

REPRESENTATIVE POLICY BOARD
CONSUMER AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

MAY 19, 2025

MEETING TRANSCRIPTION

Naomi:

Okay. Good evening everyone. I'm going to call the meeting to order. It's 5:31. Our first agenda item would be the safety moment. This month's safety moment is dealing with mental health. Despite the progress in the mental health initiative, there's still more than 30 million people in the U.S. that are still lacking quality care. There's one in five U.S. adults experience mental health each year. One in 20 adults experience serious mental health each year. One in six youth have a mental health condition, but only half receive treatment. 50% of all lifetime mental health begins at age 14, and 75% by age 24. In 2023, 20% of all high school students seriously considered suicide. Wow. Some statistics. You should always take action by focusing on what you can control and that's your own well-being. Below they provided a link which you could also check out for yourself when you're with [inaudible 00:02:31] being. Jennifer, do we have any public members?

Greg:

That's pretty alarming.

Jennifer:

No public members

Naomi:

Yes, it is. Okay. Can I get approval of the minutes? They're going to be minutes from the 17th, and also minutes from our special meeting. Can I get someone to approve the minutes for the 17th for our regular meeting?

Mark:

So moved.

Charles:

Second.

Naomi:

Thank you. So it has been moved by Mark, seconded by Charles. Are you ready for the vote? Are there any questions? Questions, questions? All those that are in favor, let it be known by the saying, aye.

Committee members:

Aye.

Naomi:

All those opposed have the same right. Hearing none, seeing none, I declare it's a vote.

Okay. I need a motion also to approve our minutes from the 21st, which is our special joint meeting with the Land Use Committee.

Charles:

Yes.

Naomi:

Can I get a second?

Mark:

Second.

Naomi:

It has been moved by Charles and seconded by Mark that we approve the minutes for the 21st of April for our land use committee and the CAC.

Are you ready for the question? Question, question? All those that are in favor, let it be known by saying aye.

Committee members:

Aye.

Naomi:

All those opposed have the same right. Hearing none, it's a vote.

Moving right on to John, recreation update?

John:

Yes, I'm here. Can you hear me?

Mark:

Yes.

John:

Okay. I was asked to give a short summary of the recreation program for the summer. Excuse me. And this summer is going to be what we've done for the past several years now. We have boats available for our recreation permit holders at Lake Saltonstall. They can rent them on Tuesdays, Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays in the morning. And then all our recreation staff also do... There's one person who does trail inspections every single day. What it is that one person gets into one of our vehicles and does basically a 100-mile loop, checking all the recreation locations, all the recreation areas, which is part of the requirements from the Department of Public Health.

Over the summer, we typically do fewer special events than we do during the rest of the year, but we still aim for at least one special event each month. And during this summer we'll have Trails Day, that's always the first weekend of June. This year it's up in Prospect. We're going to do a joint walk there with

the Prospect Land Trust over some of the Quinnipiac Trail, which we extended through our property and the Prospect Land Trust property about five years ago.

Then we also have walks by the Connecticut Botanical Society. I'm leading that one, the Connecticut Butterfly Association. And Jeff Yale, who's our Program Specialist, has been running an annual Archery for Kids event where he brings all the bows and arrows and sets up some targets for some kids to practice and get exposed to archery.

Other things that we do during the summer. Several years ago we started trying to get some young kids out into our recreation areas during the summer, trying to find camps and so forth where they would be sufficiently interested and available to get out to see some of our properties. It's been hard trying to get camps to do it. They're just already pretty busy as it is, plus the transportation to get them there. And the last thing that is tough for us is that when they bring them there, a lot of times the counselors just think that they're off for the day, which is not how it's supposed to be. They're supposed to still be the counselors and we provide the fishing equipment, we provide a lot of help, but we can't do it for 30, 40 kids at one time.

So last year and this year it looks like we're going to have the same groups including from the New Haven Police Athletic League, the Milford Boys and Girls Club, and also from Hamden Hall.

And with that, that's about a quick summary of our recreation program over the summer and I'll be happy to answer any questions you have.

Mark:

Hey John, is anybody running this or is this in your lap now? I mean, I thought we had somebody that runs it for the summer. Do we have an intern that comes in and runs it, or do you run it? I mean, are you responsible to make sure there's enough staff there when the guys come in or do we have somebody in charge of this?

John:

No, it's Jeff Yale, our Program Specialist. Jeff coordinates our recreation program, fills out the recreation staff, their schedule for the month. Most of the time, and he'll look for volunteers, or he'll look for some staff that will come in for the special events, but pretty much it's just him. And for the PAL stuff, the Police Athletic League, our police officers will go out there with some of the New Haven cops, and they will be there for that specific one. But it's really, Jeff is the hub of the wheel for the recreation program.

