

MAINE STATE LEGISLATURE

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MEMORANDUM

TO: Senator Peggy A. Pendleton, Chair
Representative Martha A. Bagley, Chair
Members of the Joint Standing Committee on State and Local Government

FROM: Charles A. Jacobs, Deputy Commissioner
Department of Administrative & Financial Services

Charles Jacobs
SJT.

DATE: January 18, 2001

SUBJECT: Report on the Implementation of the Policy on the Use of Automated Telephone Answering Equipment

Pursuant to Section 1, Resolves 2000, Chapter 90, attached please find a report on the efforts of the Department of Administrative & Financial Services to implement the policy on the Use of Automated Telephone Answering Equipment by all State agencies. This is an update on the report that was filed last spring. It is in the form of a summary report from each cabinet agency. The summaries include information required by Chapter 90. There have been no changes to the policy since it was presented to the Committee in January of 2000.

If the Committee requires further information, we would, of course, be happy to provide it.

CAJ:sjt

✓ cc: Chris Spruce

Attachment

AUG 27 2001

**Report to State & Local Government Committee
January 18, 2001**

**LD 2176 "Resolve, to Require Certain Reports Concerning the Use of Automated
Telephone Answering by State Government"**

DEPARTMENT OF ADMINISTRATIVE & FINANCIAL SERVICES

Commissioner's Office

The Commissioner's Office is in full compliance with the policy.

Bureau of Accounts & Control

Maine State Government has established a policy for all State agencies to follow on the usage of voice mail. This policy is effective February 14, 2000. Listed below are the Bureau's guidelines which all employees will be expected to follow in order to abide with the statewide policy.

1. Beginning on January 26, 2000, there will no longer be a recorded message on the Bureau's main line (287-4600). Any incoming calls on this line will be answered by the receptionist (Lorrie) or backup personnel. Calls will be transferred and announced to employees. **NO CALLER WILL BE TRANSFERRED TO VOICE MAIL WITHOUT BEING ASKED FIRST.** It will be the caller's decision if they prefer to leave a message on the voice mail system or leave a message with the receptionist. All hand written messages will be delivered to employees, but it would be helpful if all employees check in with Lorrie periodically for messages.
2. If an employee is at their desk, they are expected to answer their telephones. Telephones are not to be left ringing for voice mail to pick up. *All calls are to be answered.*
3. Effective immediately, all employees are expected to update their voice mail daily. No one should have the system greeting on.
4. All messages must:
 - give the option to press "0" to reach someone else.
 - give another employee's phone number, if you have a backup person.

Some examples of voice mail messages are as follows:

- If an employee is in, but is on another line (May also be used for daily message, when in the office):

“You have reached ____ (name). Today is ____ (day) and I am in the office today. However, I may be on another line at the moment and will return your call as soon as possible. If you need immediate assistance, please dial _____ (“0” or another number).

- If an employee is in , but is away from their desk at a meeting, lunch, etc.:

“You have reached ____ (name). Today is ____ (day/date) and I will be away from my desk until ____ (time). Please leave a message and I will return your call as soon as possible. If you need immediate assistance please dial _____ (“0” or another number).

- If an employee is away from the office for vacation:

“You have reached ____ (name) and I will be on vacation from ____ (date) until ____ (date). You may leave a message and I will return your call when I return or please dial _____ (“0” or another number) for immediate assistance.”

- If an employee is away from the office due to sickness the employee may call into their voice mail from home and change the message. In case of an emergency (accident, etc.) the bureau receptionist* will place a message on the employee’s phone:

“You have reached ____ (name). Today is ____ (day/date) and due to illness I will be out of the office all day. Please leave a message and I will return your call as soon as possible. If you need immediate assistance please dial _____ (“0” or another number).

*All employees are asked to give Lorrie the passwords on their voice mail. This is for emergency purposes only (accidents, lengthy illness, etc.) All passwords will be kept CONFIDENTIAL.

By following these guidelines, our customers will be served in a much more efficient manner. If you have any questions, please contact Joe Shaw or Debbie Jenney.

Bureau of Alcoholic Beverages & Lottery Operations

The Bureau of Alcoholic Beverages and Lottery Operations has implemented all of the policy for the use of automated telephone answering equipment except item number three; There will be no "layered" menus for office application. Due to two divisions (Liquor and Lottery) we have 2 layers.

Bureau of the Budget

Effective April 6, 2000, staff of the Bureau of the Budget have taken the following steps to implement the new policy on automated telephone answering equipment:

- In the event all of the Bureau staff are out of the office, incoming calls will be directed by call forward to the location of the meeting, to the Commissioner’s Office or to Telco (e.g., staff meeting, Bureau Quality Council meeting, etc.).

