

OCS Public Report

Annual Report 2024: 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 a majority 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, using the Send an email to the Commissioner link (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** (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, 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 Walk-In Customer Service 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, 2024

Call Volume		
Descriptions	Count	Percentage
Total Questions Handled by OCS Agents	1,318,737	100.0%
Total Inquiries Escalated	475,017	36%
Total Inquiries Resolved Without Escalation	843,720	64%

Top 20 Escalated Calls			
Rank	Inquiry	Count	Percentage
1	Medicaid - Status Inquiry	54,271	11.43%
2	Emergency Assistance - One-Shot (Rent)	21,439	4.51%
3	Medicaid - Creditable Coverage	15,067	3.17%
4	Public Assistance - Application Status	12,885	2.71%
5	Medicaid - Demographic Issue *	11,489	2.42%
6	Public Assistance - Recertification	10,433	2.20%
7	Medicaid - Exchange Medicaid Status	10,279	2.16%
8	IDNYC - Card Status	8,783	1.85%
9	Cash Assistance Inquiry	8,335	1.75%
10	Housing - Rent Payments-Landlord	8,190	1.72%
11	Medicaid - Renewal Recerts	8,076	1.70%
12	Cash Assistance - Skipped Benefit	7,900	1.66%
13	SNAP - Skipped Benefit	7,389	1.56%
14	Medicaid - Coverage Update	6,707	1.41%
15	SNAP - Benefit Amount Inquiry	6,629	1.40%
16	Cash Assistance - Benefit Amount Inquiry	6,607	1.39%
17	Public Assistance - Case Closed	5,851	1.23%
18	SNAP - Case Closed	5,585	1.18%
19	Emergency Assistance - One-Shot (Utility)	4,663	0.98%
20	Public Assistance - Add New Family Member	4,436	0.93%
Subtotal		225,014	47.4%
Total Inquiries Escalated		475,017	100%

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

Complaint Types	Count	Percentage
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Customer Service Complaints*	4,787	1.01%
Discrimination Complaints**	118	0.02%
Sexual Harassment	8	0.002%
Subtotal	4,913	1.03%
Total Inquiries Escalated	475,017	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.

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. The information is included in the ServiceNow knowledge base that staff use when they need to look up information. It 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.

Recommendations for Improving Customer Service

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

Improving the way Intranet Quorum (IQ) interfaces with the web based IQ system will provide agents with direct access to the resolution of a client's inquiry. In the past, agents would need to contact their supervisor to learn the outcome of the client's inquiry. Removing this extra step decreases the amount of time it takes to provide a client with the information they are requesting. This measure will ensure greater efficiency through less hold time for clients on the phone and improve overall service levels.

Implementing Intranet Quorum (IQ) Agency-wide to ensure that each program area within DSS has a single tool to use when responding to complaints and inquiries that are received by OCS. 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.

Expanding staff development, training and other support will better enable positive customer outcomes. Refresher trainings 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; de-escalation trainings will be conducted for all staff to provide them with tools to use when handling a difficult call.

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.