

OCS Public Report

Annual Report 2021: 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 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 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, 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 718-291-4141, 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, 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 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, 2021

Call Volume		
Descriptions	Count	Percentage
Total Questions Handled by OCS Agents*	1,657,960	100.0%
Total Inquiries Escalated	459,081	27.7%
Total Inquiries Resolved Without Escalation	1,198,879	72.3%

*Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, OCS adopted RingCentral system to assist callers beginning April 21, 2020. On December 8, 2020, the Medicaid Helpline unit's telephonic system transferred to a more advanced telephonic system called RingCentral Contact Center System. On December 17, 2020, all OCS units moved into this more advanced RingCentral Contact Center System. Therefore, the Total Questions Handled by OCS Agents for this calendar year, 2021, is entirely from the RingCentral Contact Center System.

Top 20 Escalated Calls			
Rank	Inquiry	Count	Percentage
1	Medicaid - Status Inquiry	55,711	12.14%
2	Public Assistance - CA Missed Telephone Interview	17,576	3.83%
3	Public Assistance - Client missed interview call	16,959	3.69%
4	SNAP - Skipped Benefit	16,163	3.52%
5	Public Assistance - Recertification	15,576	3.39%
6	SNAP - Recertification	12,001	2.61%
7	Medicaid - Coverage Update	11,086	2.41%
8	IDNYC - Renewal Inquiries	9,944	2.17%
9	IDNYC - Other Issues	9,879	2.15%
10	SNAP - Single Issuance Application Status *	9,314	2.03%
11	Cash Assistance - Skipped Benefit	7,947	1.73%
12	IDNYC - Card Status	7,768	1.69%
13	Public Assistance - Agency never called for interview	7,655	1.67%
14	Cash Assistance Inquiry	6,767	1.47%
15	Emergency Assistance - One-Shot (Rent)	6,509	1.42%
16	SNAP - Benefit Issuance	6,291	1.37%
17	SNAP - Case Closed	6,212	1.35%
18	Medicaid - Demographic Issue **	5,669	1.23%
19	SNAP - Deferral Extension Request	5,659	1.23%
20	SNAP - Benefit Amount Inquiry	5,068	1.10%
	Subtotal	239,754	52.2%
	Total Inquiries Escalated	459,081	100%

* 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*	610	0.13%
Discrimination Complaints**	35	0.01%
Sexual Harassment	2	0.0004%
Subtotal	647	0.14%
Total Inquiries Escalated	459,081	100%

*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.

Recommendations for Improving Customer Service

The Coronavirus pandemic resulted in increased demands on the Office of Constituent Services (OCS). Our priority became servicing clients efficiently since the Centers were closed and operations shifted to a virtual environment. Therefore, OCS continued implementing the 2020 recommendations to improve upon the agency's overall customer service delivery.

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 May 2021, a communication bulletin was sent to introduce the "Resources for Survivors of Sexual Assault and Harassment Flyer," which contains resources available to the clients who ask for information or assistance regarding sexual violence, including sexual assault or harassment. In January 2022, a communication bulletin was sent to regarding the processes to follow when client complaint is received about a DSS/HRA staff member, including HRA police officers and contracted security guards, regarding sexual assault and sexual harassment. DSS/HRA/DHS will continue developing a process for provider/department staff to follow in the event that a complaint of sexual assault/harassment is received. This process will be included in future submissions of this report.

Implementation of IQ Agency-wide: The implementation of Intranet Quorum (IQ), the agency's correspondence-tracking system, further expanded into program areas for use when processing and responding to complaints received by OCS. This capability allowed for a more streamlined process to channel complaints to staff who are "experts" in different areas, such as 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: Expanding staff development, training and other support will better enable positive customer outcomes. Refresher training on customer service best practices continues to enhance delivery of information and services. Additional training on effective listening skills and delivering information proactively encouraged improved communication. In 2020, OCS and the Office of Training initiated monthly online sessions to brief staff on existing and updated policy

information. Staff were 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.

Staff Assessments: Periodic staff assessments by supervisors will 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.