Mark:

Do we send a notice out to all kinds of inner city programs saying that we offer this, or we don't do that anymore?

John:

Yes, we've done that several times.

Mark:

Okay. Did we do it this year again or no?

John:

Yes.

Mark:

Okay. Well, it sounds very successful. We started this what, four or five years ago, John?

John:

Something like that. Yes. And we do like last year I think we had, I want to say it was over 150, maybe closer to 200 kids come through with these programs. So we've gotten a lot of kids exposed to our properties. That's good.

Mark:

That's good. Great. Great to hear it, John.

Stephen:

Hey, John, this is Steve. I'm on the phone because I'm having trouble with my computer here. About a year ago, we were sort of increasing the police force, and observation of the lands because of people with those, what do you call them, trail carts or whatever-

John:

ATVs?

Stephen:

... that were tearing up the woods. Yes, the ATVs. Is that full staffed now?

John:

We are at currently five of the six positions are filled with the police force. Our police, especially the new guys, they spend a lot of time in the field, which is great. Not only do they intercept the people who do not have permits, but they also check current permits of our recreation permit holders. And we get a lot of positive feedback from permit holders, saying that they're happy seeing that we're enforcing the rules. Because they have seen, especially over covid when everybody was outside, that there were tons of people just trespassing everywhere. But John, Kevin, Paul, Ed, they've all been out there and it's all been very, very much more controlled these days than it was before. There is always an uptick when this weather gets better and schools get out. We see that every year, but it's definitely been a lot better than it was over the last four or five years.

Stephen:

Okay. Do you think it's because people sort of got the message with what we did before?

John:

Oh, yes. I mean what happens, and we've seen this numerous times, where we do intercept somebody on a dirt bike, or a couple kids on dirt bikes, and the word gets spread around. "Hey, there's cops up there," and then they go somewhere else. And I'm not advocating them trespassing on anyone else's

property, but I definitely don't want them trespassing on ours, because it is a detriment to the public water supply. And that's what we're looking out for most especially.

Stephen:

Okay, great. Thank you.

John:

Thank you.

Naomi:

Any more questions for John? Thank you, John. We'll move on to the report from the OCA.

John:

Thank you.

Jeff:

Good evening everybody. So last month, as you know from my bill, and from what you saw from me at meetings, and in my budget letter, most of the OCA's time was dedicated to the fiscal year 26 capital, and O & M budgets. We do have, I call them three, but two of them are interrelated, and one of them is separate, ongoing consumer matters that I reported to you on the last couple of months.

Two are a father and son in Derby. The son's issue is that, if you recall, the Authority gave him a quote of \$30,000 to extend the main to the start of the son's property. The father's the one that's contacted us about both these properties. The son hasn't contacted us, but there was some back and forth with the Authority to try to get the number down. Mr. Traz proposed a payment of \$10,000 instead of \$30,000. He offered to enter into an agreement with the Authority that said that he'd be responsible for the other \$20,000, if and when the lines extended any further. The Authority's not willing to budge on it. They're willing to enter into a promissory note to give them time to pay, since the concern here really is about the amount of money, but the Authority's approach is consistent with its regulations.

The customer, in all likelihood is going to want to address the Consumer Affairs Committee at a hearing on an appeal. So Lou D'Agostino, my office is finalizing a memo that, as you know under our process will go to the consumer and to the Authority with our recommendation. And then the consumer, like I said, will want to have a meeting with the Consumer Affairs Committee so that you can hear him out.

At the end of the discussion on this extension issue, and I briefed you on this at a prior meeting, last couple of meetings, Mr. Traz brought up another property that his business owns and occupies. It's a commercial property with one tenant. There were originally two meters at the property. The tenant has its own meter and pays its own bills, and there's an issue about one of the meters being broken and trying to get a new meter installed.

Last week, the Authority advised that five years ago an Authority service person verified that the meter inside the building was not being used and should be removed. During a later inspection in 2020, the building was found to be vacant and gutted with the meter having been removed from service and left to rest on an electric panel. So to account for the gap in time since 2020, and to update the current situation, the Authority is scheduling a field visit to determine how service enters the building, if the service is currently being used via solid connection, and if installation of a meter vault is required, if the service is being used or if the service needs to be destroyed at the main, if it's not being used. So the

Authorities in the process of scheduling the site visit on that property, there's nothing more for the OCA to do on that one at the present time.

