Washington Paid Family & Medical Leave

Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes
May 19, 2022, 9:00 a.m. – 11:00 a.m.

Location	Zoom
Advisory Committee Members	Director, Leave and Care: Justin DeFour Paid Family & Medical Leave Act Ombuds: Edsonya Charles Employer's Interests Representative: Bob Battles Employer's Interests Representative: Christine Brewer Employee's Interests Representative: Julia Gorton Employee's Interests Representative: Samantha Grad Employee's Interests Representative: Tammie Hetrick Employee's Interests Representative: Maggie Humphreys Employee's Interests Representative: Joe Kendo Employee's Interests Representative: Marilyn Watkins Employee's Interests Representative: Brenda Wiest
Employment Security Department Staff	ESD Commissioner: Cami Feek Interim Deputy Director, Leave and Care: Matt Buelow Chief Financial Officer, ESD: Carole Holland Government Relations Director, ESD: Caitlyn Jeckyl Public Affairs Director, ESD: Nick Demerice Leave and Care Treasury Manager: Steve Zawojsky Operations Manager, Leave and Care: John Mattes Research & Data Manager, Leave and Care: Rebecca Grady
Guest	Allie Schaafsma
Court Reporter	Millie Martin, CCR
Notes Reviewed by	Laura Hagensick

Agenda	Introductions Approval of April Minutes Program and Trust Fund Updates Current Program Priorities Work Group Updates June Meeting Topics Open Comment Adjourn

MR BUELOW: Good morning, everybody. Welcome to our May 2022 Paid Family and Medical Leave meeting. I'm the interim deputy director of the Leave and Care division. We oversee the Paid Family and Medical Leave program for the State of Washington in the Employment Security Department.

We will start the meeting with introductions: first, advisory committee members, then our new Leave and Care Director, Justin DeFour and finally, our new Government Relations Director, Caitlyn Jeckyl.

MS. BREWER: Good morning. Christine Brewer here representing employer interests today.

MR. BATTLES: Bob Battles, Association of Washington Business here on behalf of employers.

MS. HUMPHRIES: Hi, everyone. Maggie Humphreys with Moms Rising representing employees.

MS WATKINS: Marilyn Watkins here representing employees.

MS. GRAD: Hi, everyone. Samantha Grad, Teamsters 117 representing employees.

MS. CHARLES: Edsonya Charles, Paid Family Medical Leave Ombuds.

MR. KENDO: Joe Kendo from Washington State Labor Council.

MR. BUELOW: Justin, I'm going to ask you to come forward and introduce yourself and say a few words.

MR. DEFOUR: Good morning. Thanks, Matt. As Matt said, my name is Justin DeFour. I'm the new director here at Leave and Care. I think I met most of the folks on the call today. But to those I have not, I appreciate the time and look forward to getting together with everyone and continuing our work that has already started long before me and will continue on. But you will be seeing more of me in the future. Thank you.

MR. BUELOW: Caitlyn, would you mind coming on and introducing yourself?

MS. JECKYL: Good morning, everybody. I'm Caitlyn Jeckyl and this is my third week here as Government Relations Director with ESD. I know a lot of you from formal roles and collaborations in the past, but I'm really excited for the opportunity to dig in on this subject, which is a real passion and really great to be here. So, thank you much.

MR BUELOW: I sent out April's meeting minutes earlier this week, and my apologies on the lateness of that. I'm hoping the committee had an opportunity to take a look at those and review them. If not, we can move that to next month. But did people have an opportunity to review those? And if so, are there any motions?

MS. KENDO: I'm happy to move to approve the minutes.
MR BATTLES: I'll second.
MR. BUELOW: All in favor? Does anyone not want to approve the minutes?
(All in favor).
MS. HUMPHRIES: I will abstain because I wasn't at the meeting.
MR BUELOW: We will consider the April meeting minutes approved.

MR. BUELOW: I'm going to hand it over here to Steve and Rebecca, who will give an update on how the program and the trust fund is doing.

MR JAWOJSKY: Thank you, Matt. Good morning, everyone. I'm the Leave and Care Treasury Manager, and I'm going to go through the next few slides with you covering trust fund updates since we last met.

