



Customer Service to Unemployed Workers in WorkForce Centers

Updated Report to the Legislature
as required by Minnesota Laws 2010 Chapter 347 Article 1 Section 29

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Co-Authors: Bonnie Elsey and Jim Hegman,
Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development
Anne Olson, Minnesota Workforce Council Association

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Update Report

Introduction

This report fulfills the 2010 Omnibus Economic Development bill's initial and final report requirements to the chairs and ranking minority members of the standing committees of the senate and house that have jurisdiction over economic and workforce development (see Attachment I for a copy of Chapter 347 SF 2510, Article 1 Section 29). The bill specifies that the Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED) Commissioner:

- Consult with workforce service area staff to develop and implement processes to ensure that unemployed customers who go to a WorkForce Center are provided seamless assistance in applying for unemployment benefits, accessing Resource Area resources, searching for jobs, accessing training and other services available to unemployed workers, and receiving answers to questions about unemployment insurance;
- Provide unemployed customers face-to-face consultation at their local WorkForce Center as one service option;
- Maximize the use of existing employees and federal dollars to serve unemployed customers who go to a WorkForce Center, including paying portions of existing employees' salaries from more than one funding source and cross-training employees;
- Submit an initial report on the actions and results of developing and implementing a seamless service delivery process to unemployed customers who go to a WorkForce Center by September 1, 2010; and
- Submit a second report with updated information to the same audience by January 15, 2011.

Report Sections

- Minnesota's Services to Unemployed Customers
- Federal Efforts to Integrate Unemployed Customers Into the Workforce System
- Barriers/ Obstacles to Improved Customer Service
- Actions to Improve Customer Services
- Leveraging and Maximizing Resources
- Conclusion

Minnesota's Services to Unemployed Customers

The state's service delivery environment for Unemployment Insurance (UI) is operated by the state and employment and training services to unemployed customers include many programs and are operated by state and local agencies.

Historically, the WorkForce Centers were known as the "unemployment offices." Over the past 20 years, the UI Program has automated its processes, and moved to a central call center and internet services model to reduce cost and provide consistent quality service. However, some customers still think of the WorkForce Center an "unemployment office. Today, over 95 percent of people file for unemployment benefits from the comfort of their own home, local library or coffee shop.

Minnesota's WorkForce Centers

Minnesota's WorkForce Center system is collaboration among partners made up of state, local government, and community non-profit agencies. According to the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) of 1998, the Governor, in consultation with local elected officials, is responsible for establishing Workforce Service Areas (WSAs). Minnesota grandfathered in the existing WSA configuration consisting of 16 WSAs with various political jurisdiction such as county government, city government, or joint powers agreements. The chief local elected official in each WSA is responsible for appointing a Workforce Investment Board (WIB) to oversee WIA Title IB programs (WIA youth, dislocated worker, and adult) and provide strategic direction to partners. The WIB also selects the one-stop operator for Title IB. Each WIB must assure that the WSA has at least one comprehensive one-stop (WorkForce Center) in their geographic area. While Minnesota is only required to have 16 WorkForce Centers, the WIBs have chosen to have 49 physical sites strategically located across Minnesota.

DEED is the administrative entity that manages most employment and training programs. Eighty- five percent of WIA Title IB resources are allocated by formula to the 16 WIBs. DEED directly operates WIA Title III (Wagner-Peyser or Job Service), WIA Title IV (Rehabilitation Services and State Services for the Blind), and Unemployment Insurance with state merit staff. Due to budgetary constraints, DEED does not have staff physically located at each WorkForce Center. (See attachment: map of WorkForce Center staff)

DEED does assure that WorkForce Centers have access capability to operate the Resource Areas in all 49 WorkForce Centers. DEED uses its administration dollars from WIA Title IB to equip Resource Areas with computers that have Internet access, phones, copiers, faxes and assistive technology for people with disabilities. Unemployed customers can conduct UI-related transactions using Resource Area computers and phones and access the state's job bank, MinnesotaWorks.net and ISEEK (career information system).