The other matter which I reported to you on, involves a homeowner in East Haven who operated a valve last spring while doing some gardening, a valve inside her home. She received last year a high bill, a \$1,200 bill. Her normal bill, the previous month, was about \$37. So she had contacted the Authority. She's got some type of valve inside her house. It's not the Authority's plumbing, it's her private plumbing. And when she turns the valve on water runs to a vacant area near her property. She said she never sees the water, when she shuts the valve off, the water stops the meter no longer spins. So it's kind of a strange situation.

The customer was given a waste adjustment of about \$600 and a couple of hundred dollars of interest was removed. But her position is that the Authority should have notified her of the high usage so that she could have turned the valve off while it was happening. The Authority advised her of what the rules and regs say, and she essentially is taking the position that this is a water Authority problem.

The Authority has taken the position that it owns the main and the street, and the customer owns everything else, and she was offered a 24-month payment plan, interest free for the adjusted balance. She declined. She's a former lawyer, who's now a nurse, and really what she's looking for is to have, not only all the interest and fees waived, and not only the waste adjustment, but the bills to be cut in half.

So she's been advised of what the Authority's final position is, which is a 36-month payment plan, interest free, and she was advised of that last week. She was also advised that, if that's not acceptable, the OCA will issue its memo and she'll then have 10 days to appeal to the Consumer Affairs Committee. She asked last week if the 10-day window to object could be extended because she works, and she's a single mom, and she's concerned about the timing. And I said, I told Lou, find out how much additional time she would need and then I will decide whether or not a reasonable accommodation would be appropriate.

So, eventually, in the next month we'll be issuing memos on both of those cases. And if the consumer decides they want a hearing, maybe we could do them both the same night for convenience purposes. But it looks like you'll be hearing a couple of appeals for the first time in a few years.

All right?

Jeff:

Somebody spoke over you.

Charles:

Why did she turn the valve on?

Jeff:

I mean it's like, I don't know. You ever buy a house, and after you're living there for a while, you see like a lever, or a knob, or a switch and you don't know what it's for? I've got a couple of those in my house. I've been in it for 15 years, but I don't turn it on because I don't know what it's for. But if I saw my water meter running, I think I'd be able to figure out what it's for pretty quickly. Like the old joke, my knee hurts when I do this. And the doctor says, "Well then, don't do that."

Mark:

Jeff didn't our new system, when we put in the new system, was going to tell us when customers have unusual high flow rate that's not normal to their house or system, it was going to give us an alarm and tell us that this person has something wrong in their house?

Jeff:

Yes. But I think the problem here is this isn't an RWA valve, so I don't know how we'd be able to detect excess use.

Mark:

Didn't it have to go through our valve?

Jeff:

It went through our meter.

Mark:

Yes. So I'm saying when it was going through our meter, wouldn't it have told us that this woman all of a sudden has a very high flow? And I thought we had something that we put in with our new system to be able to detect the unusual high flow rates from customers.

Jeff:

Maybe Dana or Prem could answer that better than me.

Dana:

I'll take that, I'll take a little bit. So we do notify customers, and we were sending automated letters for what we called continuous consumption. So if it didn't go to zero for 72-hours, which is unusual for a residential home, you would expect it to go to zero while you go to bed, at least for something for an hour. If it doesn't go to zero, we were sending letters. I apologize, Jeff, because I don't know all the history on that particular account, so I don't know if she received a letter at any point. Bridget is sharing that she did not.

Bridgette:

She did not.

Jeff:

No, she didn't. That's her big beef is that she never got notified.

Mark:

Maybe we should look at why did that happened that she didn't get the letter? I mean we are the Consumer Affairs Committee. It seems like the person should have got the letter, we put that system in so that she would be warned.

Prem:

Can I add something, mark? That's a great point. Remember that continuous consumption letter is if something is running straight 72 hours, right? That's when the letter goes. But if she's turning the valve on and off inside the house, we don't know when she's turning it on and off. So if she turned it off at a certain time, she is not having the continuous consumption. You see the continuous consumption process calls out for 72 hours continuously water running through the pipes right, to the meter. But if she's doing something-

Mark:

And that wasn't the case here, she was shutting the meter on and off. Do we know that for a fact?

Dana:

Nope.

Prem:

Go ahead.

