

New Jersey Department of Labor written responses to the
Senate Budget Committee follow-up questions
9/25/2020

Senator Sarlo

P.L.2015, c.235 established the New Jersey Innovation and Research Fellowship Program.

Funded out of the Workforce Development Partnership Fund, the program awards research fellowship grants to qualified science and technology companies. The employers are to use the grant awards to support the salaries of Ph.D. candidates and recent Ph.D. graduates so as to encourage them to continue their research in fellowship with New Jersey science and technology companies. Please provide a detailed status update on the implementation of the New Jersey Innovation and Research Fellowship Program.

NJDOL Response

Below is what was contracted in FY 2020 for the Innovation Research Fellowship Program. There was no prior activity for this program.

Innovation Research Fellowship Program (IRFP) Visikol, Inc. (10/1/19-9/30/21) Round 1	\$ 115,000
Innovation Research Fellowship Program (IRFP) Molecular, Nexomics, (4/1/20-3/31/22)Rd 2	\$ 241,500

Additionally, there are also two (2) pre-contracts with Nokia Bell Labs that are pending. The Nokia contracts are dated to start October 1, 2020 but have not been signed. Currently, these contracts are still under review with Nokia's legal department. This has been delayed due to the COVID Pandemic and subsequent fall out.

Senator Testa

Please provide detailed information concerning the metrics the department utilizes to ensure that unemployment insurance claims processors who work remotely are meeting performance targets. What are the performance targets?

NJDOL Response

For claims examining staff, supervisors review case production which is reported on a dashboard available online in our E-Adjudication software. The dashboard is broken down by examiner and each supervisor has access to the examiners that report to them. Each office manager has access to the staff in their office and our Regional Manager and her staff have access to all examiners state-wide to review overall production. Examiners are expected to close at least 8 cases per day. The reports can be filtered by number of cases closed so any low producing staff can be easily identified by their supervisor to take corrective action. Adjudication staff also works on monetary redeterminations for claims with issues on their monetary (missing employer, missing weeks or wages, out of state wages, etc). Monetary issues are resolved through scheduled appointments – staff are scheduled 16 appointments per day or recently through expansion of our electronic monetary processing via E-Monetary. E-Monetary allows for monetary to be completed without the need for an appointment; if the claimant provides all of the requested information in their response to the email (complete the monetary affidavit with their quarterly wage information and attach proof of the wages), the claim can be redetermined without the need for any appointment. Monetary staff working E-Monetary cases can close 25-30 cases per day, depending on if any follow up information is needed from the claimant.

Staff in Call Centers work is monitored in different ways, depending on what they are assigned to on a particular day. We have production reports available online where supervisors/Managers can see how many claims are processed per day. For staff working on 'Agent Intervention' claims that need review before they can be entered to our system, staff are expected to complete at least 50 per day. Agents taking calls are monitored with daily and weekly calls answered reports. Amount of calls answered will vary by type of call received (initial claim call will generally take longer than a general inquiry call) but on average agents are expected to answer 35 calls per day.

Senator Oroho

Please provide information on the current backlog of unresolved unemployment compensation claims. What is the total number of unresolved claims? Please break down the total into different causes for the pending status. For each of the last ten weeks, how many unresolved cases did the department clear? Is the backlog trending downward?

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NJDOL Response

We are pleased to report that more and more of our applicants for unemployment benefits are receiving a determination on their claim, and historic numbers of new claims that were flooding our office in March, April, and early May have somewhat subsided.

There is no singular metric to measure the number of 'unresolved' claims, as it is continually in flux. Each day, claims are deemed eligible or ineligible, new claims are filed, people return to work and roll off of unemployment, and agents resolve issues that had suspended a current claim so that a claimant can once again receive benefits.

To provide as accurate a response as possible given the above, we assume your questions refers to New Jersey workers who have applied for unemployment insurance who have yet to receive an eligibility determination, and require manual agent intervention.

As I said during the hearing, about 50 percent of the unemployment applications move from receipt to benefits within 3 weeks. These are so-called "clean" claims where there are no underlying complications that would require us to secure additional information or verify existing information from the claimant or their employer. In the past three weeks there have been roughly 65,000 new claims. About half of them will proceed smoothly to benefits without any additional information needed. The other half will have one or more of myriad complicating factors: incomplete wage information (or no wage information at all), multiple employers, wages in another state, filing more than one claim, having an open claim in another state, including incorrect information (such as wrong social security number), and many other possibilities. Others will be recalled from furlough or layoff, and will abandon their claim.

Currently, the number of claimants who need agent intervention for their claim to be processed, and are therefore 'unresolved', is 32,000. For comparison, on July 31st, there were 60,000 claimants awaiting agent intervention. Reports show the primary reason for delays are missing information from the claimant's employer, followed by self-employment and a lack of earnings, and self-pending the claim (meaning the person inadvertently provided information

that caused NJDOL to question their continued eligibility for benefits, which we are required by federal law to resolve before benefits can be paid).

As part of the innovation discussed at the hearing, we began an E-monetary process in August. At that time there were 12,700 claimants waiting for appointments to determine whether they met the monetary requirements for eligibility. These appointments were scheduled months out. Currently, we are down to 3,300 live appointments, with the latest being eight weeks out. As more claimants take advantage of E-monetary, the wait time will continue to improve. (Unfortunately, roughly 20 percent of applicants are determined to be ineligible for benefits; some contend they are still waiting for a determination when, in fact, they have been deemed ineligible.)

Another group that might be considered unresolved is school employees. In the memo to our congressional delegation which I shared with the Committee, I lamented the fact that, per federal law, school employees are held to a stricter standard of eligibility than other claimants. They cannot claim benefits if there is a 'reasonable assurance' they will be rehired in the next school year. Because of this heightened scrutiny we have an entire team dedicated solely to school employee issues. In a normal year, we receive approximately 10,000 school employee-related claims. This year, there have been more than 23,600, with about 10,000 waiting on adjudication.