators

Department of Labor and Industrial Relations

Mr. Scott Murakami, Director, provided the Committee the following update.

Unemployment Claims Received

- Claims Received as of Wednesday:
 - Total filings: 227,867
 - Duplicates: 20,741
 - Net filings: 207,106
 - Number of claims rose by 27% from February.
 - Department saw some decline in the rate of new claims.
- Committee inquired on the specific time a claimant will have to wait for a check.
 - Director Murakami explained that their mainframe system is antiquated and would not allow them to provide an accurate answer at this time.
 - Department can extract information on a specific claim from the mainframe but cannot batch claims to produce reliable statistics to measure the Department's progress in timeliness.
 - These types of numbers could only be identified by increasing staffing to check the over 200,000 claims' status individually.
- Department can confirm that the overall payout totals are up 27% from February.
- Unemployment checks are federally mandated to be dispersed within 21 days.
 - Before the inflation of claims, the Department was fulfilling this requirement 85% of the time.
- Over 45,000 filings require calls due to a lack of data.
 - Department is attempting to contact them at this time.
 - The new web-form is automated, but this could raise that count to up to 105,000 claims requiring additional information.
- Committee inquired about reports that State employees were filing claims while most are still receiving salaries.

Claims Process

- *Phase I – March 18-23 -the surge in claims resulted in a degradation of the system*
 - DLIR created an online claim form.
 - Allows claims to be filed 24 hours a day.
 - Reduces the strain on the mainframe.
- *Phase II – March 23 to April 9*
 - Online form launched on March 23.
 - Helps to streamline the system.
 - The call center launched on March 23.
 - 38 DLIR employees were redeployed to the U.I. division.
 - The call center moved to the Sandbox and opened on April 6.
 - Utilized space that was formerly the U.I. call center.
 - DLIR and other agencies have redeployed 83 staff members to address claims issues.
- *Phase III – current*

- Additional claims center to open – April 14.
- Department is working to integrate new additional staff into the process.
 - Staff will be redeployed from other departments.
- Department is looking into adding an additional call center.
 - This may require utilizing an additional telephone vendor.
- Department is currently testing the new claims process.
 - Department is working to ensure that a clean form claim time can be reduced from 21 days to 14 days.
- Additional processes
 - Claimants are to receive emails regarding their claim being received.
 - The Unemployment Division is not waiting for verification from employers before issuing payments.
 - Either for full time or loss of hours claims.
 - Committee asked how to access the additional federal funds.
 - Claimants do not need to take any action to receive the additional federal supplement.
 - Department was initially manually including the additional funds but are working on automating that process.
 - Claimants' response to the "ability to work" question will not impact the processing of their claim.
 - Unemployment compensation
 - DLIR's Unemployment Division is working on automating this process internally.
 - The first priority is to get the base payments out to claimants.
 - DLIR is looking at options for an automated phone system to answer common questions.

General Discussion

- Committee stressed the need to identify the additional staffing needs to address the influx of claims and reducing the time of payouts.
- Department has requested 58 additional staff from the Department of Human Resources Development.
 - As staff is received from DHRD, they must be trained before being deployed.
 - Department explained that the Senate Clerk's Office helped to produce a training manual for this purpose.
- Committee inquired explicitly about the possibility of having staff take calls from remote locations.
 - Department outlined specific challenges around the lack of landlines, and the inability to have staff use their personal cell phones for this task.
 - Committee asked whether there is an emergency procurement process or something or separate team to work on this while you focus on the servicing.
- Committee asked whether the Department could move to shifts around the clock if enough staff was redeployed to their Department.

- Department indicated that as long as they have enough permanent staff to manage and provide security, that this would be possible in theory.
- Committee inquired whether additional I.T. staff would be useful.
 - Department explained that they are currently maxed out on I.T. positions but could certainly use temporary help in this area.
- Committee noted that in their discussions with filers many required repeated attempts to log into the system due to unclear instructions.
- Committee recommended that the Department add recordings of answers to frequently asked questions to their waitlines.
 - Department indicated that they are looking into that and how to work that into their system.

Governor's Coordinator on Homelessness

Mr. Scott Morishige provided the following update.

Shelter Overflow

- Governor's Homelessness Coordinator Office has worked to ramp up existing programs to expand shelter needs that account for social distancing.
 - For example, ramp-up of Ohana Zone Program and purchasing tiny homes in Hawaii County.
- Although FEMA reimbursement is potentially available in the future, the State is paying upfront costs for the expansion of shelter options.
- Committee asked about the impact of the proposed release of prisoners.
 - Morishige acknowledged that the issue is being looked at. They are working with the Department of Public Safety on the subject.
 - Indicated that about 20 individuals are set to be released over the next 3 months.
 - Provided the Committee with the following contact information.
 - Phone: (808) 586-0153
 - Email: gov.homelessness@hawaii.gov.

Community Providers

- State has waived compliance and reporting measures for community providers to allow for a flexible response to needs.
- Hawaii Cares System is a one-stop call center that is helping to coordinate resources for homeless individuals.
- State hopes to continue this model after the crisis subsides.

Quarantining and Isolation for Positive COVID-19 Homeless Individuals

- Homeless individuals awaiting test results are encouraged to stay at the newly opened Iwilei Quarantine Center.
 - DOH and the City and County of Honolulu are considering locations for positive individuals.