Dana:

I'm so sorry. So according to the customer, it was Bridgette is sharing, we could certainly verify that. We have the AMI system and then we can confirm all that information. I do know that when we first got AMI and the notification about continuous consumption was quite the activity internally, and I wasn't too involved in the boards at that juncture. So I don't know how much you guys might recall some of this, or I've been aware, but one of the pieces that we were saying is that we are notifying out of courtesy to the customer, right? Consumption, the way water is used in the home, these are all the customer's responsibility, and we do our best to try to engage them. But it really is their responsibility to own the water and that there's no... Trying to find the right term that Jeff could probably use.

Mark:

I understand that completely. What I just don't understand was confirm whether it did run continuously for 72 hours and what you're going to look at the AMI system and go back on it and see what's going on with that regarding that case?

Dana:

We can absolutely double check that, Mark. Yes, we can do that. So again, the customer is saying it was, I don't know the data offhand, but we can definitely confirm and-

Mark:

I appreciate that. Okay, because we are the Consumer Affairs Committee.

Jeff:

Yes, we know always-

Dana:

Yes.

Jeff:

The way that we always look at these is first we try to get what the facts are, and a lot of times, if you had a leak for example, and the customer doesn't know about it, then that's different than if they had an opportunity to mitigate damages. And if you know that you have a private valve that causes water to flow on somebody else's property, you kind of have a duty to mitigate. I guess maybe she didn't think that she... A hearing would actually be good because to be able to get some real understanding and explanation of how long she has known about this valve, and why it's there, and why whether she ever contacted town, and all that kind of stuff. I think there's a lot of unanswered questions.

Mark:

Sounds good To me, Jeff.

Naomi:

Is it just over one \$1,200 bill?

Dana:

Two months.

Bridgette:

It's a valve that's in her garage that her mother turned on and they didn't know. She didn't know until a neighbor came and said, "Oh, your water's running out on that property. It's like a pipe." And her want is that we credit her everything, and fix it. And I said, "That's your valve and your pipe. I apologize that." It seems like, from what the land was, it was like a farm and they might've been using that to irrigate that land over there, like a long time ago and they divided it up. But she doesn't take any, it's still, I'm sorry. It's still a concern. I asked her, I said, "Is the valve still operable?" And she said yes. I said, "So somebody else could go out there and just turn the valve and the water will run." And she said, "Well then you should send me a letter". I said, "That's a lot of water you're losing waiting on us to send a letter."

Mark:

I think we've got to wait to see what the AMI system says.

Charles:

But what I'm trying to understand, mother went one out there, turned it on. Then she never turned it off, she left it on. Why didn't the system, it didn't drop to zero? So okay.

Dana:

We'll look at that data, we'll look at why the letter was or wasn't sent, and then we can talk about [inaudible 00:27:04]

Mark:

Thank you very much.

Naomi:

Great question. Anybody have any more questions for Jeff? Okay, we'll move right on to Jeff's invoice, which is for \$5,319 and it seems like he's definitely earned it.

Charles:

I'll move it.

Mark:

Second.

Naomi:

All those that are opposed have the same right.

Moving on to item number seven, volunteers for the authority, our months for June, July, August and September. I have for June, Charles is going to take it. For July is going to be Steve and August is going to be Mark. And I will have to take September. Okay. Jennifer, you got that?

Jennifer:

I got it.

Naomi:

Thank you. Okay, moving on to new business. Have you guys had anything?

Bridgette:

No, thank you.

Greg:

Can I bring something?

Naomi:

Absolutely.

Greg:

All right. I received a call Friday night from a constituent, and she said she attempted to pay her bill online, and... Not online I think over the phone and she had a hard time getting through. Were we having a problem with the system any particular day?

Prem:

No, go ahead Dana.

Dana:

Yes, so no, we haven't really had any issues. We do have a little bit of a wait time as we're still transitioning, and some of our calls are taking a little longer than we'd like six weeks into our new

system. So sometimes the wait can be a little bit, but we haven't had any issues with access during business hours.

Greg:

What are we talking?

Dana:

It can range. So sometimes we're a couple of minutes, and other days we're 45.

Greg:

That's a long time for 45.

Dana:

It is a long time. It is a very long time. We do include messages that say, paying online, using our MBR, and are actually something else that's actually important to know that CSRs are no longer [inaudible 00:29:51]. So we do not want our CSRs to have credit card numbers, account numbers. We don't take and process payments any longer. They do it through the IVR. So when the customer would come to us, we actually put them back into our IVR system, or encourage them. They can go to certain payment locations, send a check pay online, but the CSRs are no longer allowed to process payments.

Greg:

Do we have the ability for them to offer a callback?

