

OCS Public Report

Annual Report 2022: January 1 - December 31

Pursuant to Local Law 171 of 2019 to amend the administrative code of the City of New York, in relation to requiring the Department of Social Services/Human Resources Administration to report annually on comments, questions, and complaints by clients, the Department of Social Services/Human Resources Administration respectfully submits the report below.

Office of Constituent Services – Connecting New Yorkers in Need

The Office of Constituent Services (OCS) connects New Yorkers in need with vital services and programs, serving more than 4 million clients annually across all Department of Social Services (DSS), Human Resources Administration (HRA), and Department of Homeless Services (DHS) programs. We improve customer service both by increasing client access to benefits and services available from HRA and DHS, and by resolving nearly 80% of clients' inquiries on their first contact with OCS about an issue, whether it's rescheduling an appointment or ordering a replacement Medicaid card.

The services and information provided by OCS (listed below) reduces the number of visits made by clients to centers and offices – improving customer service and reducing agency staff workload.

Providing ease of access, resolution of concerns and complaints, and a direct connection to housing programs and enrollment assistance for Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP), Cash Assistance (CA), Medicaid, and other benefits and services, OCS partners with elected officials and community-based organizations throughout the city to advocate for 4 million New Yorkers in need.

Accommodating people with disabilities by tracking Reasonable Accommodation Requests (RARs) and requests for Home Visit Needed (HVN), OCS helps ensure that these vulnerable New Yorkers can apply for benefits and address any issue related to their benefits that may arise.

Advocating for clients through multiple channels – by phone, fax, email, letter, online, and in person – OCS responds to inquiries directly from clients on a broad range of issues.

Engaging and assisting New York's diverse populations, OCS representatives help clients by answering questions in Spanish, Russian, Haitian Creole, and Chinese. Use of Language Line Solutions allows for interpretation in 180 other languages.

Implementing video phone system technology to provide members of the deaf and hard of hearing communities with an ASL Direct agent who communicates with them in American Sign Language to address their questions and concerns about agency services and benefits.

OCS is committed to providing a high standard of service in meeting the needs of clients as outlined above.

Office of Constituent Services – Complaint Process

The OCS Complaint Process is a conduit for New Yorkers to direct complaints and concerns and resolve outstanding issues. This process ensures staff accountability in providing professional and helpful assistance.

The Office of Constituent Services functions as a central channel for complaints from the public, HRA clients, elected officials and advocacy groups, which are submitted online, and by email, fax, telephone, and mail. By meeting the citywide service level standards – answering 90% of correspondence within 14 days – we are a key point of entry for client access.

The Office of Constituent Services ensures that the agency is responsive to elected officials who are advocating on behalf of a client who raises a complaint about an HRA location or worker, about discrimination or access, about the handling of a specific Public Assistance case, or any other matter related to HRA. Inquiries to OCS can be submitted in the following ways:

- **ONLINE** at www.nyc.gov/hra, using the Contact Us link to Send an Email to the Commissioner (webpage at <https://www.nyc.gov/html/mail/html/mailhra.html>)
- **BY EMAIL** constituentaffairs@dss.nyc.gov. This mailbox is monitored Monday to Friday, 9AM to 5PM. Clients can submit their complaint more quickly by email than by phone. Online and emailed inquiries are handled in the same manner as those called in.
- **BY FAX** (212) 331-5998
- **BY PHONE** through the Office of Constituent Services at 718-557-1399, Monday to Friday, 9AM to 5PM.
- **BY MAIL** Human Resources Administration, Office of Constituent Services
150 Greenwich Street, 35th Floor New York, NY 10007

To maintain accountability and efficiency, all complaints received by OCS are entered into the agency's correspondence-tracking system, Intranet Quorum (IQ). Through IQ, each complaint is assigned a reference number that is provided to the correspondent or caller for follow-up. The Office of Constituent Services agents investigate the reported issues by reviewing agency and state databases and by communicating with HRA Benefits Access Centers, SNAP Centers, and other HRA offices and programs before responding by phone, letter, or email as requested by the person who submitted the complaint.

The Office of Constituent Services tracks data collected through IQ for reports to the Commissioner.

The Office of Constituent Services – Snapshot, Calendar Year, 2022

Call Volume		
Descriptions	Count	Percentage
Total Questions Handled by OCS Agents*	1,546,961	100.0%
Total Inquiries Escalated	505,062	32.6%
Total Inquiries Resolved Without Escalation	1,041,899	67.4%

*In April 2020, OCS adopted the RingCentral system to assist callers during the COVID-19 lockdown. In December 2020, the Medicaid Helpline unit transferred its telephonic system to the RingCentral Contact Center system, which was a more advanced telephonic system. Beginning in December 2020, the remaining OCS units were gradually transferred to the RingCentral Contact Center system. However, starting on June 21, 2022, all OCS staff returned to work, and they are now working under the newly launched Contact Center system called NICE-CXOne. Therefore, since June 21, 2022, the Total Questions Handled by OCS Agents is now generated from the NICE-CXOne Contact Center system.

