

<b>Location</b>	Teleconference
<b>Time</b>	10:00 am – 12:00 pm
<b>Attendees (all on the phone)</b>	Paid Family and Medical Leave Director: Carla Reyes Employee's Interests Representative: Sybill Hyppolite substitute for Joe Kendo Employee's Interests Representative: Maggie Humphreys Employee's Interests Representative: Marilyn Watkins Employee's Interests Representative: Samantha Grad Employer's Interests Representative: Bob Battles Employer's Interests Representative: Julia Gorton Employer's Interests Representative: Christine Brewer Paid Family and Medical Leave Act Ombudsman: Edsonya Charles
<b>Guests</b>	PFML Interim Director: John Mattes PFML Interim Operations Manager: Leah Coberly PFML Policy Manager: April Amundson PFML Business Systems Product Manager: Matt Buelow
<b>Members Absent</b>	Employer's Interests Representative: Tammie Hetrick
<b>Scribe</b>	Linda Kleingartner

**Introductions** - Members introduced themselves.

**March Minutes** – Approved.

**Customer Service Processing Update** – Carla Reyes reviewed the application and weekly claim data (see slides) through 4/11/2020. The Program goal is to be processing applications within two weeks by the end of June 2020. Data was showing a consistent rise in week-over-week application volumes that the team was tracking closely. However, the most recently completed three weeks have shown the opposite trend with week-over-week declines resulting in the lowest number of applications received in a week since benefits launch. It is too early for us to know what the sustained volumes baseline is, or what is driving demand fluctuations. We have also been trying to gauge if there are any direct Covid-19 related impacts on the demand levels. We ran two separate week random sample reviews of applications received and found a total of about 16 cases where Covid was mentioned. The most recent week-over-week application number declines would seem to support that at this time the pandemic is not driving volumes up. We will continue to monitor the application volumes. The team is keeping up with the weekly claim processing and doing their best to balance time between the weekly claims and applications. We will start seeing the benefits of the additional staffing (both in-house and contracted) as the weeks progress.

John Mattes reviewed the call data (see slides). The total volume of calls is declining. The team has maintained a consistent number of hours of phone coverage. He summarized the top five topics/reasons for calls to include:

1. Customers providing additional information related to the Benefit applications (usually start/end dates)

2. Weekly claims (hours of paid time-off used)
3. Responding fact-finding questions
4. Inquiring on the status of their application
5. General questions about the program.

Maggie asked how the Program is taking this data (most common call reasons) and whether there are any technology adjustments being made or planned to be implemented in response to the questions. Matt Buelow advised the team is working on collecting data around the most common calls or adjustments needed (e.g. weekly claim hours, application start/end dates), and then the Product team will evaluate the best solution and timing to implement the technology enhancement. The Advisory Committee expressed these functions seem relatively basic in the system design and are frustrated that they will not be addressed in a more timely manner, which they find unacceptable. They would like to see the Department move more quickly to add technology updates and enhancements. Carla acknowledged the frustration, confirmed that the team takes the feedback seriously and that the team will continue to design, develop and implement technology enhancements as quickly as possible. For context, she shared that the current typical cycle of release is about 6 to 8 weeks in length, and that when the time frames take longer, it is typically to ensure adequate testing to keep the system stable and secure. Carla shared the cloud migration work, when implemented, could increase the speed to move technology enhancements into production. The team will continue to balance speed of development with the need to pay due diligence to proper technology development and deployment practices.

**Action Matt:** Will go back and review with the team which items can be done more quickly and bring these ideas back to Advisory Committee.

Clarification was requested on the method to move an application from Family to Medical leave, which previously required a phone call. Matt confirmed that the technology was enhanced to support the ability for a customer to make this adjustment online. The process does require the submission of a second application. This was the first iteration of this process, which gives customers the ability to initiate the change online (rather than waiting on the phone) and the team will continue to iterate the functionality for continuous improvements.

**Action Leah:** Clarify how the 2<sup>nd</sup> qualifying event places the customer in the queue, does their application align with the 1<sup>st</sup> application submission date or the date of the 2<sup>nd</sup> application submission?

*Update following meeting: A report is run daily and if there is a 2nd application from a customer it gets assigned to the Specialist that has the first application. The Specialist is then working the application in order of other applications in their queue.*

Bob asked what impacts the current volumes may have on the program. He is particularly concerned about the potential to drive an increase to the premium rate, especially during a time where employees and employers are struggling with the economic impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic. Carla reiterated that the team continues to watch the benefit demand

volumes. As discussed earlier, they continue to fluctuate and there are not enough consistent data points to show a particular volume trend, yet. There is a potential impact on revenue collections from the economic impacts of Covid pandemic. April is a quarterly reporting month for the period of January to March 2020—which largely predates the Covid impacts. The biggest impact we might see in the April reporting is from employers who are not open or able to submit wage reports or remit premiums in April as planned. Since most employers report the last week of the month, we won't have great visibility on the initial revenue impacts until we close out the reporting month. In addition, the bigger impacts may be seen with Quarter 2 reporting that covers the time period from April to June. It will likely be a better indicator of the Covid pandemic impact on revenue collections. Carla recommended an initial review and discussion about this topic in the May meeting, when we have information about the April reporting cycle and suggested that a detailed planning discussion on rates take place in the August meeting once we also have the Quarter 2 results and more data on the applications and benefits expenditures. The timing will be right for planning what will be included on this topic in the December 2020 report to the Legislature and what actions the Department may need to take relative to premium rates in alignment with the statute. Bob asked to confirm that there is an upper limit on the amount of rate increase that can be implemented. Carla was not sure what that exact language was but committed that the team could follow up to clarify.