Dana:

We do have that capability. We have had some mixed results right now. So there are days we have ended a couple of days with over a hundred calls waiting for a callback. We have found that not feasible. It's very challenging, in terms of keeping up with that volume. So we use it selectively is what I'll say. So we turn it on sometimes, and then, if we're finding that that call volume is building for us, we want to be able to get to those customers and we'll actually turn it off, sometimes around three-ish in order to be able to clear the queue that day.

Greg:

Is that a manpower issue or it's just progressive?

Dana:

It's progressive learning at this point. A little bit of it is volume. So again, customers have transitioned to the new system. Some have questions about payments, some are still trying to learn, or sign up for our portal. We've done a lot of communication, which I think we've shared here, and at the Authority as well,, around a lot of the communication plans that we did and we executed on and continue to. But some people are still going into the portal for example, and using their old username and password, which does no longer work. It is a whole new system.

Bridgette:

Friday we've been doing really well, but Friday we had a bit of a SNAFU, which [inaudible 00:31:57] your constituent. Instead of throttling the text messages, we sent out 5,000 at once. Which, our volume went up. So we've been doing very well with the volume, having maybe five to six calls in queue. But Friday as soon as you said it, I said, oh, might've been the text message.

Greg:

In this meeting [inaudible 00:32:24]

Bridgette:

We were going to do the [inaudible 00:32:29] day and night. The person who created it inadvertently sent them all at once, which increased our volume for the entire day. So we did experience-

Dana:

So it would've been an excessive wait, not necessarily a problem with the phone system, but that it would have been a very high call volume long wait time-

Bridgette:

Because of that.

Greg:

So can people still make payments over the phone with their credit card, or?

Dana:

Using the automated system, yes.

Prem:

We do not take credit card numbers, we have never encouraged to take credit card numbers for the fact of being able to process because of PCA compliance so they go through our system. But I think one of the things that, it's a whole kind of learning that's happening right now where, if you remember, I spoke about all of these customers have to go back and re-register. Not just for us, but because of compliance, everybody has to go through the same process. I know it's a pain for the customer to re-enroll, but that is a process not for all of you, but anybody in the industry where they have to re-register because we don't collect SSN, don't collect credit card numbers, et cetera.

But I think where the pain is coming, which is getting better, the initial volumes for the first few weeks were higher to what Bridget and Dana are saying, but it's gotten much better. We had three times the call volumes the first week that we typically see in terms of levels because people are wanting to talk so we can re-enroll the system. But then now we've gotten it down to manageable levels. So I would say a typical 350 calls a day is now topping around 500 calls a day. So we are trying to kind of manage those call volumes as they're coming in. So maybe that's one of the things.

And, to Bridget's point, we are taking concerted efforts for us to also collect the payments because what we share [inaudible 00:34:24] to come in, and we want to have the cashflow to come in, so we want to make sure that you're offering the customers so they are being able to go through the process and make the payments. So we are managing through that.

But what I've seen from the past experiences to now this was expected as part of our goal line. Six months from now, or three months from now, it's going to be much more manageable because now people have learned, and our teams, customers and things will get better, but we are able to really offer and have resources to be able to take those calls.

And I think, to Dana's point, the callback is a great example. We do have callback, but at the same time we want to be careful that let's say you have a hundred calls waiting and you don't want to be having the callback at five o'clock, but now you're going to have challenge because you're closed at five o'clock. So what we are trying to do is to be able to manage that call volume because what's going to happen is if we have a hundred calls waiting, typically the customers will get a callback the next day morning, but we are trying to close and get all the calls the same day. So we're trying to manage the balance as well.

So within those, I think they're getting much better. I would say call volumes are going down quite a bit in terms of how we are. And again, Mondays have always been the days that we have more calls because people are coming back from a weekend. So now they're calling on a Monday versus as we progress through the day it gets better. So it's a mixed bag, but we are getting better by the day. We are answering the calls and if you are hearing something, I would encourage that there are no systemic issues per se. It's more like the volume that we are trying to manage through. Yes.

Naomi:

I have a question. How is the staff doing as far as their learning curve? Anybody having any difficulty or anything at this point? Are challenges still out there?

Dana:

We actually had an interesting conversation with one of our agents a little earlier this afternoon. Her comment was, "I get it, I understand what I'm supposed to do, but I'd like some of this to be easier." So I think what we're doing is we're really finding opportunities to be more efficient. We've learned a lot about this. You do everything you can to prepare, and plan, and have all these trainings and sometimes reality you see, ah, we don't need to do this. It's actually doing something twice for example. We don't need to do that step.