Top 20 Escalated Calls			
Rank	Inquiry	Count	Percentage
1	Medicaid - Status Inquiry	56,440	11.17%
2	Public Assistance - Agency never called for interview	38,288	7.58%
3	Public Assistance - Client missed interview call	32,372	6.41%
4	Public Assistance - Recertification	20,847	4.13%
5	SNAP - Skipped Benefit	17,965	3.56%
6	SNAP - Single Issuance Application Status *	13,697	2.71%
7	SNAP - Recertification	13,068	2.59%
8	Medicaid - Coverage Update	9,813	1.94%
9	Emergency Assistance - One-Shot (Rent)	9,098	1.80%
10	Public Assistance - Application Status	9,025	1.79%
11	SNAP - Application Pending	8,929	1.77%
12	IDNYC - Card Status	8,376	1.66%
13	Cash Assistance - Skipped Benefit	7,674	1.52%
14	SNAP - Benefit Issuance	6,610	1.31%
15	Medicaid - Demographic Issue **	6,041	1.20%
16	Cash Assistance Inquiry	5,593	1.11%
17	SNAP - Expedited Benefits	5,507	1.09%
18	SNAP - Case Closed	5,472	1.08%
19	Housing - Rent Payments-Landlord	5,188	1.03%
20	SNAP - Benefit Amount Inquiry	5,182	1.03%
Subtotal		285,185	56.5%
Total Inquiries Escalated		505,062	100%

* Single Issuance is the expedited issuance of SNAP benefits.

** Demographic issue relates to missing or incorrect client information, i.e. date of birth, address, social security number.

Complaint Types	Count	Percentage
Customer Service Complaints*	1,874	0.37%
Discrimination Complaints**	79	0.02%
Sexual Harassment	2	0.00%
Subtotal	1,955	0.39%
Total Inquiries Escalated	505,062	100%

* Customer Service Complaints comprise different types of issue codes including, but not limited to rudeness, refusal to service, and refusal to identify.

** Discrimination Complaints comprise different types of issue codes including, but not limited to racial, gender, voucher refusal, and language.

Recommendations for Improving Customer Service

The Office of Constituent Services (OCS) continues to implement changes to improve upon the agency's overall customer service delivery.

Cloud Based Interactive Voice Response System: In December 2020, OCS transferred its telephonic system to the RingCentral Contact Center system, an advanced telephonic system. However, starting in June 2022, OCS transitioned to the newly launched Contact Center system called NICE-CXOne. NICE-CXOne allows OCS to capture and track the inquiries we receive from customers and break them down by inquiry type. Supervisors and management now have the ability to listen to live and recorded calls. This capability allows supervision to assist on live calls, when necessary, and to provide assessments of previous calls where an area for improvement was identified.

Local Law 102 of 2021: OCS staff are mandated to complete sexual harassment training twice a year. In accordance with Local Law 102, OCS staff were sent communication bulletins about the actions they should take and information that they should provide if they receive complaints related to gender based-harassment and sexual assault complaints. In October 2022, a communication bulletin was sent to DSS/OCS staff to follow in the event that a complaint of sexual assault/harassment is received from DHS clients. In December 2022, a communication bulletin was sent to all OCS staff regarding the processes to follow when a client complaint is received about a DSS/HRA staff member, including HRA police officers and contracted security guards, regarding sexual assault and sexual harassment.

Upgraded IQ Agency-wide: Intranet Quorum (IQ), the agency's correspondence-tracking system, was updated agency-wide to version 4 and all existing users received training on the new version. We continue to expand the use of IQ to other program areas within DSS/HRA so that they can use it when processing and responding to complaints that are received by OCS. This continued expansion allows for a more streamlined process when channeling complaints to staff who are "experts" in different areas, such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). OCS still manages the IQ system which is used to facilitate and track the interactions with clients and improve upon the agency's ability to share data and analysis across program areas. This measure continues to ensure greater efficiency through less hold time for clients on the phone and improves overall service levels.

Staff Development & Training: OCS partners with the DSS Office of Training to

better enable positive customer outcomes by expanding staff development, training, and other support tools. In September 2022, the DSS Office of Training launched the Foundational Human Services Training (FHST) curriculum, which consists of an 8-module training program. The goal of the program is to generate a shift towards a more positive organizational culture. FHST modules include an in depth look at the history and current state of Public Assistance programs in the U.S., engaging clients with empathy, and trauma-informed approaches to interactions with clients. FHST provides participants with the knowledge, skills, and abilities to promote improved customer relations and work attitudes, and increased psychological well-being and self-efficacy as tools when interacting with clients. OCS management and supervisors were among the first FHST program participants. OCS plans to make the FHST program available to front line staff in the near future.

Additionally, OCS and the DSS Office of Training administer monthly online training sessions to brief staff on existing and updated policy information, a practice which began in 2020 and continues today. At the end of each session, staff are asked to complete a set of questions to gauge the retention of the information.

Customer Service Culture: Emphasizing and increasing customer service culture through changing mindsets in the general environment fosters improved delivery of services and information to clients. Instilling a sense of advocacy with a focus on their role as Client Advocate reinforces the staff member's role as a problem solver and increases client confidence in the agency.

In September 2022, OCS staff participated in the De-Escalation Techniques for Enhanced Customer Service class. This course focuses on providing information regarding the Agency's commitment to excellent customer service and techniques to de-escalate difficult situations. It reviews the skills staff need to continue to interact with clients using excellent customer service practices. Additionally, it reviews how to appropriately handle difficult situations, as well as challenging behaviors of Agency clients that staff may encounter in the workplace. It presents communication, conflict resolution, and de-escalation strategies and techniques that address potentially unsafe situations. The class engages participants in learning activities that highlight scenarios they are likely to face at DSS-HRA-DHS.

Staff Assessments: Periodic staff assessments by supervisors help identify areas of improvement. Additionally, script development for improving customer interactions will promote professionalism, consistency, and clarity.

The Office of Constituent Services will continue to monitor trends and share data with the Commissioner as part of the agency's effort to improve customer service and ensure that our clients are treated with care and compassion.