

LEGISLATIVE REPORT

ESSB 5193

# 2021 Second Quarter Report

SEPTEMBER 2021

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**Employment Security Department**  
WASHINGTON STATE

# CONTENTS

Introduction .....	1
Part I .....	1
Implementation of ESSB 5193 .....	1
Reserve Adjudicators Project .....	2
Letters Project.....	3
Advisory Committee Project .....	3
Phone Lines Project.....	4
Online Data Dashboard Project.....	5
Program and Funding Update .....	5
JLARC Requested Performance Improvement Plan .....	7
Improving Adjudication Timeliness and Quality.....	7
Anticipated Improvement Goals.....	9
Part II .....	10
Unemployment Rate.....	10
Reciency Rate.....	10
Individuals and Benefits Paid.....	11
Overpayments.....	12
Adjudication Timeliness and Quality.....	13
Appeals .....	14
Claims Center Phone Services and Staffing .....	15

# INTRODUCTION

[ESSB 5193](#), unemployment insurance claim adjudicators/system enhancements, requires the Employment Security Department (ESD) to provide a quarterly report on progress implementing the bill to the House Labor and Workplace Standards Committee and the Senate Committee on Labor, Commerce, and Tribal Affairs. ESSB 5193 also requires the department to produce a quarterly report on selected performance statistics.

After passage of ESSB 5193, members of the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Committee (JLARC) requested additional information be reported quarterly. Narrative responses to the JLARC request are included in Part I, and the requested statistical information is presented in Part II.

## PART I

### Implementation of ESSB 5193

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Employment Security Department (ESD) is making numerous changes and improvements to the unemployment insurance (UI) system to comply with [ESSB 5193](#) [Unemployment insurance claim adjudicators / system enhancements]. ESD has divided work related to the bill into five distinct projects:

- Reserve adjudicators
- Letters
- Advisory committee
- Phone lines
- Online data dashboard

This section contains a summary of ESD's progress regarding of each of these projects.

## Reserve Adjudicators Project

Under Section 2 of the bill, ESD needs to “create a training program to prepare a reserve force of skilled unemployment insurance claims adjudicators who can be available quickly when claims volume demands.”

The adjudicator reserve program needs to be open to public employees and private citizens, and ESD discussed the possibility of using contractors to meet the private citizen requirement. However, the U.S. Department of Labor recently announced that state workforce agencies may only use public employee “merit staff”, which eliminates the possibility of contractors to perform adjudicator work.

The training also needs to be thorough enough so that individuals serving as adjudicator reservists could be certified to perform adjudications on unemployment insurance claims within a week of coming to ESD.

The bill requires the Office of Financial Management (OFM) to work with ESD to identify other state agencies whose employees meet the minimum qualifications to serve as UI claims adjudicators, and the Health Care Authority (HCA) and the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) have been identified as early potential partners.

The bill gives OFM the right to adopt rules or issue guidance regarding this topic and requires ESD to submit an annual report to the Legislature starting October 1, 2021 summarizing the number of people who have current UI claims adjudicator certifications, how many have been employed and the period of employment, plus hiring and training costs.

ESD prepared a two-week training plan that begins with one week of online trainings through the National Association of State Workforce Agencies (NASWA), including adjudicator and customer service trainings. In the second week, ESD educates trainees on state-specific issues, including unemployment insurance and the IT system that ESD uses for UI claims. Trainees receive certifications from NASWA and ESD for completing these trainings.

ESD conducted a successful pilot this summer with 20 interns and will conduct the first training for external parties in 2022. The agency will continue to provide this training to up to 400 non-permanent staff within the next several months. Although the contracts of these staff will conclude in the near future, the goal is to build a large pool that the agency could draw on in the event of a future emergency.

Between now and the first training for external parties, representatives from various ESD divisions and units need to:

- Provide required notifications to union representatives

- Draft an interagency agreement for potential partners
- Add the NASWA online training and ESD's UICS training to the state's Learning Management System (LMS)

Further, ESD is working with NASWA on the development of a tool that would allow the agency to quickly alert and activate those who complete the adjudicator certifications in the event of future emergencies.

