



Legislative Council Staff

Nonpartisan Services for Colorado's Legislature

Memorandum

Room 029 State Capitol, Denver, CO 80203-1784

Phone: (303) 866-3521 • Fax: (303) 866-3855

lcs.ga@state.co.us • leg.colorado.gov/lcs

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TO: Joint Technology Committee

FROM: Luisa Altmann, Senior Research Analyst, 303-866-3518
Joint Technology Committee Staff

SUBJECT: Summary of Joint Budget Committee Meeting with County Representatives

Summary

This memorandum provides a summary of the testimony provided to the Joint Budget Committee (JBC) by various county representatives regarding the Colorado Benefits Management System (CBMS) and Trails system on January 7, 2020.

Colorado Benefits Management System

The JBC heard testimony about the CBMS Transformation project from the following county representatives:

- Nancy Sharpe, Arapahoe County Commissioner;
- Todd Jorgensen, Deputy Executive Director of Assistance Programs, Denver Human Services; and
- Julie Krow, Executive Director, El Paso County Department of Human Services.

First, these individuals emphasized their appreciation for the collaboration with the Governor's Office of Information Technology (OIT), the Colorado Department of Human Services (CDHS), and the Colorado Department of Health Care Policy and Financing (HCPF). Additionally, the county representatives explained that the CBMS Executive Steering Committee is now meeting weekly, instead of monthly, and representatives from the state and counties are working to address system issues. However, the county representatives continued to express reservations and concerns regarding the project, many of which were included in a 2017 letter sent by counties to the Governor and OIT. The county representatives also emphasized the need to invest in an interoperable system that integrates data and case management across the variety of client-serving systems that currently exist, including CBMS, Trails, and CHATS.

During their presentation, county representatives described several issues with the system, including:

- **Performance issues.** Commissioner Sharpe explained that since the CBMS transformation release on August 23, 2019, it is taking Arapahoe County 15 percent longer to process a case than with the old system. This has led to the county not being able to keep pace with the demand, which is causing a delay in clients being able to get their benefits. According to Deputy Director Jorgensen, the ten largest counties have experienced a drop in the timeliness of processing performance by approximately 25 percent with the new system, though this is slowly starting to recover. Particular system slowness issues exist when staff are moving between fields or between screens, causing quite a bit of delay. Deputy Director Jorgensen also explained that the new system involves more clicks and screens compared to the old system, which adds time to case processing.
- **Training.** According to Deputy Director Jorgensen, county staff received comprehensive training prior to the launch of the new system. However, the training was conducted over two months prior to the go-live date, due to unexpected delays. There was also frustration on the part of county workers during this pre-launch training that their concerns about system readiness were not being heard. Post-launch, the training environment was not stable until December 15, 2019, which resulted in new workers who were brought onboard after the pre-launch training sessions not being able to receive proper training on the system.
- **Helpdesk tickets.** According to Deputy Director Jorgensen, although countless system fixes have been implemented since the release, over 100 distinct helpdesk tickets are still being reviewed and prioritized.

Director Krow explained the various ways that counties are trying to manage the impact of these system issues, including mandatory county staff overtime. This has had a significant impact on staff morale and has potential to impact staff turnover. According to Director Krow, 11 counties have reported spending \$1.2 million in overtime costs through December 2019 to keep up with processing in the new system.¹ With monetary support from HCPF, 24 counties have been able to compensate some staff who have worked overtime to help decrease the backlog.

Director Krow also described the stressful situations that staff have encountered due to the system delays, including having to wait 15 minutes to process an application again after the first attempt was not successful in the system, oftentimes while the client is waiting. Staff have also had to deal with clients who are upset when benefits are untimely, incorrect, or when information has been shared inappropriately.

Finally, Commissioner Sharpe described the potential remedies that counties may seek from the state in the future. These include a potential budget supplemental to cover the cost of overtime that has been a direct result of the system slowness; asking OIT to develop and provide a detailed long-term project plan and timeline for system fixes; asking the state to hold counties harmless for any sanctions that might result from not meeting the federal performance measures, including application

¹Counties that have reported these overtime costs include: Adams, Boulder, Denver, El Paso, Jefferson, Lake, Larimer, Mesa, Pueblo, and Summit.

processing timeliness, as outlined in Senate Bill 16-190; and exploring funding options for mobile technology, including laptops, to enable staff to work overtime, snow days, and holidays from home.

Trails

Director Krow spoke to the JBC about counties' recent experience with the Trails system. She indicated that counties have seen significant improvements in the functioning, governance, and communications regarding Trails. She also described the important steps that OIT and CDHS have taken to address counties' concerns, including CDHS having appointed a product owner who has been very engaged and responsive to county needs, and OIT and CDHS engaging county experts to create a data dashboard, project plan, and improved training opportunities.

While the counties have ongoing concerns, including the number of helpdesk tickets and the interface between Trails and the Colorado court system being down since January 2017, with no timeline to restore it, Director Krow was optimistic about the system's next big update, which is scheduled for January 18 and 19, 2020.