So she brought some of those examples to us. Today I think most of our team has picked it up quite well. We do have a few that struggle more than others and we continue to have full-time floor support. We have people on the floor all day every day, trainers, project team members, the supervisor supervising the staff so that we can answer questions in real time. And we still have our [inaudible 00:37:15] partners on site as well. So they're here as well doing some quick troubleshooting for things, or little tweaks that we find that we're trying to fix.

But the staff is adapting. It's still, again, it's still a lot that they're kind of drinking from the fire hose, though it's maybe turned down a notch or two, but it's still a lot. And we're doing everything we can to kind of keep their spirits up and providing them the support.

Greg:

How many employees do you have on your team?

Dana:

So we're 30 total. 12, well sorry, 10 full-time CSRs, two part-time CSRs dedicated to phones. We have six billing and collection specialists, and two that assist with email and some of our legal receivership, the more complex collections activities. In addition to the supervisors.

Mark:

Do the supervisors ever jump in and take calls themselves? Or you've got people on the floor watching these other people, do they ever jump in and answer the phone themselves?

Dana:

They can and they have on occasion. Generally we're there more to support the team to help them resolve those calls and quickly move to the next one. As opposed to taking calls on a regular basis. But they can.

Prem:

Also, they address escalations, Mark, right? So if there are any escalations then it goes to them. So there's a balance between taking calls, escalations, and monitoring the floor. So all of that, the supervisors.

Mark:

Okay, thank you.

Greg:

[inaudible 00:38:48] at this point?

Dana:

I think we're okay. Yes, I do believe we have the right amount of staff for what I would call a relatively normal level of call volume. We are still drinking from the fire hose.

Greg:

But you say that the staff we have would be okay, especially if we had our normal volume, but we don't have our normal volume. So that means the staff we have is not adequate.

Prem:

Let me put it this way, there's a balance where, when you think about the staff, for example, the back office work that we have. Between that and the first day we had a lot more calls, so we had people from back office to take calls. So we are trying to balance to make sure we're addressing the customer.

Greg:

So you do have some back up?

Dana:

Yes, I'm sorry. It's not just the 12. Thank you. Yes, that's a better way to answer your question. Yes, those staff we have that are doing billing and things like that jump on and cover calls for us when we're. So it is more than just [inaudible 00:39:53]

Rich:

Can I ask a question? I'm not sure if you can hear me. Can you hear me?

Committee members:

Yes.

Rich:

So you say there are times where there's people in the queue and we're closing. Now, from my experience, there's nothing in life more frustrating than waiting on hold. Is it possible that we offer overtime and we don't allow-

Dana:

Absolutely.

Rich:

... to shut down a queue when it's filled with calls and we tell them they're going to get a call back the next day?

Dana:

Richard, please, and thank you for that. That is not what we meant when they were in queue. If we have people who are live holding in queue, we absolutely clear that queue.

Rich:

Okay. Thank you.

Dana:

These were the who opted for callback, so they're not actually waiting on the phone. Thank you for offering that clarification. Yes, no, we never leave the queue. In fact, we've done a few things where we've instituted, because we have such a clear view now with Omnichannel that we actually tell the people, we notify them that we're going to need you to stay because we have this queue to clear. So we use overtime for those things and we can see the difference between who is waiting for a callback, versus who is actually holding. So thank you. Yes, good. Good point.

Rich:

Thank you.

Prem:

If the customer waiting, it means he will get an answer.

Dana:

He will get answered that day. Doesn't mean [inaudible 00:41:26].

Rich:

That's the right answer.

Dana:

Yes. That's, no. Big sticking point for us. In fact, we even created some reminders on our calendars as we transitioned all the supervision, have a few reminders not to clear the queue, but to make sure that we're looking at who's there, getting our overtime notifications out early and cleaning up anything that's kind of left in there before the end of the day. And I thought I heard somewhere, I apologize. Were you asking about the vendor?

Charles:

[inaudible 00:42:03] better question.

Dana:

You have a better question now?

Prem:

We do have, to your point, we do have Edwards for the call flows. We do have Edwards for the calling service, but I think overall we are looking at how we can better make use of real calls. We have other options too, but we do have.

Charles:

Your work there, I mean it's a work in progress. Last month it seemed a little bit more optimistic. This month the struggle continues. So two months struggle. Okay. If this goes on the third month, then I think we got to-

Dana:

Yes, and I agree with you. I mean really where we are is we're making sure the staff is up-to-date. We're trying to improve their efficiency, which will also help reduce the hold time. And I think we've come a long way. And it is, you're probably hearing a little bit of the tiredness in our own voices. It is a lot. But really, the team is doing a good job. Generally our customers have been very patient with us, and I do apologize for whatever happened with that particular customer. There are days where the wait is a little longer, well maybe a lot longer than we would really like.