## **Letters Project**

Sections 3(1) and (2) of the bill require ESD to revise all materials related to a specific claimant's case and to do user testing, with the overall goal of making materials easier for claimants to understand. The revised materials must meet certain requirements regarding comprehensibility, clarity, and readability. This is a very large-scale project covering 138 different issues that contain nearly 700 separate variations of information dropped into determination letters depending upon the individual facts of the case.

In addition to these requirements, the revised determination and redetermination letters need to clearly convey applicable statute numbers and provide a brief explanation of pertinent law, outline of relevant facts, reasoning, decision, and result.

The agency formed a cross-divisional Research Team that holds background discussions and gathers information [for example, identifying known pain points] to ensure that the necessary information is available for the smaller Writing Team to do the revisions.

ESD will need to review and revise both letters and affiliated drop-ins, the sentences or paragraphs that ESD adds to letters as applicable. To make the project more manageable, ESD is reviewing and revising limited sets of materials at a time. ESD identified the highest priority work for the first set of revisions based on recent customer, legislative and staff feedback. ESD is currently revising the following templates and letters:

- Non-monetary determination and redetermination letter template.
- Monetary determination and redetermination letter template.
- Identity fact-finding letter.
- Reevaluate claim letter.

## **Advisory Committee Project**

Section 3(3) requires ESD to work with an unemployment insurance advisory committee comprised of business and worker advocates to explore:

- Thresholds for triggers to adjust staff for assignments and phones.
- Creating a pilot for having caseworkers work with claimants on their claims and reemployment services.
- Identifying next steps for translating written UI materials into other languages.
- Frequency of the initial and continuing adjudicator training.

To implement these requirements, ESD is:

- Recruiting members for a subcommittee of the Employment Security Advisory Committee (ESAC) to provide input on equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) issues, including, but not limited to, translating UI materials.
- Gathering background information on language utilization and current services for claimants who have limited English proficiency.
- Documenting high-level processes demonstrating the experiences that claimants face as they move through the UI system and transition to job placement services.
- Gathering background information regarding potential triggers to adjust staff.

ESD is prioritizing ESAC EDI subcommittee membership from those with lived experiences in the communities that face historical barriers in accessing benefits. The ESAC EDI subcommittee is planning to hold feedback sessions beginning in September and through September 2022.

## **Phone Lines Project**

Section 3(4) of the bill requires ESD to establish dedicated toll-free phone lines for claimants who lack computer skills or access to computers, claimants with disabilities, and claimants with limited English (LEP) proficiency.

A cross-divisional team is working to implement these requirements and is identifying more options to assist claimants who lack computer skills or computer access. Claimants can continue to get computer skills training and use computers through local WorkSource offices. To determine how to assist these claimants, ESD is also adjusting its plans based on feedback from the agency's Customer Experience Unit and may work with members of the ESAC EDI subcommittee to obtain further input. ESD already has a robust system to assist claimants who have disabilities, so the agency will continue to use that process to meet this requirement. To access those services, claimants with disabilities can email a dedicated mailbox, call toll free, or use WA relay 711 to request an accommodation.

To assist claimants with limited English proficiency (LEP), ESD is setting up a new, dedicated phone line that will include instructions in 25 languages. English and Spanish assistance will continue to be available on the regular phone line. ESD hopes to implement the LEP phone line by Oct. 1, 2021. Timing will depend on finding a contractor from the Department of Enterprise Service's master contracts list that can meet the agency's needs. Responses to ESD's solicitation are under review and contract award is anticipated in August.

When phone menu and options recordings and LEP scripts are ready, ESD will finish programming the phone system and then test the menu options for accuracy. This will require participation of the contracted language vendor.

