

EBT Call Center Transition from India to NC

The U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food & Nutrition Services (USDA/FNS), requires each State to distribute Food Stamps benefits via EBT (electronic benefits transfer). North Carolina is currently in a contractual relationship with E-Funds Corporation, Government Operations, based in Milwaukee, Wisconsin for providing the EBT service for North Carolina. Their responsibilities include:

- Setting up financial accounts for NC Food Stamp recipients,
- Crediting their account balances with the monthly benefits transferred from the Food Stamp Information System,
- Producing and mailing new EBT cards to recipients,
- Tracking transactions on individual accounts in a real time mode adjusting the account balances accordingly,
- Authorizing or denying debits against benefit balances at food retailers' POS terminals,
- Acquiring transactions from food retailers' POS machines nationwide,
- Settling the daily transactions with a funding bank to reimburse food retailers and
- Performing a daily reconciliation and reimbursement from the USDA/FNS Letter of Credit at the Federal Reserve that supports Food Stamp benefits.

E-Funds also provides retailer management for North Carolina. In addition to settling food stamp purchase transactions with retailers, E-Funds is responsible for obtaining the new retailer file from USDA/FNS daily and updating their system. They also contact new retailers about their need for equipment installation and training as well as the provision of supplies for POS terminals, as needed. Some large retailers use the same commercial equipment for EBT cards as they use for regular debit/credit cards.

Another component of the EBT service under contract is customer service for Food Stamp recipients. E-Funds utilizes a voice-response unit (VRU) to enable recipients to obtain their account balances and other simple types of account information. Recipients in touch with the VRU may opt to speak with a Customer Service Representative (CSR) for more in-depth service. At this point, E-Funds routes most Food Stamp recipients' calls that require a CSR to their Call Center in Mumbai, India. This is an around-the-clock (24/7) operation staffed mostly by local residents with E-Funds maintaining some US citizen management staff at this site. The Retailer Management Help Desk and the Spanish-speaking Recipients Customer Service is handled at the E-Funds Call Center located in New Berlin, Wisconsin (a suburb of Milwaukee). The cost of all of the components of service mentioned above is included in a cost-per-case month (CPCM) transaction fee of \$1.65. As of March 1st, the Food Stamp caseload is approximately 300,000 cases; therefore the monthly CPCM is approximately \$495,000. Additionally, there are some other pass-through charges, such as pay phone bills, Federal Express shipping charges for emergency cases, etc.

Recently, the State made a business decision to move the Food Stamp recipient calls that require a CSR away from the E-Funds Call Center in Mumbai, India to a North Carolina state facility located in Martin County. Currently, this state call center is operated by the Department of Health and Human Services for the Child Support Enforcement program. There is sufficient room at this call center, with minor reconfiguration, to accommodate CSR's who will share the existing phone system with the Child Support program CSR's. DHHS anticipates hiring 34 CSR staff, which includes 1 management position and 3 supervisors, for a 24/7 operation.

After negotiating this change in business requirements with E-Funds, we have agreed upon the following plan:

- The E-Funds VRU will still handle recipient calls that do not require a CSR;
- If a recipient requires a CSR, the E-Funds VRU will automatically route the call to Martin County via a telephone line owned by the State;
- E-Funds will give DHHS a reduction in the CPCM of \$.11 (eleven cents). This reduction in CPCM equates to approximately \$396,000 per year;
- E-Funds requires a \$25,000 one-time start-up cost;
- E-Funds will enhance current data circuitry to allow DHHS access to their Administrative Terminal system and CSR on-line guide at a pass-through cost of \$130.00 per month;
- E-Funds will furnish a trainer for 3 weeks along with training materials;
- E-Funds will be prepared to implement this change within 60 days of signing the contract amendment.

DHHS plans to hire staff, reconfigure the space at the Martin County Call Center and work with ITS to install the appropriate telephone lines and data communications in anticipation of a July 1, 2004 implementation date. This implementation date is on a very tight timeframe and is reachable only if the components of this plan are accomplished with expedience.