- There is a discussion of opening other quarantine centers on Oahu and neighbor islands.
- If there is a surge of homeless individuals infected with COVID-19, the State has the capacity to provide shelter and care for 600 to 800 beds.
- Committee inquired about the process for houseless individuals being released from the Hospitals.
 - Morishige indicated that they currently work with the shelter system to verify space is available, and utilize contract outreach providers to followup with individuals.
- One challenge is homeless individuals are not required to quarantine.
 - Instead, hospitals are directed to contact the Governor's Homelessness Coordinating Office or Partners in Care with information, so the homeless services community are aware of potential COVID-19 case.

Public PPE Donations

- State and nonprofit providers have opened three drop-off and distribution sites, or "resilience hubs," for individuals wanting to donate homemade and unopened store-bought personal protective equipment (PPE), such as masks, goggles and face shields.
 - PPE will then be distributed to behavioral health workers and social service providers statewide.
 - Locations are KROC Center in Kapolei, KEY Project in Kahalu'u, and YMCA in Kalihi.

Behavioral Health Services Administration

Mr. Edward Mersereau, Deputy Director, provided the following update.

Behavioral Health and Homelessness Statewide Unified Response Group (BHHSURG)

- Led by the Hawaii Department of Health's Behavioral Health Administration (DOH/BHA), a network of state and county agencies has developed the Behavioral Health and Homelessness Statewide Unified Response Group (BHHSURG) in response to COVID-19.
 - Coordinating agencies include:
 - Governor's Coordinator on Homelessness
 - Department of Human Services' Homeless Programs Office (DHS/HPO)
 - City and County agencies
 - University of Hawaii
- BHHSURG has centralized resources and information for agencies and providers serving the homeless population.
 - The BHHSURG website offers updates on COVID-19 guidance and best practices: <https://health.hawaii.gov/bhhsurg/>
 - BHHSURG is holding a weekly public webinar for agencies, and community providers on Monday at 11 am: <https://health.hawaii.gov/bhhsurg/weekly-webinar/>
 - Last week, there were approximately 400 participants

- BHHSURG is pooling resources for distribution to community providers, including PPE for frontline workers. Community providers can submit requests online at <http://go.hawaii.edu/ODA>

Partners in Care

Ms. Laura E. Thielen, Executive Director provided the following update and responded to several questions.

Protecting Unsheltered Individuals and Encampments

- Partners in Care has developed an app to screen unsheltered individuals for risk factors and possible symptoms of COVID-19. Those with symptoms are encouraged to seek medical care. The app will help track those at risk.
- Outreach workers are also educating homeless individuals about the virus and measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19.
 - However, homeless individuals with mental health issues have struggled to comprehend the crisis.
- Issues remain with keeping public bathrooms open, including theft of supplies and cleaning.
 - There are two mobile hygiene tracks that will be visiting locations of homeless clusters that lack access to bathrooms.
- Providers anticipate greater homeless encampment on streets because parks have closed.
- Committee inquired about a number to call for individuals in need of assistance.
 - Direct Office number: (808) 548-2282.

Releasing of incarcerated persons

Honorable Daniel Foley (Ret.), Special Master on Release of Incarcerated Persons, provided the Committee the following update.

Special Master Report

- The Honorable Daniel Foley has filed his preliminary report with the Hawaii Supreme Court.
 - The report is a public document.
 - Report describes the facilities, population, and configurations on each island.
 - Reports were received from:
 - Attorney General,
 - Prosecutors,
 - Public Defenders; and
 - Health Professionals.
- Additionally, Dr. Pablo Stewart, a psychiatrist, working at Oahu Correctional Center provided comments giving insight into what he thinks the problems are and the concern about the pandemic coming into Public Safety facilities, and their inability to confront and contain it.

Report Recommendations

- Provide a bi-monthly report.
- Public Defenders should work with the Department of Public Safety to ensure that the information regarding potential releasees is accurate.
- Recommends a collaborative process, noting that the process on the neighbor islands works very smoothly relative to the process in Honolulu, which seems to be contentious.
- That there be no block releases and that each case for inmate release goes through the original sentencing judge for a decision.

Process for releasing Inmates:

- The Prosecutors and the Attorney General are very concerned and raise these issues daily, that inmates have a place to go upon release and that they can be monitored.
- The system is working to reduce the number of potential inmates who enter correctional facilities but also to make sure that these people are not a danger to the public.
- Prosecutors will have the opportunity to give notice to the public, including victims of the inmate, regarding the possibility of release.

Department of Public Safety

Mr. Nolan Espinda, Director, provided the Committee the following update.

Prison Population

- Number of inmates has reduced by 548 from March 2 to April 9.
 - No mass release has been done.
 - The reduction is due to the actions of the police department, prosecuting attorneys, and judges.
- Court mandated that those serving intermittent sentences (weekend incarceration) be released.
 - Impacted 11 inmates
- Ninety-four inmates are currently being held at the Federal Detention Center.
 - An additional 100 inmates will be transferred on Monday.
- Committee indicated that a recent Judge report cited hygiene and social distancing as reasons for decisions to transfer inmates out of OCCC.
 - Espinda explained that he was unaware of the report.
 - Espinda noted that the system is taking the precautions possible for social distancing and treatment in line with CDC guidance, but corrections facilities are not built to encourage effective social distancing.

Testing of Inmates

- New inmates are screened at intake, travel to court, or moved within the system.

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- Inmates are checked for temperature, questioned about recent travel, checked for other symptoms.
- To date, two inmates have been tested for COVID-19; both were negative.
- There have been no positive cases found.

Personal Protection Equipment

- Staff is being provided PPEs
 - Typically 8-10% of staff, mostly medical staff, routinely is provided with PPEs.
 - Department notes that the need for PPEs has risen dramatically.
 - Department is requisitioning additional PPEs to meet the increased need.
- Prison Industries has begun making masks.
 - It will produce 700-1200 masks per week.

-end of report-