ACCESSNebraska Oversight Committee Meeting (LR 418)
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Good afternoon, Senator Howard, and members of the LR 418 ACCESSNebraska Oversight Committee. I'm Courtney Phillips (C-o-u-r-t-n-e-y P-h-i-l-l-i-p-s), Chief Executive Officer of the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services.

Thank you for asking us to be here this morning. I value your interest and look forward to updating you on the progress we've made this this past year.

ACCESSNebraska has taken many steps forward in improving service delivery.

Our call wait times have been averaging five minutes or less since September. The average days to process an Economic Assistance application has declined from 17.8 days in May 2015 to 7.99 days in April 2016.

The SNAP program has met, or exceeded, the SNAP processing timeliness of 96% or better since February 2016.

ACCESSNebraska staff, and others in the Department who support ACCESSNebraska, are continually working on process improvement. Last year, we discussed with this Committee 10 focus areas that were identified as barriers to an efficient operation.

Those items and the updates include:

1. The first is our **Mail operations.**
   Last year we discussed having mail delivered, scanned and indexed into clients files more quickly. In August, the staff began processing the daily mail at 2 a.m. Most days the mail is scanned into the system and available for staff viewing by 8 a.m.

2. We also addressed the **Interactive Voice Response (or IVR) call routing menus.**
   As we discussed last year, an updated IVR system was released April 18th. Through self-service options, clients can now obtain the scan date of the last document we received, as well as the due date for their next program review. The Department encourages clients to utilize self-service information, which is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Additional changes included the ability to complete an application via the telephone for Economic Assistance. The ability to apply via telephone has been available for Medicaid and Long-Term Care clients since the implementation of the Affordable Healthcare Act.

3. **Recruitment and retention of employees** remains a priority.
   Last year we planned to do a better job recruiting and retaining good employees. Work processes were changed to better train and prepare staff for their work in the Service Centers and Local Offices. The training process now includes more activities to be completed outside of the formal classroom training. The work site field learning experiences have increased interaction with the supervisor and work team during the training process. The Supervisor is more involved with classroom training and communicating with the trainers.

   Human Resources also has improved the hiring processes to shorten the length of time a position is vacant. In February 2016 it took an average of 64 days from when the position was vacated to when the next person started work. In April 2016 it took 51 days from when a position was vacated until the next person started work.

   The turnover rate for ACCESSNebraska is 3-4% in 2016. Experienced local office staff are retiring which is the main reason for turnover in those offices. The Customer Service Center's staff frequently leave to other promotional opportunities inside the Department. The team is working on a staff survey to assess employee satisfaction. The findings will be utilized to develop employee retention efforts.

4. Another area is **program polices.**
   As discussed last year, many policies have been streamlined, and the verification processes have been simplified where possible. For example, in the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program, policy changes lead to a more efficient processing of heating season applications. The regulations were modified in regard to income verification, payment history and calculations required. Before these changes, applications were taking 30-45 days to process. These policy simplifications resulted in the case manager being able to process energy benefits the same day as receiving the application in many instances. Policy review and simplification is an ongoing process for all ACCESSNebraska programs.

5. We have done an **analysis of the reasons clients call.**
   Benefits continue to be the primary reason clients call to check the status of an application, and to see if we have received their documents. Although the reason for most calls has stayed consistent, call volume decreases as the timeliness of processing applications improves. Economic Assistance call volume has been slightly over 30,000

calls monthly in February, March and April. This is about 25% lower than the previous 40,000 calls per month or higher in 2015. The lower call volumes can be attributed to the improvement in timeliness of application processing. The average processing time went from a high of 40 days in November 2014 to around 8 days in April 2016.

In May, phone volume increased to the 40,000 level. This is due to the end of the school year when many families have changes in income and child care expenses during the summer months. In addition, Economic Assistance implemented the ability to apply by telephone on April 18. This additional method of accessibility is part of the volume increase.

 Medicaid and Long-Term Care phone volume has been steady at about 30,000 calls monthly.

6. We have also done an **analysis of after-call work.**
Analysis continues on after-call work. Economic Assistance has lowered the time spent in after-call work from 15 minutes or more to around 12 minutes. Now, we have supervisors and lead workers walking the floor so they are readily available to staff needing assistance. In addition, staff is utilizing the electronic data sources such as TALX to verify income. Case managers are also telling clients what verification is needed and letting the client know that they can submit the verification by email after taking a picture with their phone. These changes have been key to reducing processing time.

7. **Communications** remain an important component of our work.
Our website, some correspondence and major forms have been rewritten so they are easier to understand. Several client forms were added to the website. Services have been promoted to ease clients' interaction with ACCESSNebraska. Improving communication is an ongoing activity.

ACCESSNebraska still has a monthly conference call with Community Partners which is focused on keeping partners aware of recent policy and process changes in ACCESSNebraska. The call includes a question and answer portion to answer Partner's questions. Community Partners include: Community Action Agencies, Managed Health Care Providers, and service providers such as Aging Partners, Head Start, and Food Banks. Advocacy agencies such as Appleseed also participate.

8. **Workforce management and capacity planning** has made an impact.
A Workforce Administrator, who joined the team in September, forecasts daily call volume for the Customer Service Centers. Time studies also have been completed on Economic Assistance case processing to forecast work production to know how many staff to have on certain tasks at certain times. Daily production forecasts are utilized to

assign staff to a particular task for the team to meet production goals. Tasks include: phone call volume, work tasks, and initial and recertification application processing. Production goals include: Average Call Processing time at 5 minutes; Longest Wait for a call to be answered at 10 minutes; and an average of 10 days for Application Processing. Workforce management forecasting has been very valuable for our planning efforts. The Administrator is training a team of people to assist in this activity going forward.

9. Another area is **work tasks.**
    A year ago, the number of work tasks for Economic Assistance was over 50,000 and growing. The implementation of process improvements, and the use of daily huddles, has allowed Economic Assistance to achieve no work tasks in the system over five days since March. The number of work tasks fluctuates depending on the work volume, but is now usually less than 10,000. Work tasks include case changes received via electronic data source, online change report, and documents submitted via email, online and U.S. mail.

10. The last of the 10 items is **operational reporting and forecasting.**
    In the past year, the operational data reporting has improved. Reports are now available that include the amount of work needing to be processed as well as the work that was processed the previous day, week, and month. Operational reporting and forecasting are essential tools to manage the work.

Communication and management have been keys to our improvement. Daily, a management huddle is held in Economic Assistance and Medicaid. During the huddles, discussion is held on goals for the day, amount of staff available and any issues or problems to completing the work.

Staff have done a good job keeping the average call wait time at or below five minutes for the last seven months.

Staff are now working toward a goal of the longest wait time for a client not to exceed 10 minutes. Progress has been made on this goal which had wait times over an hour in 2015 to May 2016 when the longest wait was 27 minutes.

Although improvements have been made, our work isn't done. Work groups continue to focus on process improvement and implementation of new systems. Development work continues on NTRAC, Medicaid and Long-Term Care's new eligibility system. The phone system is also being upgraded to increase productivity and is scheduled to be operational in fall/winter of 2016-2017.

ACCESSNebraska will continue to adjust to changes in the operating environment and economic conditions. Last year the Department mentioned a dashboard to publically measure how we're

doing. While we are sending you regular updates of the dashboard, we encourage you to go to our website at any time to view our latest performance. We also welcome feedback and ideas to improve our services.

Again, thank you for your support. I'm happy to answer any questions you may have.