

OCS Public Report

Annual Report 2020: 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 the Department of Social Services (DSS), Human Resources Administration (HRA), and Department of Homeless Services (DHS) programs. We improve client 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 from the State (which administers the program).

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 programs and enrollment assistance for Cash Assistance (CA), Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP), Medicaid, various housing programs, and other benefits and services, OCS works with elected officials and community-based organizations throughout the city to support 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 in their preferred spoken language, OCS representatives who speak Spanish, Russian, Haitian Creole, and Chinese answer client's questions directly, and OCS representatives can obtain interpretation in up to 180 other languages, through the use of Language Line Solutions, when assisting clients.

Implementing new 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, 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 benefits 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 by email instead of 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 718-291-4141, 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 Job 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 2020

Call Volume		
Descriptions	Count	Percentage
Total Questions Handled by OCS Agents *	1,174,344	100.0%
Total Inquiries Escalated **	288,686	24.6%
Total Inquiries Resolved Without Escalation	885,658	75.4%

* OCS adopted RingCentral system on April 21, 2020 to more efficiently assist callers when interactions shifted to telephone due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Medicaid Helpline unit's telephonic system implemented a more advanced telephonic system called RingCentral Contact Center system on December 8, 2020; on December 21, 2020, all OCS units had phased into the more advanced RingCentral Contact Center system. Accordingly, the Total Questions Handled by OCS Agents in Calendar Year 2020, includes reports partially from CCMA, RingCentral Office System and RingCentral Contact Center System.

** Inquires are escalated when they are not able to be resolved in the initial interaction with an OCS representative. The reason for an inquiry not being resolved upon initial interaction can vary and include reasons such as requiring more information about the specific inquiry from a client. Additionally, the OCS representative may need to confer with additional program staff to respond to an inquiry therefore classifying the inquiry as one that is escalated.

Top 20 Escalated Calls			
Rank	Inquiry	Count	Percentage
1	Medicaid - Status Inquiry *	48,334	16.74%
2	Public Assistance - CA Missed Telephone Interview	11,387	3.94%
3	IDNYC - Renewal Inquiries	10,903	3.78%
4	SNAP - Skipped Benefit	7,730	2.68%
5	Medicaid - Coverage Update	5,990	2.07%
6	Public Assistance - Recertification	5,844	2.02%
7	SNAP - Single Issuance Application Status **	5,616	1.95%
8	IDNYC - Card Status	5,557	1.92%
9	Cash Assistance - Skipped Benefit	5,241	1.82%
10	Access HRA - Issues/Inquiries	4,789	1.66%
11	IDNYC - Other Issues	4,563	1.58%
12	Cash Assistance Inquiry	4,037	1.40%
13	Medicaid - Demographic Issue ***	3,980	1.38%
14	SNAP - Recertification	3,898	1.35%
15	Medicare Savings Program	3,378	1.17%
16	SNAP - Benefit Amount Inquiry	3,253	1.13%
17	IDNYC - Lost/Stolen or Damaged Card	3,235	1.12%
18	Emergency Assistance - One-Shot (Rent)	3,162	1.10%
19	SNAP - Case Closed	3,126	1.08%
20	SNAP - Deferral Extension Request	2,781	0.96%
	Subtotal	146,804	50.9%
	Total Inquiries Escalated	288,686	100%

* Medicaid is a State program, however DSS representatives still assist clients with their inquiries.

** Single Issuance is a one-time emergency issuance of 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*	885	0.31%
Discrimination Complaints**	49	0.02%
Subtotal	934	0.32%
Total Inquiries Escalated	288,686	100%

*Customer Service Complaints comprise different types of inquiries; they are as follows: rudeness, refusal to service, refusal to identify, and sexual harassment.

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

Recommendations for Improving Client Service

The Office of Constituent Services implemented the recommendations below during 2020 to improve the agency's overall client service delivery.

Implemented IQ Agency-wide which allowed program areas to use Intranet Quorum (IQ), the agency's correspondence-tracking system, when processing and responding to complaints received by OCS. This capability allowed for a more streamlined process to channel complaints to staff within a centralized unit who are "experts" in different areas, such as one-shot-deals. OCS continues to manage the IQ system which is used to facilitate and track the interactions with clients and improve the agency's ability to share data and analysis across program areas.

Expanded staff development, training and other support tools to better enable positive client outcomes. Refresher training on client service best practices provided staff with tools on enhanced delivery of information and services when speaking with clients. The following initiatives are on hold due to the COVID-19 pandemic: empathy workshops to promote improved interactions with clients; and training on effective listening skills and delivering information proactively to encourage improved communication.

Emphasized and enhanced client service culture through initiatives to change mindsets to foster improved delivery of services and information to clients. Instilled a sense of advocacy with a focus on the staff role as Client Advocate and reinforced the staff's role as a problem solver to increase client confidence in the agency.

Periodic staff observations helped identify necessary areas of improvement and refresher training topics; additionally, scripts were developed for common topics, such as rescheduling an interview appointment, to promote professionalism, and to improve client interactions, 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 client service and ensure that our clients are treated with the dignity and respect they deserve.