Workforce Center staff are trained to direct customers to the call center known as the Customer Service Center (CSC) through the UI automated service system (online or

phone). They are also trained to distribute instructional brochures and answer process-related application and technical questions on how to file a claim for benefits or how to get questions answered on existing claims. WorkForce Center staff are not trained to answer eligibility related questions or continued eligibility related questions. Such questions must be direct to the CSC staff or Reemployment Eligibility Assessment Program (REA) staff. REA staff are located in some WorkForce Centers and are primarily intended to inform UI customers of their requirement to be actively seeking work, available for work, and able to work to continue receiving UI benefits. They are also responsible to identify any barriers a UI customer may have to rapidly regain employment and connect customers to resources available to help them get back to work. They can't help a UI customer look for work. As time is available, REA staff provide one-on-one assistance to unemployed customers who need assistance with UI's automated service delivery system. While only a small percent of total unemployment transactions are conducted at WorkForce Centers, unemployed customers are 20 to 25% of a WorkForce Center's weekly traffic. This varies by day of the week, area of the state, and time of the year.

Year End Updates:

- *A series of joint meetings were held between representatives of UI, Job Service state staff and local WorkForce Center partners during the summer of 2010. It was identified that that both WorkForce Center and UI Customer Service Center staff sometimes misidentify the needs of applicants. Training has been implemented for WFC staff to help them more clearly identify the level of assistance customers may need and direct them to the correct level of assistance in the UI Customer Service Center. Training was also done for UI Customer Service Center staff to help them more clearly interpret the level of assistance needed by customers and move them faster to the correct resources.*
- *Several brochures and guides used by customers were identified as being burecratic or confusing and in need of interpretation by WFC staff before customers could use them. The identified weaknesses in these documents have been corrected and distributed to each WorkForce Center.*
- *Additional UI/REA staff have been added to WorkForce Centers to bring the UI staff level up to 50 statewide. These staff continue to provide assistance in WFC Resource Rooms to applicants who need assistance to use the UI self-service systems.*

Re-Employment Services Program (RES)

As a part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) the U.S. Department of Labor (USDOL) created and invested in a Re-Employment Services (RES) program intended to supplement Wagner-Peyser (WP)resources in order to service the influx of unemployment insurance customers coming into the Workforce Centers. The Wagner-Peyser allocation in Minnesota and nationally has not received an increase in real dollars since 1982. The Wagner-Peyser/RES resources concentrated on rapid re-employment services so that the ARRA WIA dollars could concentrate on those

customers who needed more intensive career counseling and training services to return to work. DEED hired 82 temporary WP/RES staff whose activities included:

- Implement the work search plan from the UI/REA staff
- Provide job seeking assistance to include resume writing, career planning, interviewing skills
- Make referrals to WIA partners for intensive and training services.
- Help people identify their transferrable skills and input their resume into MinnesotaWorks.net
- Make referrals to jobs

However, these additional 82 temporary WP/RES staff ended on September 30, 2010 with the end of the ARRA dollars for this purpose.

The Unemployment Insurance (UI) Program

Today, UI services to businesses and individuals are primarily delivered through an integrated system that includes a Customer Service Center (CSC) with up to 200 staff that respond to customer questions over the phone and 50 REA staff which are located in WorkForce Centers throughout the state. The REA staff's goal is to conduct at least 30,000 in person, one-on-one interviews with unemployed customers between March 2010 and February 2011. Since inception of REA, United States Department of Labor (USDOL) required one-on-one interviews with UI customers. However, in 2010 USDOL made several changes to REA: group sessions are allowable in lieu of one-on-one interviews and REA customers are now required to register for work in MinnesotaWorks.net . The changes will increase the UI Program's ability to inform more unemployed customers of continued eligibility requirements and how to access services available through the partners in the WorkForce Centers.