As we talked about in last month's meeting, we anticipated the trust fund to go into a deficit balance in April based on when premiums are going to be received for the first quarter 2022 and the increasing utilization for the benefits just over the entirety of the program. So, we saw that we did go into deficit on April 7th beginning with receipts for 2022 Quarter 1 premiums. We are back to a positive balance on May 2nd. And as of May 7th, had a positive balance of $174.5 million. That is not included as a bar just because those numbers are not finalized for the month.

We typically receive most of the premium payments either on the last day of the month that they're due or the first few days of the next month. So, we certainly saw in May that our first week premiums collections were over $200 million. Again, just to reiterate, the legislature did pass the ESSB 5693, which provides essentially up to $350 million in coverage if the trust fund is in deficit on June 30, 2023.

MR. KENDO: Joe Kendo from the Labor Counsel. On the previous slide it showed the $15.7 million deficit and then the 174.5 million fund balance as of May 7th. Is that May 7th fund balance taking into account the negative 15 million? Do you have to pay that back to the 5693 money?

MR. ZAWOJSKY: No. So, essentially the mechanics of 5693 allow ESD to go into deficit up until June 30, 2023, up to that amount. So, they're actually funding it. We simply received employer premiums that then offset the $15 million negative balance that you see there in April and brought us up to a positive balance of $174 million.

MR. KENDO: As a matter of accounting though, do you have to reimburse OFM to drop in the deficit? That $350 million is now $335 million?

MR. ZAWOJSKY: No. There is no reimbursement. We don't do anything at all with the $350 million in coverage until June 30, 2023. If at that point the trust fund is in a deficit position, then those funds will be utilized. But until then, we have a letter from the Office of Financial Management that essentially asserts that we have this coverage up until that date of June 30, 2023.

MR. KENDO: So, money doesn't actually move until that time. Okay, got it.

MR. ZAWOJSKY: Correct. We provide OFM with weekly updates on the trust fund balance just so they're aware because we moved through this quarter into the biennium. Does that answer your question?

MR. KENDO: I think so, but I'm sure Bob, Marilyn and Cami are going to complicate it.

MR. BUELOW: Cami, I assume you want to add more to that question?

MS. FEEK: Yes, I would love to. There are two parts to this, right? The OFM part is, if we think about our trust fund, like a checking account. We have approval to overdraw that account for a cash flow reason, and as money comes in, that gets reconciled.

The $350 million reserve that the legislature authorized is a separate piece, and that helps us when we get to the end of the fiscal year and we cannot carry over a deficit. So that $350 million that is in reserve would be utilized to cover if there were a negative deficit that would carry over the fiscal year of making that whole.

So, there's two pieces to what we have at our disposal in terms of the leverage that can be pulled. One is a negative cash balance approval with OFM, which in essence, is covered by the state treasury and writes itself with the funds that come in, and there's not back and forth accounting to see its point.

It's more akin to a negative checking account and we continue to pay and those funds come in. And then the reserve is a separate opportunity so that we ensure at the end of the fiscal year there isn't a negative balance because we can't carry that forward.

So, hopefully that helps with a little bit of clarity and I didn't add mass confusion. But those two parts are very distinct, and I want to make sure people understand them.

MR. BUELOW: Bob, I think you were next.

MR. BATTLES: Actually, Cami's response answered my question. But I just want to confirm, basically we're not touching the $350 million until 2023 if we need to. Right now, we have a fund balance of $174.5 million in there. That has paid back the deficit, so we're not really carrying the deficit. It happened for a few days. Money came in. We corrected it. We could have that happen again sometime during the next year. But at this point money is coming in because of premiums.

So, the $350 million is just really out there not even being looked at until 2023 for a decision. I think that answers it. Thank you, Cami.

MR. BUELOW: That is exactly right, Bob.

MS. WATKINS: Just to be crystal clear, actually $190 million had come in by May 7th, and you paid back the $15.7 million to OFM, and then had a $174 million positive balance, is that correct?

MR. ZAWOJSKY: Yes. Essentially the premiums that we received offset the $15 million negative and, therefore, put us back in the positive.

MS. WATKINS: So, we're not building up a negative balance over here, and the positive balance is ignoring the negative balance. The negative balance gets wiped out, and the positive balance first subtracts the negative and then adds the positive.

