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MEDIA CONTACTS:
Tom Betti: 614-817-2945
Thomas.betti@jfs.ohio.gov

Bill Teets, 614-403-2331
Bill.teets@jfs.ohio.gov

ODJFS Provides Updates on Appeals Backlog, Other Outstanding Issues

COLUMBUS, OHIO - Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS) Director Matt Damschroder today shared the department's progress and timeline to reduce the backlog of appeals caused by the historic number of unemployment claims filed during the course of the pandemic.

"Over the last 18 months, we processed more than 6.6 million initial claims and paid billions of dollars in traditional and pandemic-related unemployment compensation payments to 2.4 million Ohioans," said Damschroder. "Naturally, that unprecedented volume has also resulted in greater numbers of appeals, which we are working to process."

Claimants or employers who disagree with an initial JFS decision about an unemployment claim have the right to appeal and request a redetermination decision. The agency may either issue a redetermination decision, which is further appealable, or certify the matter directly to the Unemployment Compensation Review Commission, an independent administrative agency that holds hearings on disputed unemployment compensation issues. Like other states, the drastic increase in unemployment claims and appeals led to a backlog in issuing redetermination decisions, which is the subject of ongoing litigation in Ohio.

ODJFS has worked diligently to reduce the backlog. As of Sept. 13, ODJFS had approximately 134,000 appeals awaiting a determination, of which 111,700 were older than 21 days. This included appeals in both the traditional unemployment and pandemic unemployment assistance programs. Efforts throughout the months of August and early September reduced the total number of appeals by nearly 25%, from 177,500 on July 29. During that time, those appeals older than 21 days decreased by nearly 24%, from 146,000. Since the start of the pandemic, ODJFS has issued more than 368,000 redeterminations. A typical annual volume pre-pandemic was approximately 45,000 redeterminations.

Damschroder noted that the department is tracking progress and conducting bi-weekly forecasting to help manage efforts to reduce the number of pending appeals. Based on current volume of appeals, rate of processing, projected staffing and overtime levels, and other factors, the department is currently forecasting that most redeterminations will be issued by early December.

In other news, Damschroder said progress continues on two other outstanding issues, reimbursement for victims of account takeovers, and processing non-fraud overpayment waivers. Account takeovers refer to situations in which criminals gained access to a legitimate claimant's account and rerouted payments to a different bank account. A process by which claimants can complete an affidavit to seek restitution is



currently being tested within ODJFS' unemployment systems. The department expects to be able to announce the process soon.

Due to the volume of claims over the course of the pandemic, entirely new pandemic-related benefits, and an influx of individuals unfamiliar with unemployment, there were many instances of overpayment made. It has led to the creation of a process that allows claimants with non-fraud overpayments that they received at no fault of their own to be absolved from repaying those funds to the state. The department has been accepting waiver applications, and is currently system-testing the approval process, as well as the process to reimburse those who may have already paid back a portion of the overpayment.

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The Ohio Department of Job and Family Services manages vital programs that strengthen Ohio families. These include job training and employment services, unemployment insurance, cash and food assistance, child care, child and adult protective services, adoption, and child support services.