## **Online Data Dashboard Project**

Under Section 4 of the bill, ESD needs to create an online data dashboard and provide a quarterly written data report on specific performance metrics. The agency will include additional metrics on the dashboard in response to a request from the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Committee (JLARC).

A cross-divisional ESD data team has identified the necessary elements and is currently developing the dashboard while gathering quarterly report data definitions, elements and sources. The dashboard will go live in October.

## **Program and Funding Update**

Section 5(b) requires ESD to provide updates on any new federal programs or funds received by the department for unemployment compensation and administration and the use of such funds.

No additional federal programs were announced in the April, May, June quarter. The Unemployment Insurance program is primarily funded with the federal Unemployment Insurance Administrative Grant. This grant is based on a complicated formula set out by the U.S. Department of Labor (USDOL). Federal funds received by the department for program administration are disbursed via an annual base grant and quarterly via above base funding grants for claims-related workload for the last two quarters, USDOL has arbitrarily reduced reimbursing the costs for administration of unemployment insurance by 25 percent for all states. This means that a different funding source is needed to pay for the costs of the program that have already been incurred. The USDOL cites the reduction is due to their estimate of fraudulent cases. Current data provided on claims identified that less than 1 percent of claims reported to the federal government for administrative funds may be fraudulent.

The agency intends to apply for grant funding of program specific items as new grant funds become available. USDOL periodically makes grants available to state agencies throughout the nation for special focus projects that supplement base administrative funding.

Section 5(c) requires reporting on any software or technology issues related to claims processing, including any issues causing claim delays or inaccurate automated notifications.

Implementation and administration of new and updated federal requirements for federally funded programs is ongoing. The federal programs are Pandemic Emergency Unemployment Compensation (PEUC) which allows additional weeks of benefits for recipients, Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA) to provide benefits to workers not covered by traditional unemployment benefits, and Federal Pandemic Unemployment Compensation (FPUC), weekly stimulus payments to all receiving benefits. Major pandemic related technology projects completed during the quarter include:

- Reinstating the waiting week waiver allowing claimants to be paid the first week of benefits claims
- Reprogramming to align with new federal guidance on backdating PUA claims
- Implementing 75 percent federally funded relief of benefit charges to reimbursable employers
- Reprogramming to align with new federal legislation allowing PUA overpayment waivers
- Implementing federal legislation allowing claimants to remain on federal PEUC benefits if their state claim had a lower benefit amount
- Implementing federal requirement that claimants who are eligible for a regular UI claim must file that new claim and be removed from federal benefits

In addition to major projects completed, ESD focused significant IT resources to ongoing fraud prevention and detection efforts. These efforts were aimed at both fighting fraud and minimizing impacts on legitimate claimants.

The large scope and speed of implementation to add functionality to the benefits payment system (UTAB) required adjustments and enhancements to address issues with claim processing, payment delays and inaccurate notifications.

- Backdating PUA claims and transferring weeks to PUA claims
- Ensuring PEUC was paying on the correct claim
- Ensuring system calculations were correct to pay the appropriate weekly benefit amount

- Allowing agents the ability to manually add weeks of extended benefits when customers were close to the expiration of their regular claim
- Enhancing and correcting notifications, including updating Spanish translations, adding and correcting data contained in letters, adding and consolidating information in letters to improve clarity based on feedback received from the Office of the Attorney General and Customer Experience Team

Section 5(d) requires updates on the department's protocols and process for protecting sensitive data. The department updated all necessary protocols and processes for protecting sensitive data including system updates and enhancements to prevent fraud and protect data, updates to manuals and desk aides for claims agents, training materials for all new staff, internal policies, and changes in existing agency structure to include the creation of the fraud division. Existing guidelines were updated to reflect best practices and fraud prevention identified by the US Department of Labor (USDOL) and other partners. Additional trainings were made available to both new and existing staff using the National Association of State Workforce Agencies (NASWA) Integrity Data Hub (IDH). The department also worked with the Office of Inspector General (OIG), the Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI), as well as other state agencies to better understand fraud and protection of sensitive data to implement best practices.