MR. ZAWOJSKY: Thank you, Cami, for that explanation. I think understanding in checkbook fashion is a great way to do that. So, this is a running balance as of May 7th we're at $174 million. Thank you for those questions.

This slide here shows longitudinally the benefits and premiums that we received since the initiation of the program 2019. The Quarter 1 2022 benefits amount were very similar to the 4th quarter 2021- and the three-month running average is $3.9 million, which is really pretty reflective of what's going on with the program since about the third quarter of its operation in 2021. We're in the $80 to $100 million of benefits per quarter during that timeframe.

And just as an aside. With the premium increase in 2022, although the numbers aren't finalized because April wasn't closed in the State's accounting system until last week, we are looking at premium receipt of increases in the 40 percent range, which we should recognize when the main numbers come in with those premiums.

So, we are definitely seeing a positive uptake, although it's not noted especially on this slide because we don't receive those premiums in April. It will be reflected next month in the presentation.

MS. WATKINS: Steve, could you just clarify? When it says, "First Quarter 2022," are those the premiums that actually come into the system during the first quarter, or are those the premiums that are reflective of what would have been collected by employers and obligated by employers during that quarter?

MR. BUELOW: I can answer this one.

MS. WATKINS: Will the 2022 premium rate will be reflected for the second quarter of 2022?

MR. BUELOW: This is the collections, Marilyn. This was the money that actually came in that was due for the 4th quarter or failed for a prior quarter. So, you're not seeing the reflection of the different premium rate. You will see that in the next quarter.

MR. ZAWOJSKY: It's just the timing issue because the premium invoices are due 30 days after the end of the previous quarter. We actually don't start receiving those premiums until 30 to 40 days after that period of time. So, the first quarter premiums that are due by employers we'll see -- we saw some in April, but the majority we will see in May -- in the May numbers, so that increase will be reflective next month. I think I don't have anything else for this slide unless there are other questions.

Next, we will look at monthly premiums remitted. So, these are the premiums that are remitted on a monthly basis. And I talked with Rebecca about this. Rebecca, maybe we can just discuss this a little bit right now. But the premiums that we're seeing here are based off of our AX system, which is what we enter data into. So, we are seeing that these April numbers of $198 million are basically reflected of invoices in that system through the end of April. Is that right, Rebecca?

MS. GRADY: Since the end of April landed on a weekend this year, we saw a pretty sizable chunk of first quarter assessed premiums come in the first week of May. So, that $198 million might be a little lower than what you might expect given the increase in the premium rate, but it's because you will see it when you get to the end of May and present May next month.

MR. ZAWOJSKY: Great. Thank you. Again, on the treasury side of things we did see in May -- the first week of May we received over $200 million in premium receipts. There have been some additional efforts as well in reaching out to employers, I know in the previous month, for past due invoices and assistance with those invoices. So, I think we've seen some impact with that as well certainly.

MS. GRADY: We have seen in terms of the amount, to go back to what Marilyn's question was on the last slide, we've seen about $280 million assessed in invoices for that first quarter assessment period. We are projecting about $300 million, but that sort of is our typical experience. Typically, we see about 80 percent come in on time during the reporting period, and then the remaining trickle in.

So, that may even be higher as of the first week of May, and we are often up to 95 percent by the month following.

MR. ZAWOJSKY: This slide is the Monthly Benefits Amount. In April we were at close to $90 million. But we've seen a rolling average over the last three months of $89.6 million. However, if you look all the way back to June of 2021, the range of benefits in the program has been consistently between $80 and $100 million.

I think as far as experience in the program and what we're seeing as far as benefits go, we seem to be really solidifying around that $80- to$90 million average. We haven't seen much of an uptick in the utilization really recently at all.

The annual benefits projection was revised upwards of $1.187 billion just based on utilization. This is about $132 million more than what was initially projected. However, again with our increased premiums in not fiscal year, but calendar year 2022, we expect to see a revenue in excess of $1 billion - between $1 and $1.1 billion.

Again, we're going to get a more accurate ability to project that amount as we go through this first year with these increased premiums, but that's what we're looking at right now. Any questions about this slide?

I think I'm passing along to Rebecca.

