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Press Release

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Alaska Introduces Virtual Contact Center Technology

JUNEAU, Alaska—A new phone system adopted by the Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development's Unemployment Insurance program means expedited service to Alaska's unemployed workers.

"The Virtual Contact Center combines Alaska's three unemployment insurance claim centers into one unified system for shorter wait times and more efficient services for callers," Labor Commissioner Click Bishop said. "All incoming calls are forwarded to the next available agent no matter where the agent is located in the state, maximizing resources including agent skills and capabilities."

Alaska's Unemployment Insurance program provides temporary financial assistance to unemployed workers. Almost every dollar of UI benefits is returned to the economy, which helps strengthen businesses and stabilize the work force.

An innovative and customer-friendly feature of the new virtual system gives people the option of being called back instead of waiting on hold, without losing their place in line.

"If the wait time is more than a few minutes, the phone system asks if the caller would like to be called back rather than continue holding," said Bill Kramer, assistant director of the Employment Security Division, which includes the unemployment benefits call centers. "When that 'caller' reaches the front of the 'line,' the system connects them with an agent. People no longer have to wait on the phone and can continue with their daily activities."

In addition to saving callers' time and cell-phone minutes, the department anticipates cost savings by reducing the amount of time callers use the phone system. While the virtual system reduces wait times, callers will experience even shorter wait times on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays when the volume of calls is lower.

Although the Department of Labor is the lead agency, two other departments are implementing their own Virtual Contact Centers – the Department of Administration's Retirement and Benefits Division and the Department of Revenue's Permanent Fund Dividend Division.

"We are very excited to implement the features of this new phone system and are confident our customers will experience improved phone services when they call us," said Jim Puckett, acting director of Retirement and Benefits.

Puckett said R&B implemented its Virtual Contact Center this week.

"The current system we use is like a waterfall – callers fall to the end of the stream while they're on hold," said Deborah Bitney, director of Revenue's PFD Division, which will implement later this spring. "The new contact center technology means no matter where callers are, they'll get the next available specialist."

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File for Unemployment Benefits Online

http://labor.alaska.gov/esd_unemployment_insurance/biff-splash.htm

Retirement and Benefits Division

<http://doa.alaska.gov/dr/>

Permanent Fund Dividend Division

<http://www.pfd.state.ak.us/>