Section 5(e) requires a report of any other relevant unemployment issues, or information related to enhancing the unemployment insurance system, as determined by the department.

ESD began work during the reporting period on several major projects whose implementation stretched into the next quarter. These included planning for the reopening of in-person services at local WorkSource offices, the resumption of work search requirements for unemployment insurance recipients, implementing federal requirements that PUA recipients prove their employee or self-employment status, and planning for the close-out of federal unemployment benefits scheduled for September 2021.

## JLARC Requested Performance Improvement Plan

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### **Improving Adjudication Timeliness and Quality**

JLARC requested details on steps being taken to improve timeliness and quality of the adjudication decisions that allow or deny access to benefits. Adjudicating unemployment insurance eligibility issues is highly skilled work and having proficient staff is the key to success. It has been challenging to hire and train new staff and upskill existing staff to increase overall

capacity, meet timeliness goals, and ensure quality of work. The rapid pace of hiring and promotions has left a shortage of experienced lead workers and supervisors needed to support inexperienced staff. The large volume of incoming cases has increased the complexity of workload management. Unemployment Insurance Customer Support (UICS) division has developed a variety of counter measures to overcome these challenges.

## Hiring

ESD did not meet aggressive self-imposed hiring targets for the quarter. UICS as a whole hired 43 new staff and made 84 internal promotions. To remedy this shortfall, in June 2021 ESD began implementation of a new streamlined mass recruitment and hiring process and added more Human Resources staff. Full implementation was completed in July 2021 and ESD anticipates meeting targets in the upcoming quarters. Improvements include:

- Rewriting job announcement to reflect industry naming conventions, highlighting benefits, including meta tags in the announcement to generate more search hits.
- Changing minimum customer service experience requirements from five to two years to increase the applicant pool.
- Relying on pre-hire assessments and screening processes rather than panel interviews to identify highly qualified candidates.
- Adding three recruitment staff dedicated to UICS mass hiring

## Training

Claims center staff worked with the UICS training unit to adjust training priorities and streamline training to get more staff on the highest workload cases sooner. Newly hired adjudicators typically are trained on a variety of issues over time, so they have a wide skill base. New hires are now specializing in only high-demand cases so they reach proficiency and full productivity sooner.

## Support

UICS expanded a successful pilot of a new technical lead support model designed to give new staff easier and quicker access to get questions answered. The existing model assigned one lead staff per team. The pilot established a pool of leads available to help all staff transitioning from training into production. The pilot showed trainees had better access to technical assistance and increased opportunities for consultation with a skilled staff member. The new model will be employed for all new classes of staff coming out of training.

## Workload Management

Adjudication managers and supervisors are assigning large teams to “sprints” designed to address specific workloads with the largest number of outstanding issues and to resolve issues for claimants who have been waiting the longest for their decisions. Every sprint adjudicator is assigned to resolve a specific type of issue for an entire week. This short-term specialization reduces switching costs and allows the adjudicator to know what to expect and develop a faster rhythm of work.

Adjudication is conducting a team-based case management pilot testing how to increase efficiency and reduce timelines while resolving multiple issues affecting a claimant’s payment. The pilot team consists of two Intake staff, two Adjudication staff and one Office of Special Investigations staff member trained to resolve identity theft issues. The team is assigned cases from a report identifying claimants who have been waiting the longest without receiving benefits. The team coordinates to hand off cases to each other that require specialized skills that some team members have and other do not rather than simply returning the case to a work queue where resolution may be delayed. These better communication methods aim to resolve all issues on the claim as soon as possible. Early results are promising, particularly the cross-division work with the Office of Special Investigations in resolving identity issues first so other issues can then be addressed. In six weeks, the team has resolved 91 percent of the cases presented, almost 2,200 cases total.