MS. GRADY: Good morning, everyone. So, turning to what we expect the future to look like. I'm going to first direct your attention to the right hand of the slide.

This is our weekly cash flow trust fund balance projection. We've been of course updating all of our projections weekly and quarterly based on experience in the first quarter and incorporating the changes of course from the last legislative session.

At this point also on the weekly projection, now that we're past the first quarter period, we shifted - showing you what might be coming next reporting period.

So, at the moment we are expecting to experience another short-term cash deficit during the month of July, which is the next -- during the next reporting period. Kind of similar to what we experienced this past month in April where we will dip below zero. And as premiums come in at the end of July and early August, we will go back into the positive.

Of course, that assumes recent trends continue as they have been. And going to the question of what we might need at the end of the biennium, I think last month there was a request for what we were projecting that amount to be. If the trends continue right now under our baseline projection, we're expecting it might be about 60 million that we need to square out at the end of the biennium to prevent carrying the deficit into the next biennium. So, we'll keep updating you on that as well.

Then turning to the quarterly projections where we project the premium rates for next year, again, updating with Quarter 1 experience as Steve mentioned, benefits increased a little bit more in the first quarter. Not huge amounts, but enough that we looked forward and adjusted what our expectations for the remainder of the year.

Based on that along with economic and revenue forecast counsel updates in their revenue and wage group projections, we're looking now on the cusp of between a .2 and .3 percent charge. We have been up to last month feeling like it would be 2.2 percent, but we did want to let you to know that it's right on the cusp. So, .3 percent is looking potentially possible, which is kind of an early sharing matter. Of course, that's based on the current status quote, not considering anything that might be proposed later on this year.

MR. BATTLES: Bob Battles. First of all, the percentage that you're going to owe -- or the negative in the $60 million in 2023, that would have to be used the $350 million to take care of it. Do you anticipate that with that $350 million there the reason why that short fall of $60 million, is the funding failing to be sufficient to do the job or is it a cash flow issue and it just happens to be at the biennium that you can't carry a deficit? Would we be on any non-deficit -- I should say non-biennium, could they just be an easy carry-over like we've been doing on the other ones?

MS. GRADY: Yes, this is where I think the legislative task force need to dig into some of the longer-term projections and considering where benefits are at and where benefits might be expected to grow now into longer term future years. It is definitely the case that if the biennium, say, didn't fall right in the reporting period, it's possible that we wouldn't need any of that $350 million.

But that doesn't necessarily mean we don't need to do some more analysis and investigation with that legislative task force. I think before we can confidently say whether there are long-term changes needed for the structure of the premiums or the funds.

MR. BATTLES: That's why we set up the legislative task force and all the advisory board members are on it. So, we definitely know that we're going to have that conversation. I appreciate that. I just want to make sure, but you're saying there's a bigger picture we have to look at. Are we always going to end up having just a little less than what we need based on what the benefits being paid out are?

MS. GRADY: Potentially, yes. And to the extent that there is interest in not having repeated short-term cash flow concerns through the year it is another thing I think to consider what level of tolerance do folks have for that.

MR. BATTLES: My other question is, on the solvency tax, isn't there a cap requirement that you can't go more than two percent? Is that right?

MR. BUELOW: There is a cap of .6 percent, yes.

MR. BATTLES: Thank you.

MS. GRADY: Kind of related to that might be useful to update everyone that the work is moving forward related to the prework for that legislative task work -- Work is moving forward with the Office of Financial Management to have actuarial services contract this summer.

MR. ZAWOJSKY: I just wanted to make a comment too about the process that that solvency surcharge is activated. There is always going to be a lag there because the solvency surcharge won't go into effect until the following year. So, if we see a deficit in the previous year, there will always be some sort of lag as the premiums attempt to catch up with what occurred in the previous year as far as benefits.

So just as far as the mechanism of how that works, that will be an expectation of mine that as the program solidifies and stabilizes as far as revenues and expenses, that we will still experience a little bit of lag between the adjustment of the premiums and making up for the benefits that were paid out in the previous year.

MS. GRADY: Thank you for adding that. There is always going to be that time that we talked a bunch about between when the premiums are set the end of September or as of the date of the end of September and when they actually come in the next April. Any other questions on the projections? I don't see any hands.

