



Legislative Fiscal Bureau

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Joint Committee on Finance

Paper #686

Call Center Staff (Safety and Professional Services -- Regulation of Professions)

[LFB 2023-25 Budget Summary: Page 554, #2]

CURRENT LAW

The Department of Safety and Professional Services (DSPS) employs customer service staff under its Division of Professional Credential Processing (DPCP) to answer a variety of phone calls and assist callers with the process of occupational licensing. Call center staff respond to a variety of individuals, including credential and license seekers, employers, educational institutions, hospitals, state officials, and all others with inquiries or concerns regarding the state's regulation of professions. Because DSPS regulates more than 240 professions, call center staff are expected to maintain technical knowledge of the various licensing requirements and application components to best assist those seeking help.

DISCUSSION POINTS

1. DSPS is currently authorized 10.0 state-funded and 1.0 federally funded (FED) staff in its DPCP Customer Service Center (CSC). Of those, 1.0 is a records management program supervisor, 4.0 are license/permit program associates, and 6.0 are office operations associates. The 6.0 office operations associates are the primary staff that answer phone calls. The Department states that the 6.0 call-answering staff are able to handle about 37% of approximately 1,700 daily calls, as the Secretary-Designee's testimony to the Committee indicated on March 30, 2023.

2. The agency reports it utilized limited-term employees and in 2022 began contracting 22 additional employees through a third-party company using funds from the federal American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA). DSPS observes that the 22 currently contracted staff can handle approximately 60% of calls. As a result, the Secretary-Designee reported to the Committee that typical call answer rates meet or exceed 90%.

3. Assembly Bill 43/Senate Bill 70 would provide ongoing funding of \$793,000 in 2023-24 and \$1,018,300 in 2024-25 with 14.0 office operations associate permanent positions to provide additional customer service call center staff within the CSC. The Administration would assign state-funded staff to handle ongoing call volumes as federal ARPA funds expire. DSPS contends that an additional 14.0 call center positions would be able to handle typical call demand, and also would build knowledge and expertise over time.

4. Table 1 summarizes the amount of CSC staffing under AB 43/SB 70 and the assumptions used by DSPS and the Administration in estimating state-funded positions that would retain current service levels. DSPS reports receiving approximately 1,700 calls daily, with each call duration an average of five minutes, or a total of 8,500 minutes daily. DSPS models 420 minutes per CSC staff member, per eight-hour day; this assumes two 15-minute breaks plus 30 minutes not answering calls due to doing other related tasks such as talking to supervisors or following up on complex or technical calls. This model yields a requirement of 20 staff, or 14.0 positions more than currently allocated. In most staffing models, the Department must assume leave time, during which people are unavailable due to illness or leave of turnover. DSPS reports that staffing models for call centers assume 20% to 50% for the times when people are unavailable, and DSPS indicates that the recommended staffing level does not include this factor.

TABLE 1

Workload Estimate for Call Center Staff -- AB 43/SB 70

Daily Calls	1,700
Average Duration (Minutes)	<u>5</u>
Total Daily Call Time (Minutes)	8,500
Daily Available Time per Position (Minutes)	420
Staffing Need (Daily Call Time / Available Time per Staff)	20
Current Staffing Provided	<u>6</u>
Difference	14

5. DSPS reports that permanent staff would be projected to cost less per individual, and overall, than contracted call center staff. Table 2 shows differences in costs per year between those budgeted in AB 43/SB 70 on a full-year basis and those under contract as reported by DSPS. (Not shown are premiums that may be payable to multi-lingual staff, who typically are paid higher rates than other contract staff.) The Department also expects that permanent staffing would facilitate greater expertise within CSC staff due to not having to retrain contracted or limited-term employees who may tend to have shorter tenures in the role.

TABLE 2

Comparison of Costs for Call Center Staff

<u>Position Type</u>	<u>Hourly Rate</u>	<u>Yearly Salary/ Cost</u>	<u>Fringe Benefits (42.5%)</u>	<u>Total Compensation</u>	<u>Supplies and Services</u>	<u>Total Cost</u>
State (Permanent)	\$18.92	\$39,400	\$16,700	\$56,100	\$16,600	\$72,700
Contract	39.60	82,400	0	82,400	0	82,400

6. It may be that providing permanent positions for CSC staff would achieve high answered-call volumes as well as lead to retention of skilled incumbents that could better handle complex or unique calls. It also could be considered likely that given DSPS-reported increases in credentialed occupations in recent biennia, the volume of calls made to CSC will continue to remain at current levels of approximately 1,700 per day, and perhaps between 400,000 and 500,000 per year.

7. The Committee could approve the 14.0 permanent positions based on the calculated need by DSPS [Alternative 1]. The Committee could approve fewer staff at its discretion, such as an additional 6.0 staff to double current levels [Alternative 2]. The Committee could also take no action [Alternative 3].

ALTERNATIVES

1. Provide ongoing funding of \$793,000 in 2023-24 and \$1,018,300 in 2024-25 with 14.0 office operations associate permanent positions to provide additional customer service call center staff within the DPCP Customer Service Center (CSC).

ALT 1	Change to Base Funding Positions	
PR	\$1,811,300	14.00

2. Provide 6.0 office operations associate permanent positions for the CSC, with funding of \$327,400 in 2023-24 and \$436,500 in 2024-25.

ALT 2	Change to Base Funding Positions	
PR	\$763,900	6.00

3. Take no action.

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