## Anticipated Improvement Goals

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ESD has the goal of eliminating the COVID-related backlog of adjudication cases as soon as possible, working towards meeting US Department of Labor timeliness goals of resolving 87 percent of eligibility issues within three weeks of detection. As federally funded benefits sunset in early September, ESD anticipates a large decrease in incoming workload, allowing ESD to devote capacity to reducing the number of cases awaiting adjudication.

## PART II

ESSB 5193 Section 4(2) requires ESD to provide quarterly reports on selected unemployment insurance performance metrics. At the request of the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Committee, ESD has included additional performance metrics. The following tables contain data for the period April, May, and June 2021.

### Unemployment Rate

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The US Bureau of Labor Statistics defines the total unemployment rate as the average number of unemployed workers 16 years of age or older actively seeking work divided by the total civilian labor force.

Table 1: Seasonally Adjusted Unemployment Rates

Month	April	May	June
Unemployment Rate	5.4%	5.2%	5.2%

Source: Employment Security Department, Labor Market and Economic Analysis/U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Local Area Unemployment Statistics

### Reciency Rate

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The unemployment insurance reciency rate is the number of individuals receiving unemployment compensation divided by the number of total unemployed as reported on the monthly Seasonally Adjusted Local Area Unemployment Statistics that come from the federal Bureau of Labor Statistics survey . Unemployment compensation includes state unemployment compensation, unemployment compensation for federal employees, and unemployment compensation for ex-servicemembers. The reciency rate does not include claimants receiving federally funded benefits.

Table 2: Unemployment Insurance Reciency Rates

Month	April	May	June
Reciency Rate	33.7%	34.2%	34.1%

Source: ETA Report 5159 Claims and Payment Activities and Labor Market and Economic Analysis/U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics Monthly Seasonally Adjusted Local Area Unemployment Statistics

## Individuals and Benefits Paid

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The following table counts the total number of unduplicated individuals paid per month and the total benefit they received from all unemployment insurance compensation sources – state funded regular unemployment, federally funded Pandemic Emergency Unemployment Compensation that extends weeks of benefits available, Pandemic Unemployment Compensation which covers workers not eligible for regular benefits, and Federal Pandemic Unemployment Compensation which provides \$300 weekly in addition to unemployment benefits.

Table 3: Individuals Paid and Total Benefits Paid

Month	April	May	June
Individuals Paid	376,923	393,895	357,792
Benefits Paid	\$ 1,010,553,102	\$ 1,200,842,293	\$ 980,373,115

Source: ESD operational data query

A claimant for unemployment insurance files an initial application to establish eligibility for or disqualification from receiving benefits based upon why they are no longer working. They then file a weekly claim every week they are seeking benefits. Claimants found initially eligible will receive payment as described below. If ESD questions a claimant's initial eligibility for benefits, the claimant receives no weekly payments until the eligibility issue is decided. Claimants ultimately found eligible will receive back payments for weeks filed while awaiting their adjudication decisions.

In addition to establishing their initial eligibility, claimants must maintain continuing eligibility by being able, available, and actively seeking work and following other program requirements such as participating in eligibility reviews. Claimants certify each week they claim that they are maintaining continued eligibility. If ESD questions their eligibility, they continue to receive benefits until the issue is decided. If ESD determines they were not eligible, claimants must pay back benefits received.

The table below shows the status of each weekly claim filed by month as of the date of the data extract. Because eligibility is determined week by week rather than for the entire benefit year, an individual may have weeks in all three categories. For the quarter April, May, June 2021, 82.2 percent of weeks claimed were paid, 15.9 percent of weeks claimed were not paid because the claimant was determined ineligible, and 1.8 percent of weeks claimed were still pending a decision.