If we can go to the next slide. We can go to the program data related to all this. So, in terms of claim applications submitted, we did see April drop off a tiny bit from March, although still more than April of last year. Just kind of an interesting side note, we did also see in March a little bit of a bump up last year, so it may be that there is something about seasonality there with March.

And then if we end up seeing a similar trend to what we saw last year, we might expect late May and June for applications to increase a little bit, especially bonding applications, there are a lot more babies born in the summer. So, we might see a slight uptake based on that as well in the coming month.

Our approval rates are holding pretty steady at about 83 percent for the initial application. We are also holding pretty steady for the number of unique claims that are actively being paid on, so claims that have received at least one payment in the month. For April, that was a little over 33,000 which was about 31 percent more than April of last year.

MS. WATKINS: Just a quick question on the approval rate. Can we get another analysis of what reasons for denial are? Is the time before the events still one of the major reasons for denial or are there other reasons? I think it would be helpful for us to just understand what the reasons for denial are.

MS. GRADY: Absolutely. I'll mark that down.

We can bring that back next month. We can go to the next slide on "Benefit Levels and Lengths." You can see the trend bumps around month over month in terms of average weekly benefits for new claim year starting each month, and then it jumps up. Every January it will jump up as the benefit becomes calculated based on the more recent state-average wage and the more recent cap that also comes into effect.

It does look like there's a little bit of recent increase. But what we've been noticing is that near the beginning of each month the most recent month tends to always look like it's bumped up a little bit. Then as that data matures, that number comes down. So that 958 number where it looks like it's bumped up for April, it may well come down a little bit when we look at the data for April next month. But we will be continuing to monitor that if that trend continues or if that's a real increase in average weekly benefit.

We are expecting that statewide or average benefit to stabilize right around the 940 mark throughout the year, and that's largely a factor of the statewide average annual wage growing so much from 2020 to 2021. And that is benefit calculations that are based on that average annual wage or average weekly wage version of the average annual wage, the increase as well. The length of leave has also remained relatively stable, about seven to eight weeks per claim and nine to ten weeks per a person within a claim year for those who have multiple weekly claims within a year.

So, the next slide you can turn to "Operational Measures." Our time for application admission to first payment dropped another half a week this past month. That means we've managed to cut down a full week since January. We are also convening the work group that we discussed last month around time to payment. The first meeting of that is next week. So more to come on this. We also expect some of the changes for that are being implemented to become effective in June to also contribute to improving time and applications mentioned in the first payment.

So, the next slide on "Phones." We also have been holding really steady with our success on phone time in answering the high percentage of the calls and less than five minutes average wait time for folks in the pay leave cue.

So that is it for program data. If there are no other questions or comments, I will turn it back to Matt to talk about current program priority.

MR. BUELOW: Thank you, Rebecca. Thanks, Steve. Let's advance slides. I'm going to talk about what is the most forefront of our brains right now and what we are focusing a lot of our energy on.

We are in the midst of implementing legislation that passed this last session. So, with 5649, we are still working through getting the policy technical operational communications solidified and done.

Same thing with 2076, and we will talk a little bit more about communications in the work groups in a few minutes here. We are implementing changes to the waiting week so it doesn't deduct hours from people's bank of hours and also changes that are required under 5649.

We are doing a lot of benefit account enhancements, which I will talk about on the next slide. So, if we can advance.

In June we have a big technological release. We had a lot of work put together that is going to come out at the same time. It's legislation and other things. So, I want to talk about what those other things are, and then answer any questions that you may have about that.

We are making changes to the initial application. We are adding some additional questions that we've discovered there's some usability and feedback, and then we're implementing the postnatal leave from 5649, the waiting week changes -- some are legislative and some are not -- and the COVID data collection, which is a requirement under 5649.

For the benefit accounts and processes, people who are in the middle of their claims, if you will, we are implementing conditional logic to the weekly claims, which I'm really excited about. I'm hoping that this one has a big impact on our customers. So, theoretically, we will only be asking the questions that are pertinent to an individual's claim and circumstance as opposed to every question every week to everybody. This should reduce errors, help improve payment rates we think. We'll see what the data shows.