UI customer volume In 2009 revealed:

- 363,000 new applications for unemployment were filed.
- Applications increased 50% over 2008's figures.
- Weekly benefit request rose from the prior year.
- Customers experienced longer periods of unemployment.
- Customers completed about 10 million UI-related transactions.
- 98% of all UI transactions were conducted over the phone or the internet.

Year End Updates:

- *The number of new applications for UI has been falling during 2010.*
- *Due to federal extensions, the number of applicants receiving UI is at historically high volume.*
- *The number of applicants receiving benefits through the regular, state unemployment insurance program has fallen to near pre-recession levels.*

- *The number of applicants receiving benefits from one of several extended benefits programs now exceeds those receiving regular benefits.*
- *On December 17, 2010, President Obama signed a Bill extending the federal UI extensions until December 31, 2011. The extensions had expired November 30, 2010. The Bill does not add additional benefits for applicants who have already exhausted all entitlement for UI benefits. The maximum available in Minnesota is still up to 86 weeks. The Bill also does not reinstate the \$25 Weekly Supplemental payments that applicants were receiving.*
- *As the phase-out progresses, the number of applicants exhausting benefits before finding employment will increase. The UI program is working with WorkForce Centers to assist in identifying applicants who will be running out of unemployment benefits and ensuring that they take advantage of services in the WorkForce Center that can help them get back to work.*

Current Environment

During the economic downturn of the past two years, both the UI Program and the state's WorkForce Centers have served a record number of people while maintaining strong customer satisfaction levels.¹ Even so, DEED recognizes that not all customers received the effective, timely, and high quality services that we strive to provide and that customers expect and deserve. The Legislative Auditor's report in February 2010² noted a number of service challenges and improvement opportunities that need to be addressed to provide more seamless service delivery to unemployed workers.

DEED, in collaboration with workforce service area partners, has launched a number of initiatives this past year to better understand the strengths and challenges of our services to unemployed customers who go to a WorkForce Center. This initiative has led to the following changes in the system:

- ARRA stimulus funds temporarily allowed WorkForce Centers to enhance and expand services to customers. DEED staff concentrated on UI customers. However, these staff were terminated as required on September 30, 2010.
- Improvements were made to Resource Areas to ensure they are well equipped with latest technology and tools, including installing approximately 630 computers in Resource Rooms and YouthZones.
- WorkForce Center staff are well trained and are required to complete a certification process to demonstrate they are knowledgeable and able to use technology and tools to work in the Resource Room.

¹ In 2009, a UI customer satisfaction survey was conducted. The survey was patterned after the American Customer Satisfaction Index. Scores are on a 0-100 scale, with Minnesota's UI experiences scoring 75.1. This is similar to scores for Banks and Department stores. A comparison chart can be found at www.theasci.org for Dec. 2009.

² *Office of the Legislative Auditor Workforce Programs Report.* (2010, February 17). Retrieved August 9, 2010, from Office of the Legislative Auditor: <http://www.auditor.leg.state.mn.us/PED/pedrep/workforce.pdf>

- Wagner-Peyser staff are certified to assure they have the knowledge and facilitation skills to conduct Workshops.
- WorkForce Center staff assist unemployed customers who have minimal computer and/or language skills (illiterate, ESL) in how to apply for unemployment.
- WorkForce Centers partner with Adult Basic Education to provide computer literacy skills so customers can use technology tools.

Federal Efforts to Integrate Unemployed Customers Into the Workforce System

Concerns regarding seamless services to unemployed customers who enter a WorkForce Center are not unique to Minnesota. The National Association of State Workforce Agencies/Center for Employment Security, Education and Research (NASWA/CESER) and the Information Technology Support Center (ITSC) were tasked by the U.S. Department of Labor (USDOL) to facilitate a workgroup of federal USDOL staff, state unemployment insurance and workforce system administrators and local employment and training directors, to develop new and improved strategies to better connect and integrate unemployment insurance (UI) customers into the workforce system. The workgroup has developed the following “ideal” vision for the project:

We envision a system that is driven by a single Workforce System Registration as the entry to the nation’s “reemployment system” – and offers a coordinated customer-centric focus with full partner access. The UI claimant process is seen as a part of the broader “job seeking” process and customers are treated as jobseekers first and foremost (their UI claim being just one aspect of the services available to job seekers). Services are available via the internet as well as other means – but the internet access is supported by dynamic social networks linking customers, career counselors, employers and educators. Integrated service delivery is focused on customer outcomes. The system is focused on skills transferability, is data driven, measureable and accountable (both to the law and to customer needs).