Table 4: Total Weekly Claims Paid, Pending, and Not Paid

Month	April	May	June
Weekly Claims Paid	1,347,075	1,562,257	1,265,650
Weekly Claim Pending	14,435	34,719	44,460
Weekly Claims Not Paid	264,511	329,170	214,195
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,626,021</b>	<b>1,926,146</b>	<b>1,524,305</b>

Source: ESD operational data query

## Overpayments

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Overpayments are established when ESD determines that a claimant received benefits to which they were not entitled because they were ineligible to receive benefits or they were paid an incorrect weekly benefit amount. Overpayments may be waived if the claimant was not at fault for creating the overpayment, if the payment was not “conditional” as ESD was determining eligibility, and if collecting the overpayment would create a financial hardship.

Claimants potentially eligible for a waiver are offered a waiver request form which includes financial information. ESD also automatically waives some overpayments created when federal law requires that claimants be moved between state and federal benefit entitlements that have lower weekly benefit amounts. The high waiver numbers and approval rate in May were the result of federally authorized waivers for claimants moving from higher to lower weekly benefit amounts.

Overpayments as reported quarterly to US Department of Labor (USDOL) represent 5.5 percent of total benefits paid in the second quarter.

Table 5: Overpayments Established by Benefit Entitlement

Benefit Type	Cases	Overpayments
Regular	26,306	\$ 60,620,008
FPUC	31,086	\$ 83,737,230
PEUC	6,977	\$ 18,003,858
PUA	22,459	\$ 13,292,194
<b>Total</b>	<b>64,369</b>	<b>\$ 175,653,290</b>

Sources: ETA Report 227 (Regular, FPUC, and PEUC), ETA Report 902P (PUA)

Table 6: Overpayment Waiver Requests and Outcomes

Month	April	May	June
Approved	380	2,642	403
Denied	1,333	2,829	1,960
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,713</b>	<b>5,471</b>	<b>2,363</b>
Approval Rate	22.2%	48.3%	17.1%

Source: ESD operational data

## Adjudication Timeliness and Quality

The USDOL timeliness standard requires 80 percent of nonmonetary issues that have the potential to affect the claimant’s benefit rights be determined within 21 days of when the issue was detected. Timeliness is calculated for separation issues regarding quits and discharges from employment and for all other non-separation issues that could potentially prevent benefit payments.

Adjudication timeliness performance fell short of targets as ESD continued to focus on resolving the oldest cases still awaiting adjudication while still receiving a high volume of new incoming work. States around the country are struggling with similar issues. US national average results for adjudication timeliness in the first quarter were 32.5 percent for separation issues and 50.2 percent for non-separation issues. ESD is increasing adjudication capacity and making performance improvements as described in Part One of this report.

Table 7: Timeliness of Adjudication Decisions – Separations

Month	April	May	June
Total Workload	8,660	7,369	9,104
Determined within 21 Days	16.4%	16.7%	20.7%

Source: ETA Report 9052

Table 8: Timeliness of Adjudication Decisions – Non-separations

Month	April	May	June
Total Workload	35,167	37,464	33,989
Determined within 21 Days	60.4%	79.4%	57.5%

Source: ETA Report 9052

The USDOL Benefit Timeliness and Quality (BTQ) program estimates overall quality of adjudication by reviewing a statistically representative sample of nonmonetary determinations against 100-point scoring criteria. The quality standard requires that at least 75 percent of determinations reviewed receive a score of 95 or higher. Because ESD did not meet this standard, ESD must enter corrective action with the U.S. Department of Labor through our State Quality Service Plan. We are currently waiting for the details regarding what will be entailed, as some targets are being adjusted this year due to the extraordinary circumstances.

Separation and non-separation samples are scored. ESD met quality standards for adjudications completed in the quarter ending December 2019. BTQ reviews are typically done quarterly, however, reviews were suspended for much of the pandemic. BTQ was completed for the quarter ending June 2021.

Table 9: Quality of Adjudication Decisions

BTQ Sample Quarter Ending June 30, 2021	Separations	Non-separations
Sample Size	50	50
Case Material Not Found	0	0
Invalid Cases	2	20
Scored Cases	48	30
Score	58.3%	76.7%

Source: USDOL Benefit, Timeliness and Quality

## Appeals

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A claimant or employer can make a written request for a hearing to appeal the outcome of an ESD determination to allow or deny unemployment insurance benefits. The Office of Administrative Hearings (OAH), an independent state agency, hears unemployment benefits appeals. Only one appeal may be transmitted to OAH per determination of an issue.

