

# OCS Public Report

## **Annual Report 2023: 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 3 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 providing application status 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 3 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](http://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](mailto: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** (917) 639-9241
- **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, Internet 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, 2023

Call Volume		
Descriptions	Count	Percentage
Total Questions Handled by OCS Agents*	1,222,905	100.0%
Total Inquiries Escalated	416,709	34.1%
Total Inquiries Resolved Without Escalation	803,152	65.7%

\* Starting June 21, 2022, all OCS staffs have returned to work, and they are now working under the newly launched a Contact Center system called NICE-CXOne. Therefore, the Total Questions Handled by OCS Agents is generated from NICE-CXOne Contact Center System. Starting January 2023, OneNumber IVR has also launched which consolidated about 40 different separate phone lines into one phone line.

Top 20 Escalated Calls			
Rank	Inquiry	Count	Percentage
1	Medicaid - Status Inquiry	59,185	14.20%
2	Public Assistance - Application Status	26,763	6.42%
3	Public Assistance - Recertification	16,509	3.96%
4	Emergency Assistance - One-Shot (Rent)	16,030	3.85%
5	IDNYC - Card Status	11,776	2.83%
6	Medicaid - Creditable Coverage	10,819	2.60%
7	SNAP - Skipped Benefit	9,660	2.32%
8	Cash Assistance - Skipped Benefit	8,432	2.02%
9	Housing - Rent Payments-Landlord	6,710	1.61%
10	SNAP - Recertification	6,659	1.60%
11	Medicaid - Demographic Issue *	6,208	1.49%
12	Public Assistance - One Shot Interview Complaint	5,573	1.34%
13	SNAP - Case Closed	5,431	1.30%
14	Cash Assistance Inquiry	5,419	1.30%
15	SNAP - Benefit Issuance	5,128	1.23%
16	SNAP - Benefit Amount Inquiry	4,793	1.15%
17	IDNYC - Other Issues	4,659	1.12%
18	Public Assistance - Case Closed	4,355	1.05%
19	Medicaid - Coverage Update	3,867	0.93%
20	IDNYC - Appointment [Need/Cancel/Change]	3,714	0.89%
	<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>221,690</b>	<b>53.2%</b>
	<b>Total Inquiries Escalated</b>	<b>416,709</b>	<b>100%</b>

\* 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*	2,733	0.66%
Discrimination Complaints**	65	0.02%
HRA Sexual Harassment/Assault***	13	0.00%
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>2,811</b>	<b>0.67%</b>
<b>Total Inquiries Escalated</b>	<b>416,709</b>	<b>100%</b>

\*Customer Service Complaints comprise different types of issue codes; they are as follows: rudeness, refusal to service, and refusal to identify.

\*\*Discrimination Complaints comprise different types of issue codes; they are as follows: racial, gender, voucher refusal, and language.

\*\*\*HRA Sexual Harassment/Assault comprised of different types of issue codes to capture complaints received from HRA clients.

## Local Law 102 of 2021

As per Local Law 102 of 2021, OCS staff are mandated to complete sexual harassment training every year. In accordance with Local Law 102, OCS staff were sent communications 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 July 2023, information was added to the newly created servicenow knowledge base that details the steps DSS/OCS staff must follow in the event that a complaint of sexual assault/harassment is received from HRA and DHS clients. In June and November 2023, communication bulletins regarding the processes to follow when a client complaint is received about a DSS/HRA/DHS staff member was sent to all OCS staff, including HRA police officers and contracted security guards, regarding sexual assault and sexual harassment.

## Implemented Initiatives for Improved Customer Service

During 2023, the Office of Constituent Services (OCS) implemented the following initiatives to improve customer service.

**Launched the DSS OneNumber** to modernize and expand the Agency's call center capabilities and provide clients with the ability to request assistance and receive information about their benefits and services independently. The DSS OneNumber consolidated and upgraded the Agency's existing phone systems, specifically public-facing numbers, into a centralized Interactive Voice Response (IVR) system. The DSS OneNumber is in full compliance with Local Law 30 by offering menu options and responses to self-service inquiries in all required languages. Callers can verbally respond to navigate through the menu in English and Spanish. All callers can use touchtone navigation within the DSS OneNumber menu options. During periods of high call volume, callers can opt to receive a call back from the Agency when their position in the queue is reached.

**Created the Office of Constituent Services servicenow knowledge base** to provide OCS staff with a wealth of information that they can easily access when answering calls about the benefits and services that are administered by DSS. The knowledge base is a powerful search engine that allows the agents to navigate through content quickly to find the answers to client inquiries. The content is reviewed and modified on a regular basis to ensure that the content is up to date. New content is added, when necessary, to capture information about new initiatives.

**Deployed the “Voice of our Clients” post call survey** to capture client feedback, generate reports related to the feedback, and take corrective measures in a timely manner to improve the overall experience customers have when they call the DSS OneNumber. The post-call customer survey is offered to clients after they interact with the agency’s DSS OneNumber.

## **Recommendations for Improving Customer Service**

The Office of Constituent Services (OCS) provided recommendations to improve upon the agency’s overall customer service delivery.

**Implementing Intranet Quorum (IQ) Agency-wide** resulting in all complaints received by OCS are entered into IQ. OCS manages the IQ system’s use throughout the agency to facilitate and track interaction with clients and improve the agency’s ability to share data and analysis across program areas. Using IQ, we recommend consolidating complaints and creating centralized units to handle complaints and “expert” staff to handle different areas such as rental assistance programs. This measure will ensure greater efficiency through less hold time for clients on the phone and improve overall service levels.

**Expanding staff development, training** and other support will better enable positive customer outcomes. Refresher training on customer service best practices will enhance delivery of information and services. In addition, empathy workshops will promote improved interactions with clients; additional training on effective listening skills and delivering information proactively will also encourage improved communication.

**Emphasizing and increasing customer service culture** through changing mindsets in the general environment will foster 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.

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.