DEED and their Partners are participating in the USDOL workgroup and will seek opportunities to align our services with the workgroup’s vision, customer bill of rights, and forthcoming recommendations.

Barriers/ Obstacles to Improved Customer Service

Policy/Regulations

- Confidentiality/data security concerns
- Separate Performance measures don’t encourage collaboration
- UI staff in WorkForce Centers are supervised by UI staff in St. Paul versus Wagner-Peyser managers in the WorkForce Centers.

Resources

- Limited resources to provide adequate staffing for re-employment services.
- ARRA funding expired on September 30, 2010 ending the 82 temporary RES staff positions. Cost allocation barriers in assigning proportionate benefit of services.
- High work volume for all partners.
- Low literacy of some customers.

Technology

- Outdated profiling model that could more accurately reflect those most likely to exhaust benefits.
- Disconnected systems between WIA, Wagner-Peyser and UI.
- Customers and staff need to enter demographic data in three systems.

Organization

- UI funding driven by workload/performance measures (timely and accuracy) and are not measured on efforts to shorten duration of UI.
- UI and Wagner-Peyser's re-employment services are separated in DEED's organizational structure.

Actions to Improve Customer Services

DEED is taking actions to address service challenges and provide more seamless assistance to unemployed customers. These actions were identified in collaboration with workforce service area partners and are in various stages of implementation.

UI Usability Project

In spring 2010, the UI Program initiated the UI Usability Project to identify challenges that customers experience when navigating the self-service systems and seeking assistance from UI staff. This project involves a series of studies conducted by an independent third party that specializes in improving commercial web applications and communication. The first study focused on the web-based initial application and weekly request process. During August 2010, an independent third party that specializes in improving customer service conducted training for all UI staff.

Year End Updates:

- *A usability study focused on the self-service phone system used by UI to accept applications for benefits, weekly requests and to access staff in the UI Customer Service Center. Applicants indicated that they found the phone system and menus easy to use and did not have difficulty getting in touch with Customer Service Center staff. As expected, the study also found that wording in some*

parts of the system should be clarified to help applicants better understand how to answer some questions.

- *Although many of the study results were positive, they also found that re-ordering some of the menu choices would improve usability. In particular, simplifying the path to UI Customer Service Center staff would reduce anxiety for applicants who are unfamiliar with phone menus.*
- *In September a new phone number was added for applicants to specifically answer questions on a determination of eligibility. The new phone number did not increase the overall number of calls to Customer Service Center but may have directed them quicker to the right person.*

Increasing Connections Between Unemployment Insurance and the WorkForce Center System

- The UI/REA program provides a UI staff presence in WorkForce Centers and assist applicants with UI tasks. This allows other WorkForce Center staff to focus on delivery of services such as work search workshops and resume writing skills, job referrals, career counseling and guidance, or making referrals to training.
- UI increased UI/REA staffing across the state from 35 to 50 in September 2010. (WP/RES re-employment staff decreased by 82 staff when the program ended on Sept. 30, 2010.) The 15 additional UI/REA staff were transferred from the 82 WP/RES staff.
- CSC staff refer unemployed customers who are challenged with work search to their local WorkForce Center.
- All UI/REA staff assist customers with UI related issues in the WorkForce Center Resource Areas on Mondays, which is a high traffic level day. Other days of the week, they schedule one-on-one or group appointments with unemployed customers to provide face-to-face consultation on UI and work search matters.
- In March 2010, a business improvement process completed and implemented a better process for staff to provide services to customers.
- When the WP/RES staff were employed, the UI program was able to send an additional 32,000 invitations to permanently separated unemployed customers to attend an orientation session. Normally, 30,000 unemployed customers were invited to WorkForce Centers as part of the REA process.
- Improvements were made to the process by which unemployed customers are referred to WorkForce Centers, including changes to the UI phone system to better direct customers and self-assessment tools in the UI initial application process to aid customers in identifying WorkForce Center services they may need to return to work.
- An enhanced data exchange with the WorkForce One database allows UI to update customer records when a customer enters re-training which is necessary to administer the “training in lieu of work search” provision of the law.
- Wagner-Peyser and UI have existing data sharing processes that ensure that WorkForce Center staff can access job seekers who may not have visited their WorkForce Center.