We're making payment history visible to benefit customers so they can go online and see this is when I got paid/how much I got paid. Right now, unfortunately they have to call. So, we're really excited to make that available to them.

We are also adding some automated notifications. When someone uploads a document say, yes, we got the item, and application status changes. So, you get an e-mail that says, "Your status has changed. Go ahead and log into your account and take a look," and then they can see in there what their current status is.

And then we're updating the system's rules and calculation, so how it does the math behind the scenes. We are removing the waiting week for postnatal medical leave, and we have to change the waiting week so that when someone has a waiting week, it will not deduct from the total bank of hours. So that is being implementing then as well.

Before I move forward on slides, I'm going to pause and see if there's any questions. That was a lot thrown at you very quickly. (No questions).

So, then we'll move forward. I want to talk a little bit about how we're making our customers ready for these changes because obviously there are some big changes coming for them. Some of the content that we're updating is the actual application. We are making some changes to the serious health condition form, benefit decision letters, website, FAQs, our guides, tool kits, these sorts of things.

Then we're providing direct outreach and support for current benefit customers impacted by the changes. The biggest one there is the weekly claim changes. What we don't want to do is not inform our customers how they're going to access their benefits will look and feel a little bit different for them. We want them to be prepared for that so they don't think something is wrong. We are working with community-based organizations, sending information directly to healthcare providers, and working with our partners which some of you have been involved with as well.

MS. HUMPHREYS: Are the changes in the application going to be implemented across languages from the start or is that going to be a base release?

MR. BUELOW: Allison, I'm going to defer to you on that.

MS. ELDRIDGE: So, it will depend a little bit on the ability of our translation vendors to complete all of them. They may take a little bit longer with some languages than others. We intend to have them all translated as quickly as possible, but a lot of that depends on the timeline of the vendor.

MR. KENDO: This is Joe Kendo for the Labor Counsel. Matt, can you speak a little bit to the outreach communication to healthcare providers? My question is being driven by some anecdotes about providers giving inaccurate information under some of our members. And then not just an independent clinic, but from a very large provider carrier organization. Just kind of give me a sense of what that approach is.

MR. BUELOW: Yeah. I'm not going to answer that because I wouldn't be the right person. But Allison or Emily, either of you?

MS. ELDRIDGE: I would be happy to. I didn't know Emily was here because I know from communications, they're working on the strategy. But from the product side, can we talk about the work that we're doing with the communications to make sure we're getting the information to the right people? And just bring some awareness that we also worked with healthcare providers on the changes that we need to confirm that we got their feedback on both how to improve it for usability for providers and customers, and how to sort of reach providers more effectively.

From those contacts, we got the list of organizations that can help us disseminate the information. I don't know what particular provider carrier network you were referring to, but we have worked with Kaiser pretty closely in the past, and we are talking with them again to try to clear up some miscommunications around process and requirements.

And I see Emily has her hand up. So, I will mute myself and let her continue.

MS. PERSKY: Thanks, Allison. I was a little slow getting to the buttons. I was going to say, too, when we talk about work group updates, this can kind of be a bit of a preview. But we had some really good conversations yesterday with the folks that joined the communications work group. One of the things that we're looking into is putting together a gut delivery newsletter potentially for healthcare providers and building -- I don't know that it will be, you know, ready to go for this release, but that is something that we're looking at as we're gathering these e-mail addresses and building our contact lists. So, one other thing that I put in there.

MR. BUELOW: Thank you Emily and Allison. Edsonya?

MS. CHARLES: This is Edsonya Charles. I'm excited about the changes that have been made for workers on the workers' side, especially the weekly claims. I do think it's going to reduce problems that many customers have in not getting paid in answering the questions incorrectly, especially customers who are not working, but falsely report that they worked 40 hours because they're so eager to tell the Department what they would have worked had they not been on leave when that's not one of the questions that's being asked. So, this new process will ask, "Did you work at all," so that people will understand better and I think will be really helpful.

I also applaud the payment history information being available to customers. I think that will reduce a lot of calls for that information and for people being able to keep track of their benefit usage.

I just want to bring up again and see where it is in the priorities, something that I know that I've raised and several others have raised since premiums went live, which is providing some electronic notification for employers; and automating those systems similar to the way that it is for workers. Also, multiple points of contacts for employers instead of just one.

