



Employment Security Advisory Committee

Meeting details

Date: Monday, October 21, 2019

Time: 1:00 to 3:00 p.m.

Location: Employment Security Department – Maple Park Building, Maple Leaf Room

Committee members present:

- Mark Johnson
- Chelsea Mason
- Linda Nguyen
- Anne Paxton for John Tirpak

Committee members participating by phone:

- Mike Gempler
- Rod Van Alyne

Committee members absent:

- Bob Battles
- Joe Kendo
- Mark Riker

Summary

Welcome and introductions

Cami Feek (Deputy Commissioner and Chief Operating Officer) made introductions and welcomed the newest Employment Security Advisory Committee (ESAC) member, Rod Van Alyne of Eastern Washington Partnership Workforce Development. Having Rod as an ESAC member will help to ensure that the committee remains mindful of the needs of rural residents, particularly in Eastern Washington.

RESEA update

Mike Schulte (Employment Connections Program Integration Manager) and Steve Ruggles (Unemployment Insurance Customer Support Implementation Manager) gave an overview of the Reemployment Services and Eligibility Assessment (RESEA) program. As of the end of fiscal year 2018, 51 states and territories were participating in RESEA, which helps people get back to work sooner by ensuring that unemployment insurance (UI) claimants can navigate the UI system as successfully as possible.

Washington has the fourth-highest RESEA grant in the nation. The grant affects several ESD divisions, including but not limited to Unemployment Insurance Customer Support, Employment Connections, and Policy, Data, Performance, and Integrity.

Eligibility for RESEA depends both on need and on claimants' scores regarding the likelihood that they will obtain employment.

Economic Cycle Planning

Dan Zeitlin (Director of Policy, Data, Performance, and Integrity) discussed ESD's efforts to prepare for future economic shifts, a project that the agency calls "Economic Cycle Planning." Employees from across the agency have worked for months to prepare a document called the ESD Economic Cycle Planning report that identifies approximately 60 potential countermeasures that ESD can take to increase the likelihood that the agency will be prepared to handle future economic shifts. Some of the countermeasures only affect one ESD division, some affect multiple ESD divisions, and some involve work with ESD's external partners. In the near future, the Economic Cycle Planning work will move to ESD's Operations Committee, which will begin prioritizing and working on some of the countermeasures.

Improper benefit payments

Dan Zeitlin and Joy Adams (Manager of Unemployment Insurance Quality Assurance) gave an update on improper UI payments.

The U.S. Department of Labor (USDOL) is working to decrease states' rates of "improper" UI benefit payments, which occur when ESD provides unemployment benefits to claimants, and then determines later that they don't actually qualify for the benefits. In these situations, claimants have to repay benefits to ESD.

Federal law requires states to maintain a rate below 10%, but ESD's current average is around 14%. Because ESD's rate is above the federal threshold, USDOL recently put ESD on a corrective action plan and is providing technical assistance.

ESD has started taking action to reduce the rate by focusing on reemployment efforts and the agency's improper payment rate has started to decrease accordingly. Joy said that the National Association of State Workforce Agencies (NASWA) provides confidential independent assistance to states at the request of the USDOL. She explained that NASWA conducted a week-long site visit with ESD in August and will soon prepare an improper payments reduction plan for ESD.

Overview of ESD rulemaking

Dan Zeitlin gave a brief overview of [ESD's current rulemaking activities](#), and Scott Michael (Legal Appeals and Rules Coordination Manager) highlighted some of these efforts, such as the ["Out of Country" rule](#), which will set standards regarding eligibility for unemployment benefits when claimants are physically located in another country.

ESD is also working on an ["Hours of Availability" rule](#), which will eliminate the requirement for claimants to be available for work during all hours that are customary for their occupation.

ESD legislative agenda

Nick Streuli (Legislative and Executive Operations Director) gave an overview of ESD agenda for the 2020 legislative session.

Nick said that ESD plans to run two bills: one that will make necessary technical corrections to the Paid Family and Medical Leave Act, and one that allows employers to ask for “relief of benefit charges” in situations when employees are discharged because they can’t satisfy a job prerequisite required by law or administrative rule.

In addition, Nick said that ESD is considering running three decision packages. The first decision package will make a technical adjustment to ESD’s appropriation authority from the Employment Services Administrative Account for the 2019-21 biennium, and the second decision package will request an expenditure authority adjustment regarding the PFML program so that ESD can complete implementation activities and adequately support program operations.

The third decision package will be a Capital Budget request regarding ESD’s headquarters building (called Maple Park), which was built in 1961 and has never had a major renovation. All of Maple Park’s major systems are obsolete, so it’s important for ESD to renovate the building. The agency will ask for funding to complete some predesign work and to do preconstruction work so that improvements can begin in late 2021.

Wrap-up and next steps

Cami Feek thanked everyone for their input and participation and ended the meeting.

2020 meetings

All of the 2020 Employment Security Advisory Committee meetings will be on Mondays and will start at 1:00 p.m.

The first two meetings will be at the ESD headquarters in Olympia on:

- April 6th
- June 15th

The remaining meetings will be at the ESD building in Lacey at 640 Woodland Square Loop on:

- August 17th
- October 26th