- UI and the state's Rapid Response and Veteran's Services teams coordinate with UI staff to attend layoff information sessions. This ensures that dislocated workers understand how their situations will affect their benefits and veterans understand their rights to unemployment insurance and are made aware of the reintegration process.

Year End Updates:

- *UI/REA staff have been increased from 35 to 50.*
- *REA staff have developed a new group orientation process to augment the current one-on-one process. This allows for an increase in the number of applicants invited to WFC orientation sessions from 32,000 per year to greater than 80,000 per year.*
- *Frequent interaction and training between WFC staff and UI Customer Service Center staff have given each other the perspective necessary to assure customers are receiving the appropriate assistance with the UI self-service system and are being referred immediately to resources best suited to their needs in WorkForce Centers.*

Internal Process for Improvements and Organizational Structure Changes

- Enhanced the UI program and Workforce Center marketing materials and handouts.
- Communicated to CSC and WorkForce Center staff the UI program and WorkForce Center missions, services, service delivery systems and staff roles and responsibilities.
- Updated the UI component in Reception and Resource Area (RRA) Certification Program training and delivered training to 90 RRA staff throughout the state in March 2010. A second round of training was delivered on November 16 and 18 to 120 RRA staff. This training is available to all staff on DEED's internal website.
 - The UI training component, provides a basic overview of UI and informs staff how to direct customers to the UI automated service system (online or phone) and connect customers with questions to either UI/REA staff who may be in the WorkForce Center or to CSC staff.
 - The training also helps RRA staff respond to typical application and technical process questions that unemployed customers may have. The training does not inform staff how to administer UI, which would include responding to eligibility and account specific questions.
- In June and July 2010, CSC and WorkForce Center (DEED and partners) staff met to define the needs of unemployed customers who are challenged with UI's self-service system, identify the roles of each party, and develop actions to create a more seamless process. Recommendations have been made to improve the process and will be implemented with the participation of engaged partners.
 - UI participates quarterly in the WorkForce Center Resource Area Advisory Team meetings in order to identify quality of service issues and ensure consistency.
 - WorkForce Center websites are reviewed by UI specialists to ensure accuracy of UI links and information.

- WorkForce Center staff and UI senior management meet regularly to share program status, identify concerns and share best practices to assist customers with UI concerns.
- UI supervisors have visited a number of WorkForce Centers to observe unemployed customers in the Resource Areas and identify possible gaps in unemployed customer service strategy.

Opportunities for Further Enhancements

UI received a supplemental grant of \$190,400 from the USDOL to implement a change to the UI application and MinnesotaWorks.net that will allow an unemployed customer to transfer their UI information into MinnesotaWorks.net, so that customers can more quickly and easily begin their job search. Directing UI applicants to the Minnesotaworks.net system at the end of the initial application process will: 1. Increase awareness of and use of WorkForce Center services by UI applicants, 2. Harmonize user IDs and passwords between the two systems and 3. Allow for better tracking of UI applicant activities in the One-Stop through the use of a shared identifier. It is anticipated that this system will be built and deployed by late summer 2011.

