



Testimony before the Task Force on the Reduction of State Agency Paper and Duplicative Procedures

Michael P. Starkowski, Commissioner

December 14, 2010

Good morning, Representative Nafis and members of the task force. My name is Michael Starkowski. I am Commissioner of the Connecticut Department of Social Services (DSS). I am pleased to be here this morning to present testimony on efforts being made in my agency to reduce paper use and duplicative processes.

Agency's best practices:

The Department of Social Services has taken a number of steps over the last few years to increase efficiency and to reduce duplication and paper usage within the agency. I would like to share with you a few of the measures that we have implemented.

1. Regular use of PDF documents and electronic transmittal of correspondence, reports, and Freedom of Information Act requests. The department has significantly reduced the amount of paper usage and mailing costs by utilizing scanners and email when possible.
2. Increased use of our internet and intranet. The department's public website contains a significant amount of consumer information in our attempt to promote self-service and increase accessibility. Information such as program eligibility, publications, downloadable applications and frequent updates any changes made to our programs can be found on the website. Our intranet, available to all our staff, provides ongoing information and updates about program eligibility, repository for all internal and external forms, policy manuals and agency statistics to name a few.
3. Postage Project. DSS generates 6.5 million pieces of mail each year, excluding mail sent by contracted managed care organizations, our HUSKY/Charter Oak enrollment broker (ACS), and other contractors. Our return mail rate averages between 4% and 6% per month. There are two reasons why mail is returned: 1) the address is inaccurate; or 2) the client does not live at the address reported to DSS.

Recognizing the problem, agency staff formed an internal workgroup that has been meeting over the last year to create a solution. A plan has been developed that will significantly decrease the number of returned mail by about 70% and result in cost savings of approximately \$100,000 per year. The department will install software that will match the address that is currently on file in our Eligibility Management System to the list of valid addresses on file with the U.S. Postal Service. In addition, this software

will match the client against the USPS national change of address database to determine if the person reported an address change to the post office. While we estimate a reduction in paper, duplicative processes and actual cost savings, the greatest benefit is workload reduction. Undelivered mail causes a backlog in case processing. It increases the number of times a worker handles the case to complete a single transaction and the phone call volume to the regional offices. Regional staff indicated that each mail item that returns with a change of address sticker on it results in 2 or 3 additional mailings.

The other reason for implementing this process is the U.S. Postal Service itself. Undeliverable mail costs money to carry and return it to the sender. As a result, the USPS is phasing out postage discounts for large mailers that do not utilize the automated technologies developed to cleanse and forward mail to the addresses reported to the Post Office. We could end up paying 6 cents more per letter if we do not start this process. Six cents on 6.5 million pieces is almost \$400,000 per year. The cost of the equipment we need is less than \$6,000 per year when you subtract the federal share for SNAP, MA and TFA.

4. Client Issue Tracking System (CITS). At my direction our Office of Communications/Public and Government Relations worked in conjunction with our Information Technology Services to develop a web-based referral and tracking system for client cases. As you are probably aware, the department receives a substantial amount of client and applicant-related inquiries from numerous sources that are sent throughout the agency. Upon reviewing further, we discovered that external sources were not only contacting various units throughout the agency but they were also sending multiple requests.

To address this growing problem, staff created a web-based program that allows authorized staff to enter client data and simultaneously email the information to the appropriate regional office for resolution. The information is housed in a centralized database that will notify the user if an inquiry currently exists, in addition to generating tracking reports. With the implementation of this system, we have seen a reduction in use of paper, faxes and duplication of efforts.

5. Modernization. As a result of the Raymond v. Rowland settlement agreement, a lawsuit alleging that people with disabilities could not effectively access our services, DSS is making changes to the way we do business. These changes will provide extra help for people with disabilities, as well as create changes to physical office setup, procedures, written notices and phone and computer systems to make them easier to use, the department is exploring a number of systems and processes to increase access to our regional offices. This includes web-based applications, an Interactive Voice Response phone system, an electronic document management system and enhancements to our regional offices. While this is still in the planning stages it will greatly improve access and efficiency, while eliminating the mountains of paper we regularly deal in.
6. Internal and external use of electronic (fill-able) forms for requesting services and program materials. The department receives frequent requests for applications and

informational materials about our programs. The department has converted the request forms to a fill-able electronic format and the requests come back to the department via email.

7. File exchanges of client data between DSS and the Housing Authorities in Middletown and New Haven regions. This project was initiated in our Southern region and has experienced great success. The department entered into an MOU with the Middletown and New Haven housing authorities that allows for the electronic transfer of client information necessary for maintaining or determining eligibility of benefits. By implementing this it provided a seamless transmittal of information, reduced the time and paper between the two agencies and eliminated the need for client shaving to come into the office to fill out additional paperwork.

Obstacles with regards to efficiency:

There are a number of obstacles to obtaining much needed efficiency in state agencies.

- Statutory and legislative requirements that do not support paper reduction efforts. The department is currently responsible to produce and submit 73 legislative reports, all required by statute. Each report is on a different timeframe and the reports have varying submission frequencies. These requirements are labor-intensive at a time when we have lost staff and caseloads have been skyrocketing. Our resources are stretched very thinly. While I completely support transparency, in this time of diminished resources, our focus really needs to be on serving our clients.
- Requirements for Submitting Regulations to the Legislative Regulation Review Committee. The Regulations Review committee currently requires that 19 paper copies of the proposed regulation and any corresponding documentation be sent to the committee. On March 4, 2010 I wrote to the committees recommended that they consider allowing for the electronic submittal of regulations, a copy of which is included with my testimony.
- The overall cultural shift of moving to a “paperless” environment.

Suggestions for statutory and regulatory changes that could be made to decrease the amount of paper in your agency:

- Revise the Regulations process to allow for electronic submissions.
- Consolidate statutory reporting existing requirements.