**Action John:**

- Add an agenda topic to review preliminary data on revenue from April reporting in the May meeting.
- Add a rate analysis agenda topic to the August 2020 meeting.
- Provide confirmation of the rate limits included in statute.

John Mattes highlighted the data around non-English applications requested thus far, as well as the languages supported for interpreter services. He outlined that the application is structured to require data and number entries so that fewer translations are required and applications can be processed more quickly.

**Action Leah:** Provide information about the approval rates for the non-English applications received.

*Update following meeting (as of 4/20/2020): 4 have been approved, 1 is in review and 32 are in submitted status. The number in submitted status is a reflection on when the applications were received and their position in queue.*

John reviewed the status Target Two Weeks update (see slide- key accomplishments in green section). The team is monitoring the data closely and happy to report we remain on track to meet our 2-week processing timeframe by the end of June.

Matt Buelow provided an update on the hardship expedited reviews. The policy was implemented and expedited reviews and processing began March 6th. Matt thanked Edsonya and the Ombuds' office for their support in the review of these requests. Edsonya clarified the types of documentation needed to support the request which are the specific notice (e.g.

eviction, utility shut-off). She noted that if that information is not available then the customer can do a declaration explaining what their circumstances are.

**Action Leah:** Identify the number of hardships requests waiting to be processed.

*Update following meeting (as of 4/20/2020): There are no pending hardship requests, once they are received from the Ombuds office, they are assigned to a Specialist and worked as part of their current queue.*

*The Ombuds office reviews the applications the day they receive them and send them over to PFML Leads. Our Leads assign them out every day (unless received after 5:00 PM) and the Specialists process them within 24-48 hours, unless fact-finding is required and they are unable to obtain the needed information over the phone.*

**Paid Family and Medical Leave and COVID-19** – April Amundson distributed an updated version of the document she shared with the Advisory Committee providing a comparison of the WA Paid Family and Medical Leave program to the recently enacted Emergency FMLA Expansion Act (until 12/31/2020) and Emergency Paid Sick Leave Act (12/31/2020). Bob asked if the document will be distributed with ESD branding, as he would like to share the document and wants to credit the Department appropriately. April said she is working with communications to put this into a branded document and confirmed that in the meantime it is fine for members to share the existing document.

Leah Coberly shared the team was able to move all staff into a telework status in a two-week window of time. The onboarding and training have successfully been adjusted to be provided online. The team has done a great job with their adjustments keeping teams engaged with daily stand-ups. There has not been any significant decrease in productivity. Carla shared the team is evaluating how we are looking at applying the key learnings from this experience on how to optimize the use of facility space and telework options in the future.

Bob asked if there are any challenges that we were working through with equipment and security. Carla answered that the Paid Leave program was already equipped with the employee's standard issued equipment to easily flex into a telework situation. The team is not using personal computers, and are operating on the virtual private network already in place. Matt confirmed this provides the firewall protection and connections which are aligned with telework that has occurred elsewhere in the department for years. The remote staff are not handling paper documents, these documents are processed at the Department's Imaging Center. Telework agreements in place for all staff to clarify the responsibilities and expectations for working remotely.

### **Advisory Committee Logistics -**

**Decision:** Advisory Committee agreed to make May and June public meeting's conference call only.

Carla shared this is her last Advisory Committee meeting serving as the Paid Family and Medical Leave Director. John Mattes will serve as the interim Director. The Advisory Committee appreciated her openness, wonderful leadership, and great partnership.

**Action Liz / Carla**—Work with Bob Battles to schedule a meeting with him, several employers, Suzi and Carla or John to discuss the program. Carla clarified that Bob could work with her to get a meeting scheduled. Note: Liz Merrick will serve as the point person to assist in scheduling this meeting.

Maggie or Marilyn asked whether the Department has been in contact with other states to discuss impacts of Covid-19 on Paid Leave programs currently in operation. Carla shared that NASWA has facilitated regular weekly cross-state communication calls, but that to date most conversations have focused on the UI system impacts. She also shared he has been speaking with Oregon and Massachusetts on their planning and implementation of the program.

**Action John:** May Agenda topics: What small business opt-in rate? How is it working? What is going on with the small business grants?

**Action Liz:** Send John's contact information

The Advisory Committee agreed either of the two alternate dates for September's meeting work, please go ahead and schedule.

**Action Liz / John:** Confirm the meeting date for September from the proposed options.

### **Open Comment –**

Marissa Mayfield Lincoln Financial- Voluntary plans- Are the voluntary plan employers able to reach out to the state to get the history from a private employer. John – yes there is a way for an approved voluntary plan employer to reach out to the Program to get the information. John offered to follow up with her direct inquiry via email.

**Action Linda:** Provide the slides from the meeting to the Committee (was emailed immediately) and for future meetings.

**Next Meeting:** Thursday, May 21, 10:00 am - Noon | This meeting will be held via WebEx only