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**Report to  
The Vermont Legislature**

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**Report on  
Economic Services Division Pilot Programs**

**In Accordance with Act 85, 2017**

**Submitted to: House Human Services  
Senate Health and Welfare**

**Submitted by: Ken Schatz, Commissioner  
Department for Children and Families**

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**Report Date: January 15, 2019**



## Introduction

Per the 2017 Budget Bill, Act 85:

“On or before January 15, 2019, the Commissioner shall submit a report to the House Committee on Human Services and to the Senate Committee on Health and Welfare summarizing the pilot programs implemented pursuant to this section and any findings and recommendations. In the event a particular pilot program is successful at improving the delivery of services to clients, the Commissioner may seek to amend the Division’s rules in conformity with the approach used by the pilot program pursuant to 3 V.S.A. chapter 25.”

Below is a summary of the two pilot projects conducted under this authority.

## Economic Services Pilot Programming

In October 2017, the Economic Services Division (ESD) began two pilot projects regarding the processing of fuel benefits when multiple program benefits are applied for at the same time. The goal was to shorten wait times for processing and receiving a fuel benefit. Prior to the pilot projects, when an application was received requesting benefits for multiple programs, the fuel request was held and processed alongside the other benefits. This often led to a fuel application being held and not processed for 30 days.

The pilot projects’ focus was to process applications for fuel benefits more quickly while not confusing the client or creating case errors. Two district offices were selected to conduct the pilots, Newport and Barre. Newport processed cases per usual procedures unless the client had not called in for the 3squares interview by the 5th day. At that point, Newport eligibility staff would send out a Notice of Missed Interview (NOMI) and a “fuel only” verification request. In Barre, staff worked the case as soon as possible, did not wait for the NOMI to be sent out and sent the verification request for fuel benefits as soon as the application was received.

The pilots ran for six months before conducting a review of the projects. This allowed us to ensure the change in the delivery of benefits was sustainable in the district offices and that clients were not confused by the new process.

## Findings

The following significant findings were realized by the pilot projects for fuel applications:

- The average processing time for cases was 18 days, significantly less than the average 30+ days
- Clients were found eligible sooner and dealers had funds available more quickly to help meet clients’ home heating needs
- Clients remained eligible for crisis assistance
- There was no increase in Case and Procedure Error Rates (CAPER) due to this process; and
- There were no reports of client confusion.

Following these findings, it is felt that we could move forward statewide. ESD developed a hybrid of the two pilots where fuel can be processed as soon as possible, but no later than when the NOMI is sent. This takes the best of the two pilots and puts it into one package. A Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) was developed and supervisors were trained on this in August 2018.

The new SOP is currently being followed in all 12 districts across the state. As a result of these two pilot projects, customers are receiving fuel benefits approximately 12 days sooner than before. This is a change in how the fuel benefit is processed, and thus does not require going through the Administrative Procedures Act to request a rule change. We are very excited at the success of this project and the outcome this means for our clients across the state.