



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

Virginia Employment Commission

Demetrios J. Melis
Commissioner

Post Office Box 26441
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May 15, 2024

TO: The Honorable Glenn Youngkin
Governor, Commonwealth of Virginia
P.O. Box 1475
Richmond, Virginia 23218

The Honorable R. Creigh Deeds
Chair, Senate Commerce and Labor
Senate of Virginia
P.O. Box 396
Richmond, Virginia 23218

The Honorable Jeion A. Ward
Chair, House Labor and Commerce
Virginia House of Delegates
P.O. Box 7310
Hampton, Virginia 23666

The Honorable Adam Ebbin
Chair, Commission on Unemployment Compensation
Senate of Virginia
P.O. Box 396
Richmond, Virginia 23218

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.

VEC continues to make necessary adjustments to VUIS to enhance its customer centric features. Across all methods of feedback, the most common problem that previously existed but has been resolved was registering or logging into the online portal.

In January of this year, VEC went live with its implementation of an alternative third-party login method for customers to access our online services, called ID.me. This effort has significantly increased online claim filings resulting in more timely eligibility determinations and receipt of customer's first payments. These focused efforts have led to a 288% increase in initial claims filed online since January 2023. Initial claims filed online for the first quarter of 2024 continue to trend upward and stand at 62%,

which is up from 45% as of the last quarterly report. Since the implementation of ID.me in January of 2024, over 35,000 claimants have used it, which led to the substantial increase in online initial claim filings since January 2023.

The improved access to our online services provides 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. Previously, over half the calls fielded by the CCC related to problems registering or logging into our online portal. We have had a one hundred percent increase in access to the UI Direct portal for initial claim filing. Since the introduction of ID.me, call volume has decreased by 47% resulting in significantly lower wait times and improved ability of callers to reach a customer service representative on their first call.

VEC's Customer Contact Center recently developed an in-house knowledge base for employees to use in assisting customers which will further improve the customer experience by shortening wait times and increasing first call resolutions. The VEC previously utilized a third-party tool for this purpose; however, it was costly and did not meet the needs of call center agents. This effort will save the VEC \$300,000 per year.

VEC has taken additional steps to boost the customer experience by enhancing all online services. We've simplified and redesigned the VEC website homepage for easier navigation, offering tailored pathways for claimants, job seekers, and employers. We're simplifying our most visited pages for clarity and employing plain language for better understanding. Furthermore, we're collaborating with a vendor to rebuild the website with a sharper focus on user experience and accessibility. The following represent some notable VEC communication, outreach, and education initiatives:

- Utilizing social media, we're consistently promoting the benefits of ID.me with engaging graphics and video. Additionally, we have been using this medium to provide general education about the UI qualification and determination process.
- Proactively reaching out to customers via text and email, educating them about the benefits of using ID.me for quick and easy online claims filing.
- Created informative postcard brochures on benefit eligibility and ID.me which have been distributed to Virginia Works (DWD) field offices across the Commonwealth. These cards are also being shared with other touchpoints like libraries, food pantries and at town hall events. Our partnership with ID.me has earned media attention from multiple outlets amplifying awareness of ID.me as a new login method for customers and the agency's commitment to enhancing the customer experience.
- Updated the UI Customer Manual to make it easier to understand and focus on the claim filing and job search process.

Planned and Completed System Changes

The VEC has established a Performance and Innovation team that has been tasked with thinking creatively to solve everyday issues at the agency and streamline processes to allow for maximum efficiency. The team consists of various members from each department within the VEC who collaborate biweekly to develop innovative ways to improve the VEC from within. Additionally, VEC has continued to explore the use of Robotic Process Automation (RPA) throughout the agency. By expanding our usage of RPA, VEC staff can allocate human resources to areas where they are necessary for resolving complex UI, adjudication, or appeals issues.

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 continues to work 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:

- Providing outreach as well as a QR code to direct customers to our alternative log in process using ID.me for customers that cannot access UI Direct for traditional log in.
- 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 in twelve languages. This includes general UI claims, adjudication, and appeals updates and is available 24/7.
- The IVR will soon expand to include an Employer IVR option that will allow employers, our second largest customer base, to use some CCC self-service options.
- Reviewing feedback from customers on their experience with accessing the system to identify areas in registration and claim filing that we can improve.
- Reviewing the process for claimants to report their last and liable employers in add/reopen claims.

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 dark ink, appearing to read 'Demetrios J. Melis', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Demetrios J. Melis
Commissioner