



DANIELLE D. FOX
DIRECTOR

MAINE STATE LEGISLATURE
OFFICE OF PROGRAM EVALUATION AND
GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

Date: March 20, 2019
To: Members, Government Oversight Committee
From: Danielle Fox, OPEGA *Sain*
Re: Progress report on ReEmployME System review

In March 2018, concerns about the Department of Labor's (DOL) new unemployment insurance online system, ReEmployME, were brought to the Government Oversight Committee (GOC) of the 128th Legislature. The new system was launched on December 6, 2017 as part of a four-state consortium development project between Maine, Mississippi, Connecticut, and Rhode Island. Shortly after ReEmployME launched, issues were reported to the media and legislators from staff and claimants. These concerns included (but were not limited to):

- claimants experiencing technical difficulties with system;
- claimants experiencing long wait times for technical support and customer service;
- allegations of destruction of public documents in the form of written notes of claimant voicemail messages;
- potential federal regulation violations pertaining to work search requirements; and
- the timing and overall implementation of the system launch.

The GOC voted to place a review of DOL, and the Office of Information Technology (OIT) as this agency implemented the new system, on OPEGA's work plan in March, 2018. At this time, other reviews were given priority by the GOC, resulting in OPEGA beginning our review on ReEmployME in the second half of 2018. Preliminary research was conducted through early 2019 and included interviewing management, staff, and confidential informants; reviewing state and federal laws, regulations, and policies; reviewing documentation regarding the selection, implementation, and oversight of the ReEmployME system; and obtaining data relevant to claimant complaints.

As OPEGA conducted preliminary research we made two observations about the concerns that were raised to the GOC:

1. The majority of the concerns expressed when the review was requested appear to be related to a one-time event – the implementation of the new system (that has now been operational for approximately 15 months) which coincided with a change to how the requirement to search for employment was to be reported/recorded by claimants (work-search certification).

2. Although presented to the GOC as connected with one event – the launch of the ReEmployME system – OPEGA found that that concerns fell into the following four broad areas (with some over-arching complaints and concerns with management and changes unrelated to the system):
 - a. implementation of the system;
 - b. access to unemployment claims process(es)– in terms of people being able to file claims and required documents, and an awareness of filing options;
 - c. response to claimant questions or issues communicated to DOL at the time; and
 - d. handling and retention of documents related to those claimant questions/issues.

OPEGA observed that many complaints about the ReEmployME system appeared to be related to customer-service issues and process changes related to the work-search certification.

As part of OPEGA’s risk assessment work to identify potential scope areas and possible questions to be addressed by a full review, we evaluated the areas noted above in terms of future likelihood and impact. From our understanding of how the system is functioning currently and updated information received from both the current and previous administrations related to those concern areas, a full review of this subject may not be helpful to the GOC or the Legislature in terms of looking at future improvements/ongoing concerns and may not be a good use of OPEGA resources (which may be better dedicated to other GOC priorities).

However, we have identified two potential avenues for the GOC to consider:

1. **Update on current functionality and accessibility of the system:** The GOC may want to consider inviting the Commissioner of the Department of Labor (or designee) to update the Committee on the status of the functionality and accessibility of the system, the department’s response to current claimant issues and to address any ongoing concerns GOC members may have in these areas.
2. **Questions related to the response to prior claimant’s issues:** Questions remain related to the response to prior claimant issues – particularly whether all complaints were logged, attended to, and disposed of properly. These questions are unlikely to be covered by the current Commissioner (or Bureau of Unemployment Compensation) if they are invited to come before the GOC. Due to the lack of existing data, OPEGA is unable to make any definitive determinations of what occurred. During our work we have heard differing accounts in interviews with MDOL staff of how messages left by claimants (at that time) were handled. OPEGA can provide the GOC with a summary of what we understand occurred during that time and the various accounts we received. At this point the GOC can consider whether it wants to take further action relative to these questions.