MR. BUELOW: Allison, you know I'm going to defer to you on this one.

MS. ELDRIDGE: Indeed. I was readying myself to unmute. So we have been making and working on the prioritization of enhancement to employer accounts and employer account structures in getting those multiple points of contact for an employer is essentially up on top of the list. A lot of the other things we want to do depends on the ability for an employer to designate different people within their own organization to carry out specific tasks and get different contact information, etc.

So, we are working on a pretty high-level road map for those changes; and, of course, sort of pouring out the quarter and the timing based on other priorities, putting all the essentially changes and work. So, we should have more information on when that is coming too, but I would expect that our development people start working on the changes to employer account structure and multiple contact points probably within the next two months.

MS. CHARLES: So, does that also include a portal for employers? Electronic communication?

MS. ELDRIDGE: So that has to come after the changes to the account so there's structure that exists already, the ability for them to designate different people with different contact information. Those people might have reasons to access other sorts of things that we would automate, the other source of communications that we would want to have in place including secure messaging from employers. So, to have those contact points tight security holds first allow them to more securely build out the automation of other features.

MR. BUELOW: Maggie?

MS. HUMPHREYS: Kind of going back to the conversation that Joe kicked off. I did want to flag. I was in the meeting yesterday with the Comps folks, but I didn't think it came up. Back I did want to flag that back in 2020 we worked with Kaiser's continuing education department to create kind of a webinar, continuing education piece that can be sent to their employees and practitioners who were going to be engaging with PFML.

So, I just wanted to bring that up as another resource or idea to try to engage with some of the continuing education staff that needs provider systems as a way to get some content from employees.

MR. BUELOW: That's helpful. Thank you. Do we have any other questions or comments on the priorities? Let's advance slides, please.

So, I want to talk about the work groups if we can just go one more slide, please. We were able to meet yesterday for the two communication work groups, the one about reducing the time from application to payment. Rebecca mentioned this earlier is scheduled for next week. So, there's an update from that one.

I'm going to invite Emily Persky to join us again and give an update on how those communication groups went.

MS. PERSKY: I want to thank everyone who participated in those. We really benefited from your time, attention and feedback. I especially want to thank those who showed up to both of them. You should get a badge, I think.

We went through the audiences for each of these pieces of legislation for the communications related to them. We talked about audiences, the communications strategies and timeline on a pretty high level, and then also at a high level the key messages and calls to action that we're developing. And it was a great point to get that feedback because a lot of this currently is in development. So, we are in a place where we can incorporate it.

Some of the pieces that we talked about may be scheduled not for the immediate launch, the week of June 9th, but we'll put those into place either in the second half of June or early in July. So, yeah, it was super helpful and useful for us. And I don't know if there is any other information you are interested in hearing out of those or any questions? No? Okay. Thank you.

MR. BUELOW: If we can advance slides, please. So that's the end of the content that we were presenting today and the discussions. But I do want to talk about what we might want to bring next month in addition to our standing agenda, of course.

I know we had a request for Marilyn to talk about denial reasons, and I think we can have that together for next month. Happy to do that. Is there anything else that the committee would like to see?

MS. WATKINS: This is Marilyn Watkins again. So, one of the things that we've talked about and asked about in previous meetings is getting a timeline for what is in the technology upgrade queue, and some things that we had understood to be in that queue that apparently got dropped off the queue. Just sort of knowing what the timeline is for anticipated technology upgrades and adding functionality and various things.

We understand that everything can't happen all of once, but I think having a sense of that timeline -- I don't know if we need to have that at the next meeting, but I think getting that report soon so we understand what the queue and timeline is and also get updates when that changes. I think that would be a good thing to have periodically as a regular thing; not every month, but twice a year or something at least.

MR. BUELOW: I think that's a great suggestion. Allison, do you know -- I mean we're working on a roadmap, which is going to answer those questions. I don't know when it's going to be ready or if it's ready, so I'm asking Allison because I don't want to commit us one way or the other. Is that something that we can bring to June or would you want more time?

MS. ELDRIDGE: I think getting the number of changes that we're releasing and getting ready for June 9th we could have it for June, but if we can wait for July so we are more operational with all of the changes that we are currently executing. I think that would probably be better.