- Staff will program their voice mail, as suggested in the policy, to indicate they may not be immediately available but will return the call as soon as possible. The selection of “0” to reach someone else in the office will be an option. Staff who are out of the office for one day or more (e.g., meetings, vacation, sick leave, etc.) will ensure that their voice mail message indicates where they are and when they are expected to return.
- All voice mail will include the option of pressing “0” in order to reach someone with whom to speak.
- Callers who are transferred will be advised that they may reach voice mail but will have the option to press “0”, if they so desire, in order to reach someone with whom to speak (Note: In some circumstances, staff taking incoming calls may not be aware that the person to whom the call is being transferred is at his or her desk).

Bureau of Employee Relations

The Bureau of Employee Relations meets all of the requirements of the policy. We have one incoming line to the office with a rollover line when busy. We do not have menus and all personal lines have a "0" option with a voice mail option.

Bureau of General Services

The Bureau of General Services is now in full compliance.

Bureau of Human Resources

With regard to general policy for answering telephone calls, the Bureau implemented a new telephone policy in December 1999.

With regard to the use of automated operator functions:

- The main office does not employ the use of the automated operator functions, other than individual voice mail. Policy regarding the use of individual voice mail is detailed in the December 6, 1999 telephone policy.
- The Division of Employee Health and Benefits encourages telephone calls to individual lines, but the Division also uses automated services for calls coming into the main line. This service directs incoming callers to either Health and Benefits or to Workers' Compensation, or to “press 0” to talk to the receptionist. Calls directed to Workers' Compensation are answered by a service representative. Calls directed to Health and Benefits are further instructed to call our health and dental providers directly for certain services (phone numbers for our providers are repeated twice), or to “press 0” to speak to an operator.
- The Division of Employee Health and Benefits implemented the automated system in order to adequately respond to the high volume of calls received and to provide access to services when all of the service representative lines are busy. The options for callers to leave messages has been significantly reduced to facilitate more direct contact with service representatives. When the caller presses “0” or waits on the line, the call is directly transferred to the receptionist. If all service representative lines are busy, the receptionist

offers the caller the option of waiting for the next available service representative or access to voice mail. Further, the receptionist offers the service representative's individual direct line for future reference.

The automated message is activated from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Monday through Sunday. After 5:00 p.m., the message indicates that the office is closed. Specialized messages are activated for holidays or office closure due to weather.

Bureau of Information Services

- **"0" Option**

All telephones in the Bureau of Information Services do have the "0" option. When the "0" option is pressed by the caller, the call will be transferred to a BIS Administrative support staff person or to the State of Maine Telephone Operators.

- **Auto Attendant for the BIS Help Desk**

The BIS Help Desk (624-7700) does offer a menu with options to assist the caller:

If the caller knows the extension they can press it immediately, OR

Press 1 for Network/System problems

Press 2 for Computer, Hardware, Software problems

Press 3 for Telephone, Voice Mail problems

Press 4 for MACWIS problems

Or stay on line for the next available assistant.

During business hours, Help Desk calls will transfer to the Administrative support staff if the Help Desk staff is not able to pick up a call. For assistance on weekends, or from 5:00 pm to 7:00 am, callers are directed to the BIS Computer Operations shift employees for assistance.

Maine Revenue Services

The MRS phone system is driven by volume. We have made an effort to meet the intent of DAFS policy notwithstanding our view that much of our telecommunications activity does fall within the "call center" exception. The Income Tax call center, alone, received over 400,000 calls in 1999, of which we answered over 333,000 (the rest of the people hung up before their call came up in the queue. Probably most of them successfully called later.) A great deal of thought, planning, and testing has to go into any change we make to our phone system, no matter how minor the change, or else we take the chance of making things worse. We have invested much of our resource in improvements to the phone system, in an attempt to meet public demand, enhance customer service, and comply with legislative requirements.

MRS has four auto-attend phone numbers with menus, all of which are published (287-2076 is the general MRS number, 287-2011 is for Property Tax, 287-2336 is for Sales Tax, and 626-8475 is for Income Tax). Additionally, we have a call center for Income Tax; the Telefile (624-7776), Telefile Tax and Rent (624-7778), Teletax (624-7875), Telerefund (624-8461), and Teledebit (624-7777); and the Forms ordering line (624-7894).