ESD staff review appeal requests received via US Mail, fax, or eServices. Appeal requests have one of three outcomes:

**Redetermined.** The eligibility issue case associated with the appeal request has been reviewed by staff and the outcome has been redetermined to allow benefits based on new information.

**No action taken.** The request has been reviewed by staff who close the work item with no further action because the request is a duplicate, the request is moot because the requested relief has already been granted, or because the claimant is not an aggrieved party.

**Sent to OAH.** A formal request for an appeal hearing is sent by ESD staff to OAH after a staff review determines that the denial of benefits still stands or any of the relief requested in the appeal was not granted and thus the claimant is an aggrieved party.

The following table shows the status of appeal requests as of the date of the data extract. The requests are grouped by the month in which the request was received. For the quarter, 85.7 percent of the appeal requests have been resolved and 14.3 percent are pending resolution.

Table 10: Disposition of Appeals Requests

Month	April	May	June
Pending	1,673	2,325	2,614
Submitted to OAH	5,639	5,819	5,920
Redetermined	5,904	6,342	6,021
No Action Taken	1,322	1,408	1,176
<b>Total</b>	<b>14,538</b>	<b>15,894</b>	<b>15,731</b>

Source: ESD operational data

## Claims Center Phone Services and Staffing

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Claims centers track the number of calls answered by staff after the calls enter the phone system, the number of calls abandoned by customers after they enter the system, and the number of calls that are not connected because there is no capacity to handle the call. Because one person may make many repeat calls, the number of individuals attempting to be served via the phone is also tracked. The tables below show:

**Answered.** Count of calls answered by an agent from queues for the following claim center units: Intake, Adjudication and SAW Portal help desk.

**Abandoned.** Count of calls abandoned by a customer from queues before being answered by an agent for the following claim center units: Intake, Adjudication and SAW Portal help desk.

**High Call Volume Messages.** Count of calls (not customers) that are played a high-volume message asking the caller to try again later.

**Total Calls.** High Call Volume Messages played + Answered + Abandoned.

**Individuals.** Individual callers (by count of unique SSN) attempting to speak with an agent during the day. This count includes both callers who received a high-volume message and callers who entered the phone system. Individuals are counted once each day they attempt to call, so they are counted multiple times if they call over several days.

**Average Wait.** For all calls answered in all call queues, the average time a call remains in queue until answered by a claims center staff member.

Table 11: Calls to Claims Centers

Month	April	May	June
High Call Volume Messages	312,303	264,610	409,017
Answered	62,044	54,684	63,882
Abandoned	18,125	17,627	19,918
<b>Total Calls</b>	<b>392,472</b>	<b>336,921</b>	<b>492,817</b>
Average Wait Time	0:41:24	0:41:58	0:40:58

Source: ESD operational data

ESD is exploring industry standard call center staffing software that provides better estimates of staff required to reduce call wait times and answer all calls forecast during peak demand

periods. These new estimates will provide a clear picture of the gap between federal funding available and what it costs to meet service goals common for businesses, typically well under one minute.

Table 12: Individuals Calling Claims Centers

Month	April	May	June
Individuals	165,768	139,912	176,319

Source: ESD operational data

ESSB 5193 asked ESD to calculate the ratio of staff phone agents to employers and ratio of staff phone agents to claimants. ESD does not have FTE counts of phone agents because no staff members are assigned exclusively to answering phone inquiries. As of Jun. 16, 2021, the Unemployment Insurance Customer Support Division in total:

- Had 1,175 UI Benefits permanent and non-permanent staff positions to serve an average of 376,203 claimants who received payment in the second quarter.
- Had 185 UI Tax and Wage permanent and non-permanent staff positions to serve 252,544 active employers.