MR. BUELOW: Does that work for you, Marilyn?

MS. WATKINS: I think that will be fine. I think we all would agree that prioritizing changes for June 9th is important.

MR. BUELOW: Absolutely.

MS. WATKINS: And getting some kind of report of how that went would be good for June.

MR. BUELOW: Because we need obviously the 16th, so we will update too on the June 9th launch what we know at that point.

Any other agenda items for next month?

MS. BREWER: Matt, this is Christine Brewer. I was hoping to get an update on the implementation of the legislative task force and OFM contracting for the actuarial services. And I understand that ESD isn't directly in charge of those, but I think I would suggest the idea of possibly have OFM staff or send to Robinson or somebody come to our advisory meeting to get an update on where things are at.

MR. BUELOW: That is an interesting idea. Caitlyn, I will hand that one off to you and get your thoughts.

MS. JECKYL: Christine, I can report that I know both things are right on the cusp. We've heard from legislative folks that they're sorting out their list of who is going to serve and what task force. So, I'm anticipating we're hearing about next steps with convening that group really soon.

We just had an update call with OFM yesterday, and I know we're right on the cusp of having that actuarial contracting finalized. So, I think it's perfectly fair to have that agenda next meeting, and we can figure out on our own end who is the right point of contact to bring that. But I do suspect we will have updates on both of those next time.

MS. BREWER: Thank you, Caitlyn.

MS. CHARLES: I don't know, is there an update? I think the Department has been doing some work on sort of the pre-approval questions for planners and early appliers. Is there any update available on that that can be shared next month?

MR. BUELOW: I don't know as to how I'm going to answer that. I'm sorry. I just don't know. We've done a lot of work around that, but we believe that that's going to be a topic of the workgroup for reducing time to payment. We would be surprised if that comes up.

Depending on what happens there, I don't know what we will have to bring next month. But if something exists, we will bring it. We will definitely talk about the workgroup how that went, what it's doing, that sort of thing. So stay tuned.

Any other requests for next month from the committee? Let's advance slides, please. With that, we got through our full agenda in an hour.

So, I will open it up for comments. If you're on your computer, I would ask that you please raise your hand and we will call on you. If you're on the phone, it's kind of hard to jump in sometimes; but just try and we'll get to you. I promise. Looks like Allie has one. Allie?

MS. SCHAAFSMA: My name is Allie Schaafsma. Just a comment, Matt, on the pre-approval process. I know you just mentioned that you're still looking into that internally. I think that is going to be a really, really important process. Your approval turnaround times from the time of application are looking so much more positive than they have in the past.

I think that is going to bring a lot of relief to and release of some of those complaints; because once I submitted my claim, I've still on average gone a month without pay and I've already started my leave.

Additionally, having that done earlier in the process will allow employees to access those award letters earlier to be able to share with their employers so their employers can properly ensure that short-term benefits are offset correctly rather than either making the employee wait for their asking benefit until they can get the award letter turned in, or works overpaying the employee and then having to go back and collect funds from that employee.

So, I just want to encourage -- I know you all have a lot on your plate, but I think that might help reduce some of the incoming concerns for the employers and employee.

MR. BUELOW: Great. Thanks, Allie. I appreciate that comment. Anyone else?

MR. KENDO: Matt, it looks like there was a question in the chat.

MS. PERSKY: This is Emily Persky. So, we are going to feature these changes heavily, and the employer newsletter is going out May 27th. And I don't have the date right in front of me for the June newsletter, but I believe it's June 24th or thereabouts. We also are very likely going to be sending out a special edition in early June/mid-June with some information specifically for focusing on voluntary plans and maybe some of the other changes as well.

In addition, as far as direct communication to employers, we are going to have a separate e-mail for voluntary plan employers that will go only to them, but I believe we also have voluntary plan employers on our employer news list distribution. So those are the main vehicles for employer -- direct employer communication.

MR. BUELOW: Thank you, Emily. Do we have any other comments? It does not appear so.

With that, I think we will adjourn today's meeting. I want to thank everyone from the committee and from the public who attended today and provided some good insights for the Department. We look forward to next month's meeting and look forward to next week's work group meeting with some of you. Thank you very much, and I hope you all have a fantastic day.