Mark:

45 minutes is really long.

Dana:

Yes, Yes, it is. And then not the norm, please know that it's not the norm. I'm just trying to represent that there are days that it can get. Early on it was-

Charles:

You can clean the kitchen in 45 minutes.

Dana:

We play nice messages while they wait.

Speaker 10:

Dana, since you went to the new system, have you lost any employees?

Prem:

Employee wise, no. Client, Yes.

Dana:

Yes. No, not on our front line. We have not. We have a couple that will probably be transitioning from a supervision standpoint, but I'm sure Liz and others will share updates on our head transitions.

Naomi:

Are all of the employees still in house?

Dana:

Yes. Yes. We did a small pilot in May, or during this month, to ensure that the system would work as expected on remote, which it did as we anticipated. And it's really interesting because again, with Omnichannel we have a different level of visibility even to some of our back office folks when they're remote than we did prior to the system. So it actually even helps from a supervisor standpoint. In terms of being able to ensure people were where we wanted them to be when we wanted them to be there. So it was a good change.

Greg:

You said at end of day-

Rich:

I apologize. Go ahead.

Greg:

At end of the day, you keep people, there's some people [inaudible 00:44:59].

Committee members:

[inaudible 00:45:02] would be emergency, if it's leak or [inaudible 00:45:03] something. Rich, do you have a question?

Rich:

And you may have covered this. Do you have average wait time and what is the goal for average wait time?

Dana:

Our goal for average wait time, average speed of answer, is 90 seconds. We aren't hitting that yet on a regular basis with this new solution. As I said, we can have some wide fluctuations. Some days it's great and we're under a minute. Other days it can go beyond. Mondays particularly tend to be very heavy. Thursdays and Fridays less so. Generally we again, we created our own pain for our customers when the snafu happened. Instead of sending trickles of these messages, which generate calls, we sent 5,000 at one time, which created an influx of call volume. But that is the target we're aiming for, Rich.

Rich:

Under a minute. And what is... I mean I know you'll have spikes, you'll have days, slow days. What is your average? And you measure that in weekly, monthly? What is the average that you're producing now?

Dana:

Right now, probably, I don't know, five minutes on this. In the average, thinking about my dashboard. Again, it can vary throughout the day, but we are literally measuring it in real time from eight to five. And we are trying to reassess resources. Again, if we get too many people in queue or the longest wait time is getting long, we'll shift some resources. So.

Prem:

I think there's always a balance. I just want to be pragmatic about this. There's a balance of managing within the number of people we have. So we move back office people onto the calls, we manage those calls. So every call gets answered for the day. But I also want to be careful that when it comes to efficiency and headcount, this is not unusual. This is what is expected for every call. As a matter of fact, we are far better in terms of the scenarios that you may remember from the days of SAP or whatever. We have to be careful how we pool our resources and you never tend to hire permanent employees for the spikes. You want to have a productivity balance and really making sure, and we are trying to manage that between the people we have and managing between the overtime we have. So we are doing pretty good from that perspective.

And I think we are six weeks into our go live now. And I anticipate that we have a 90-day stabilization period to what Chelsea had mentioned. And we are going to manage this and making sure that we are able to answer every call, take care of every closings, and every other escalation that comes to our contact center. So we are getting there.

Dana:

Yes,

Prem:

We can literally see, based on the first week versus now the sixth, seventh week, we are getting much better as we are trying to stabilize the system. And again, I know there was also a question about learning curve and training and everybody learns differently. Some of them are visual learners, some of

them take a little bit more time. And we are telling our employees that it's okay that we are, again, some of them, all of them take pride in what they do. So they feel like, oh, the customer is waiting or the customer is trying to get something done. Like today's conversation we had with one of our employees, we're saying that just help the customer and if they have a learning curve that they're trying to go through and they're getting better. And I can see a huge difference from day one to now. So I think next month we'll stabilize more and I'm expecting the call volumes will go back to normalcy. So that's the idea.

Dana:

And just the other thing, just as we're talking and really what we're experiencing now and what our customers are experiencing now is this transition, is the new system. It will get better. It is getting better. And just for comparison, if we look back over the last year, average speed of answer could have... We had months, we were as low as 24 seconds. Even though we have a 90-second objective, we were 24 seconds. So we have the staff to handle volume as we stabilize.

Right now, our customers have a lot of questions. We had our downtime where we cut over, they just got their first set. This actually their second set of bills. They got their first bills in April. This is the first time they're seeing the next round. I think people are still having questions about portal. So all of those things we're working.

