

# Sean Brown, DCF-ESD Deputy Commissioner

## HHS Testimony Outline: 4/15/2020

### Caseload Pressures:

Applications (reinstatement & new) and EBT Card Issuance	Daily Applications (New and Reinstatements)		EBT Card Issuance
	3SVT	Reach UP	
Weekly Average Pre-COVID	<b>390</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>240</b>
03/23 - 03/26	<b>1237</b>	<b>300</b>	<b>390</b>
03/30 - 04/03	<b>2009</b>	<b>388</b>	<b>548</b>
04/06 -04/10	<b>698</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>591</b>
04/13 (Mon)	162	23	124
04/14 (Tue)	78	23	136

Business Hours (8:00am - 4:30pm)	# of Calls in (total)	Call to Reps (avg daily)	Avg. Call Time	Mode Wait Time
Weekly Average pre-COVID	3098	413	0:04:33	0:00:25
03/23 - 03/27	8245	778	0:14:14	0:03:51
03/30 - 04/03	7890	885	0:11:53	0:05:23
04/06 - 04/10	4252	696	0:05:42	0:00:20
04/13 (Mon)	917	842	0:05:18	0:00:17
04/14 (Tue)	718	699	0:05:09	0:00:15

GA Housing # of Rooms	04/02	04/03	04/06	04/07	04/08	04/09	04/10	04/13	04/14
ADO	43	52	53	59	61	63	63	65	63
BDO	296	317	329	330	331	335	347	349	360
HDO	67	70	74	73	78	79	81	84	85
JDO	26	29	34	36	36	37	38	38	38
LDO	82	80	90	91	82	81	85	94	95
MDO	141	146	154	164	153	161	163	165	168
NDO	11	12	13	13	13	14	16	15	16
RDO	73	86	102	100	103	108	111	122	120
SDO	22	25	25	29	28	28	28	32	33
TDO	73	85	89	91	95	100	107	110	111
VDO	14	15	16	16	16	19	21	21	19
YDO	38	46	49	51	51	52	51	51	52
Harbor Place	NA	4	4	4	4	2	4	4	3
North Beach Campground	NA	21	21	24	24	24	23	24	25
Total	886	988	1053	1081	1075	1103	1138	1174	1188

## Operational Response:

- Quickly moved the majority of ESD staff to teleworking from home, including district and call center staff.
- District offices are open for walk-ins and are staffed by a few staff to meet the demand. We have implemented changes to ensure proper social distancing.
- All in person program and eligibility requirements have been waived. Most of our interaction with Vermonters is now via telephone, online and mail.
- Expanded call center hours until 6:30 p.m., M-F.
- Significantly expanded OT, across ESD staff have worked 3,162 hours of OT in past 4 weeks.
- In the first 2 weeks of the COVID crisis, we had close to 80 BPS staff answering the call center general queue, normally there are approximately 20.
- We are current on our work and processing cases as timely, if not more so, than we were pre-COVID.

## Reach Up & Essential Person Program Policy Changes:

### **Changes to the Reach Up/PSE program due to Covid-19**

- Waived interviews and extended March and April reviews for six months.
- Suspended Reach First Program, because it requires documentation that is too difficult to obtain currently.
- Halted all new sanctions that were due to start for failure to cooperate with OCS and for not participating in the services component and lifted all existing sanctions.
- Ended closures for those not participating in services if they have 60 countable months of Reach Up and reopened those cases due to close in March and April for this reason.
- Extended benefits for those receiving Reach Up under “temporary absence of child or adult” (typically children in DCF custody) until the end of June.
- Due to the unknowns around Covid-19, all pregnant women within 90 days of their due date, expanded from 30 days, will be considered “high risk” and may receive Reach Up if otherwise eligible (income, resources, etc.)
- Simplified reporting and verification requirements to allow self-declaration in many cases (application for Unemployment, end of income).

- Most case management appointments taking place remotely, via phone or Skype.
- Suspended work requirements: case managers check in with families regularly to help them with most relevant issues of the moment (often this is homeschooling, obtaining internet access, finding necessities such as food and toiletries).
- “Stopped the clock” for all participants, so that none of the months during this pandemic will count against their 60-month time limit.
- Waived a physical signature for the Family Development Plan (FDP).
- Suspended the independent Medical Review Team process (no need for it since work requirement is waived).
- Good News Garage is not currently placing any cars.
- Suspended the conciliation process.

### **Changes to the Essential Person Program due to Covid-19**

- Extended reviews for March and April for six months.
- Waived doctor’s signature on forms; temporarily take self-declaration and review case in a shorter time frame - in 6 months.