Year End Updates: Minnesota UI received the requested funds for this project and is now anticipating this enhancement will be implemented by spring 2011.

In June, 2010 DEED began an automated e-mail process to new UI applicants encouraging them to register for work with MinnesotaWorks.net (DEED's job bank). The e-mail also informs them of services available in a WorkForce Center and invites them to participate in activities such as job search assistance, resume writing workshops, etc. As of December 31, 2010 11,510 UI applicants have this e-mail. Of those, 3882 (34% registered with MinnesotaWorks.net; 44% of those registered have submitted a resume; and 81% of those with resumes have made them viewable to employers.

Leveraging and Maximizing Resources

Funding for WorkForce Centers and UI comes through several distinct program streams, and the funding stream dictates the allowable job functions of specific staff. The Wagner-Peyser and WIA Adult core services the most flexible resources and are the only resources not requiring eligibility for services.

Funding

- The services available in WorkForce Centers are determined by the availability of staff resources and the flexibility of the funding structure for those staff. Federal Regulations limit the delivery of UI and Wagner-Peyser activities to state merit staff. DEED is exploring opportunities to pay portions of existing Wagner-Peyser and UI

employees' salaries and providing cross training to perform the basic functions of filing an application for UI, providing REA services and providing WP/ES services.

- UI funding for WorkForce Centers is based on the same basic formula used by USDOL to fund the UI Program: workload and transaction.
- Wagner-Peyser funding for WorkForce Centers is based on civilian labor force and number of employers.
- UI/REA staff are located in the WorkForce Centers so they can provide direct customer interaction. All Wagner-Peyser field staff are located in the WorkForce Centers. UI and Wagner-Peyser shares in WorkForce Center cost allocation support of infrastructure. The approximate value of the UI support across all WorkForce Centers is \$512,000 annually.
- UI/REA staff work in Resource Areas on Mondays to assist with UI applications or UI continued eligibility questions. Their presence allows other WorkForce Center staff to be assigned to other duties and therefore creates the opportunity to provide additional services. The approximate value of the assignment of UI//REA staff to the Resource Areas is \$684,000 annually.
- Unemployed customers who go to a WorkForce Center usually check-in at the reception desk then go to the Resource Area. To support this staffing position, UI annually provides \$414,000 to WorkForce Centers.
- Unemployed customers are a major user of the UI self-service system in Resource Areas. The availability of this resource to unemployed customers has value to the program and its customers. UI provides funds to help support physical space and infrastructure in the WFCs in the amount of \$223,000 annually.
- Taken as a whole, UI currently provides approximately \$1.8 million in financial support to the statewide WorkForce Center system. This is equivalent to 12% of the UI budget for initial applications and weekly benefit requests.

Sharing Positions

- Because of the federal regulations regarding delivery of services by state merit staff, sharing the cost of positions between all programs is not possible.
- DEED has the legal authority to cost share Wagner-Peyser and UI positions as long as staff charge their time to the appropriate funding source.
- Both the UI and Workforce Investment Act programs regularly use itinerant staff that are able to travel between locations providing expertise and services that are not cost effective to maintain in any one location.

State/Local Planning Process

Building on previous front-line staff level discussions, the Department of Employment and Economic Development has initiated an action planning process and have included representatives of the Minnesota Workforce Council Association (service providers, Workforce Board Chairs and Local Elected Officials) to participate. The purpose of this joint initiative is to ensure that resources at the state and local level are used most effectively to reach the largest number of Minnesotans with the greatest impact.

During the recession, increased customer volume stretched the capacity and resources of the system to deliver timely services. This experience has exposed strengths and weaknesses in various delivery models, and this planning process will generate ideas to address gaps in the system. A survey was distributed to all planning participants and has resulted in the formation of four working groups: Employer Involvement; State/Local Roles and Integration of Services; Employment and Training Services; and Services to Focused Population. Each group will put forth recommendations on how to improve on the workforce delivery system to meet the needs of the new “normal”; higher unemployment and increased need for workers with some type of post-secondary credential that is recognized by employers.