Some of the outbound messaging we're doing to try to get them information and encourage them that these are the mechanisms available to use. Our IVR, go to locations, go to even our Dropbox. We have a lot more people coming into the lobby space as well.

Naomi:

I saw that today.

Dana:

Yes, it's a lot busier.

Naomi:

You answered my question.

Dana:

Appreciate the patience both of the Board here and the customers. It is getting better. But again, it is a system transition. We knew it was going to be a challenge. We tried to message ahead of time with our customers for that and the team is managing through it. It is getting better. Fortunately we still have some-

Greg:

I don't know if this is a new year for your purview or not, but has there been any promotion on social media? Is there any... are we getting-

Prem:

Yes. We cover that too. So far, let's keep it that way.

Greg:

I didn't know if that was part of yours.

Dana:

Yes, and there have been one or two that got shared with us and it's really no more or less than anything we would've seen prior to the system. SO.

Greg:

Unfortunately the world we live in now.

Dana:

It can gain momentum. But some of it has been very positive actually. And then others, we have a few complaints in there, but nothing out of the ordinary.

Prem:

So one thing I also want to give it to the customer. For example, even before we went live the project, we sent numerous communication telling them, you're going to get an activation code on your bill. You just have to register. But guess what happens? Customers are going to still call. They still call and they want to talk.

Dana:

They wanted to pay. I'm not that upset that they wanted to pay.

Prem:

So I think those are the call volumes. It's not because they have an issue, it's just because they want to talk to someone and say, okay, I holding something. So we are seeing a lot of those calls and I think I actually literally, I stand in the customer care floor. I'm there all the time. I'm on the floor. From the day we went live.

So I go for meetings or whatever and I think the team rotates as well, but I can clearly see the conversations the team is having with the customer. I see most of the calls, all of the calls are up to the point where the customer is happy. So I'm like, good, you're doing a great job. So it's almost like having that conversation and it's the transition time. So I'm not overly concerned. And if there's an escalation, we have a process to manage that too. So we are doing that as well. So not really worried. So another month we'll see a lot more stabilization.

Mark:

Did you get any complaints when you went from quarterly bill to monthly bill from customers?

Prem:

I got one about a year ago, but she complained about the rate increases and-

Dana:

[inaudible 00:52:24]

Prem:

Oh, Yes. So when we go up again, I'm going to get another call.

Dana:

Yes, I think you got about a year, right? Yes. So when we went from quarterly to monthly, we got some complaints. It's interesting because it actually makes the size of the bill much more manageable for most people. That was one of the reasons for going to monthly billing, and certainly to be aligned with other bills, home bills that people are familiar with.

But the interesting thing is that some people were, now I got to send you three checks. We're like, "Oh, just enroll in auto-pay," and then it [inaudible 00:52:58]. But most of it was about, they liked quarterly billing. They were used to quarterly billing and it was more about just the change. As opposed to a complaint about the transition. Anything that was a challenge in the billing, or a challenge in the reaching us at that time, or anything like that. It was more just folks who preferred quarterly.

Greg:

[inaudible 00:53:21] more. Growing like we want it to?

Dana:

Yes, it's growing. I think late last week we were at about almost 11,000?

Prem:

For auto-pay. Yes. Yes. And for E-bill we had 42%. Now we're at about 44%. So it is going up. So it definitely-

Charles:

It's Going in right direction.

Dana:

It's going in the right direction. And that is all, again, some of the promotion we're also trying to do. And outreach those customers who were on auto pay but have not yet re-registered for auto pay. We've done specific outreach to them and we'll continue to do that. We have done quite a few things to promote E-bill and auto pay over the years. Again, it took us years to get to 42%, 18% auto pay, 42% E-bill, 18% auto pay. It'll take us a little bit of time to get that back up, but what we have now are so many more options for auto pay between PayPal, Venmo, checking accounts, and things like that. Apple Pay, that what we're hopeful is that we'll be going-

Greg:

And this auto bill will make it more palatable.

Dana:

Yes, absolutely. Absolutely. A lot more manageable on a month-to-month basis. Yes.

Naomi:

Representative Policy Board
Consumer Affairs Committee
May 19, 2025

Okay. Does anybody have any more new business or questions or concerns? Okay. Our next meeting will be held for the Consumer Committee on June 16th at 5:30.

First of all, I forgot this. I need to thank everybody for coming today, for being here with us. John, Jeff, Prem, Dana and Bridget, and thank everybody else for coming. Thank you.

Charles:

See you Thursday.

Naomi:

Goodnight folks.