### 3SquaresVT Policy & Benefit Changes

#### **Waivers**

- Applied for and granted waivers with FNS:
  - Waiver of requirement to conduct Quality Control Interviews Face-to-Face
  - Extension of Quality Control Interview Deadlines
  - Waiver to deadline to conduct fair hearings
  - Waiver to extend recertification for the months of May, June, and July by 1 year and waiver of the Interim report requirement for the same time period
  - Waiver to provide an emergency allotment to households to increase the monthly benefit to the maximum allotment for their household size
  - Waiver of the requirement to conduct an interview at application or recertification
- Applied for and denied waivers with FNS:
  - Waiver to provide flexibility to college students that are no longer able to take advantage of an on-campus meal plan
- Applied for and still pending waivers with FNS:
  - Waiver to allow households to purchase hot and prepared meals

## **P-EBT-Federal Stimulus Benefit**

- This plan once submitted and approved by FNS will issue additional benefits to SNAP and non-SNAP households with children to cover the value of free or reduced-price school meals due to COVID-19 school closures, beginning in early May. Benefit will be provided to all families with children receiving free or reduced-price school meals, whether they receive SNAP benefits or not. Total benefit issuance is estimated at \$14,728,800. Benefit will be provided to a total 38K children, 18K children in SNAP households and 20K children in non-SNAP households. ESD is working closely with Agency of Education to identify the non-SNAP households.

## **Maximum Allotment-Federal Stimulus Benefit**

- VT's plan to issue additional benefits to existing SNAP households has been approved. This benefit will issue up to the maximum allotment allowed based on household size to each household currently enrolled in SNAP in March and April. Approximately 20K households will receive a total of \$3M in additional benefits. The first payment will happen the week April 20<sup>th</sup> and the second payment will happen the week of May 18<sup>th</sup>.

## **Policy Changes/Clarifications**

- VT has exercised as much flexibility as possible within the Federal rules of the SNAP program.
  - Verification Requirements
  - Dependent Care Clarifications
  - Student Criteria
  - Employment & Training Program, ICAN

## LIHEAP Policy and Benefit Changes:

### **Seasonal Fuel**

- No real change as we were at the end of the regular Fuel season. We are still processing applications for the 20-21 fuel season and to date we have seen around 5% increase from March to April.
- Extended recertification/ reviews for six months

### **Crisis Fuel**

- Waived face to face interviews, phone interviews are taking place.
- With Moratorium on Utility disconnects. Public Utility Commission order is in place until 4/30/20, however VT Gas and GMP just announced they have extended theirs to 5/31/20 and we think others will follow
- Taking self-declaration when unable to verify employment has ended.

### **Additional Funding**

- We are anticipating an additional 4.153 million (estimate only) to help families with additional LIHEAP needs.

- Working with Community Action Programs statewide to extend the current Crisis season from April 30<sup>th</sup>, 2020 to June 15<sup>th</sup>, 2020. They are putting together budgets and identifying what they think their need might be to help struggling Vermonters.
- Plan is to focus on Utility Disconnects as those bills could be quite high once companies start notifying Households of shut off dates.

## General Assistance Policy & Benefit Changes:

### **Application Process**

- Interviews are conducted primarily by phone, a substantial change for the General Assistance program.
- Applications are no longer being completed for extensions of Adverse Weather Conditions housing grants.

### **Non-Catastrophic General and Emergency Assistance**

- Verification requirements have been relaxed. Applicants are not being asked to provide verification from a medical provider of temporary disability or verification they are working with an attorney on their Social Security claim.
- ESD staff are proactively calling recipients of non-catastrophic General Assistance and completing applications by phone in order to limit visits to ESD district offices.

### **Temporary Housing**

- Many residents of congregate shelters have been moved to hotels. Examples include the Good Samaritan in Barre, Groundworks in Brattleboro, as well as the COTS and ANEW in Burlington
- ESD is housing clients who meet the CDC's definition of "hyper-vulnerable."
- Adverse Weather Conditions have been extended to allow the homeless population to comply with Governor Scott's "Stay Home" order. AWC has been extended through the night of May 15<sup>th</sup>, 2020.
- Other than the North Beach Campground, applicants are no longer being referred to homeless shelters.
- Applicants are no longer required to spend 30% of their income on housing.
- The "Period of Ineligibility" has been waived for applicants asked to leave hotels.
- Housing grants have been extended beyond the normal maximum of 28 days.
- In order to meet the increased demand, ESD is working with hotels not normally part of the temporary housing program.

- ESD is working with community partners to provide meals, case management and other services to homeless individuals housed in motels.
- ESD is contracting with Sheriff's departments to provide security at hotels with large numbers of guests (over 50), 3 in Chittenden County and 1 in Washington County.