This process, facilitated by an outside organization, will result in a working paper that will include recommendations agreed upon by individuals at the state and local level; this collaborative effort and the resulting document can be used to guide a new administration in efforts to target, streamline, and integrates services where possible to enhance employment outcomes of our joint customers.

Conclusion

DEED, in collaboration with workforce service area staff and partners have made serious commitments to creating a more seamless service system for unemployed customers who go to a WorkForce Center. Some key actions and planned actions include:

- Continually invest resources to understand service challenges of unemployed customers who use the WorkForce Center and/or the UI system. The voice of the customer should inform the service delivery improvements.
- Collaborating with workforce service area partners to identify and implement solutions to unemployed customer service challenges, including developing a standard process to serve unemployed customers in WorkForce Centers.
- Investing and maximizing resources to improve technology systems, hire and train staff, improve communications, and track progress and performance on improvements.
- Developing and deploying a standard process to provide more seamless service to unemployed customers who obtain UI services through WorkForce Centers.
- Changing UI's on-line and phone systems to make the language more understandable and the processes easier to follow for customers.
- Making UI correspondence more understandable to customers.
- Clarifying the roles of Workforce Center staff and UI staff via updated scripts and, marketing initiatives for use when communicating with customers so that expectations are clear.
- Training CSC and WorkForce Center staff on the new process and scripts.
- Placing additional REA staff in the WorkForce Centers.
- With local Workforce Investment Boards and Local Elected Officials, engage in a strategic planning effort to identify fiscal and customer service concerns in sustaining the number and locations of WorkForce Centers. The state/local partnership will

evaluate ways to streamline services and provide value added customer service in order to get Minnesotans back to work. The efficiencies and operation of the UI system will be evaluated as well as all services provided in Minnesota's WorkForce Centers.

- Evaluating the current organizational structure to be done by the new administration.

In the coming months, DEED will take additional important steps that further improve the quality and timeliness of services to the unemployed customers who enter a WorkForce Center.

Attachment I: Legislative Report Mandate

2010 Regular Session, Chapter 347 S.F. No. 2510, Article 1

Sec. 29. CUSTOMER SERVICE.

(a) The commissioner of employment and economic development, in consultation with workforce service area staff, must, as soon as practical, develop and implement processes and procedures to ensure that unemployed Minnesotans who go to a workforce center are provided, to the fullest extent possible, seamless assistance in applying for unemployment benefits, accessing resource room resources, searching for jobs, accessing training and other services available to unemployed workers, and receiving answers to questions about unemployment insurance.

(b) The actions taken to comply with paragraph (a) must include, at a minimum, the implementation of a procedure by which unemployed Minnesotans may receive, at their option, face-to-face consultation and assistance in their local workforce center on applying for unemployment benefits, accessing resource room resources, searching for jobs, accessing training and other services available to unemployed workers, and receiving answers to questions about unemployment insurance.

(c) The commissioner is authorized and encouraged to maximize the use of existing employees and federal dollars to accomplish paragraph (a), including, but not limited to, paying portions of existing employees' salaries from more than one source of funding, ensuring that employees are cross-trained to perform functions beyond that required by paragraph (b) when such employees are stationed in workforce centers, and implementing need-based scheduling of employees to ensure that each workforce center is adequately staffed during peak demand hours for the services contemplated by paragraph (a).

(d) By September 1, 2010, the commissioner must provide an initial written report to the chairs and ranking minority members of the standing committees of the senate and house of representatives having jurisdiction over economic and workforce development issues on the actions taken under paragraph (a) and the result of those actions. The report must include detailed information on new additional resources provided by the department to ensure that the issues in paragraph (a) are addressed. A second report with updated information must be provided to the chairs and ranking minority members of the standing committees of the senate and house of representatives having jurisdiction over economic and workforce development issues by January 15, 2011.

EFFECTIVE DATE. This section is effective the day following final enactment and expires August 31, 2011.