



Michael Preston  
SECRETARY OF COMMERCE

Charisse Childers, Ph.D.  
DIRECTOR,  
DIVISION OF WORKFORCE SERVICES

## MEMORANDUM

TO: Elizabeth Smith, Secretary of the Department of Inspector General

FROM: Charisse Childers, Ph.D.

CC: Mike Preston, Secretary of the Department of Commerce

DATE: September 4, 2020

SUBJECT: CARES Act Funding request to continue contract call center services during the COVID-19 Emergency

In response to the COVID-19 Pandemic, Governor Asa Hutchinson created the Arkansas Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act Steering Committee to make recommendations to the Governor on the "best uses of the CARES Act funding" under Section 601 of PL116-136, the "Coronavirus Relief Fund."

The COVID-19 crisis has hit our citizens and business community hard with a significant spike in unemployment. There is a critical need to continue contract call center services and support through the end of December 2020.

### Background

Due to the significant increase in unemployment and the additional CARES Act programs that were implemented, there has been a significant increase in call volume. Unemployed Arkansas citizens utilize the 844-908-2178 UI Hotline to ask questions related to unemployment insurance eligibility, how to apply for unemployment along with how to navigate through each of the available programs. In addition to general information about regular UI, the new CARES Act UI programs, the third-party call center accepts initial regular UI applications and initial PUA applications for individuals that do not have access to a computer.

Approximately 100 third party agents staff the UI Hotline 7 days a week, 12 hours per day between the hours of 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. The third-party support is in addition to approximately 100+ state team members that have worked the same schedule.

Between January 1, 2020-February 29, 2020, the average daily calls answered for this 45-day period was 835 per day.

Between April 23, 2020 to September 2, 2020, the average daily calls answered for this 130-day period was 4,108 per day.

If DWS is not able to continue this service, daily answered calls will decrease by approximately 50%.

### Proposal and Request

The Division of Workforce Services (DWS) respectfully requests \$2,800,000 in CARES Act funding to continue the call center support through December 31, 2020.