Referring to the bulleted items in the "Policy on the Use of Automated Telephone Answering Equipment", we note the following:

- None of the four auto-attend numbers have a clearly stated "0" option, early in the recording. In each case, though, there is a clearly stated method at the end of the menu for the caller to reach a "live" person. We are reluctant to make changes to the recordings, as they work well and have been in use for months, even years, without problem or complaint. Most published numbers comply with this, as do most personal numbers with voice mail.
- All "0" options go to a live person during business hours.
- Only one of our auto-attend numbers (287-2076) has layered menus. Three of the five options go to another menu. Unless 287-2076 can be given to a receptionist, we have no other choice.
- One of our menus has five options. After talking with many of the people who monitor the various auto-attend numbers, we find that we receive no significant number of complaints about the menus or the wait. There has been no perceived reduction in the number of complaints since the menus were shortened and improved. No actual complaint statistics have been kept.
- There is no voice mail on receptionist numbers during business hours.
- Employees who deal with the public and who have voice mail have been, and continue to be, instructed in the use of voice mail. They are told to not use voice mail for call screening and to change their greeting, if possible, when they are not available for extended periods.
- Receptionists are instructed to ask before transferring to voice mail. Without the employee password, receptionists or co-workers cannot change the voice mail greeting or options on another person's voice mail. Employees are instructed to transfer their phone to a co-worker or change their voice mail greeting if they are going to be out of the office for an extended period.

Accomplishments

1. The remaining employees who did not have a well defined "0" option have had one assigned and their voice mail setup, at BIS Telco, was changed to reflect this.
2. We reviewed the use of 287-2076 with the objective of shortening the menu and removing layering. We found that no changes could be made.
3. We reviewed the two menus with five options with the objective of reducing the number of menu items to four or fewer. One was reduced to three options, the other remains at five.

Action Plan

1. A clearly stated "0" option, early in the recording, could be implemented on all menus. There is great reluctance and resistance to this, as the feeling is that it will dramatically increase the number of people who will try to get a "live" person immediately, thereby increasing the MRS workload and taxpayer wait time in queue. Most taxpayers can be more efficiently and effectively served by the automated system. It is our position that leaving the menus as they are,

having shortened them as much as possible, is the best we can do, without adding significantly to our telephone answering staff.

Division of Financial & Personnel Services

For the Division of Financial and Personnel Services (DFPS):

- DFPS does not have an auto attendant system.
- All employees will verbalize the “press 0” option on their standard voice mail messages.
- All DFPS phones have our main number (287-4500) as the “press 0” option. A “live person” answers the main line from 8:00 A.M. to 5:00 P.M. daily, and breaks are staggered to ensure full time coverage of that line.
- The main number (287-4500) is not sent to voice mail from 8:00 A.M. to 5:00 P.M. daily.
- No caller is transferred to voice mail without first being asked if that is acceptable.
- All employees will indicate scheduled absences on their voice mail messages, and will include the “press 0” option in those messages.
- In the case of unscheduled absences, the absent employee's voice mail will be disabled and his/her phone will be forwarded to his/her supervisor.

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

The Department of Agriculture is now in compliance with the new policy.

DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION

With the exception of Parks and Lands all Bureaus have a central number which is answered by a real person. Parks and Lands does use some menus, but callers may opt for a secretary. At times a statehouse operator is used when there is a coverage problem.

The department's biggest problem with regard to this policy is small field offices, state parks, and similar situations in which there is limited availability of staff. In those situations we use answering machines or voicemail when staff are not available to answer the phone. These are not prime program numbers, however, and field staff are instructed to return calls as soon as possible.

DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS

The Department of Corrections has implemented the policy on Automated Telephone Answering Equipment.

The Department has a number of facilities, regions, as well as Central Office.

Those who work at our facilities can activate voice mail at their respective phones with their "0" being a main switchboard which is manned 24 hours a day 7 days a week.

Our regional offices vary in size. The larger offices have one or more clericals so if a person calls and dials "0", they will be able to speak to a live person. The Department does have numerous one and two person offices with no clerical support. Those offices do not have voice mail but do have answering machines.

Some concerns for our Department are: Central Office does not have a "live" person after 4:30 P.M.. We are examining several options to improve reception services.

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE, VETERANS & EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

1. The Department of Defense purchased Active Voice Automated Answering System, which is capable of meeting the requirements of Section 1, Resolves 2000, Chapter 90. The installation date for this product is December 8, 2000.
2. The installation of the new system will include provisions for compliance for 'key' telephones in the Department, providing compliance prior to January 1, 2001. All additional Direct Inward Dial (DID) Lines will be added to the system in the following 6 month period.
3. The initial plan covers the Office of the Commissioner and Camp Keyes. Outlying units will be added as new technology is implemented that allows them access to the features on the main Switch System at Camp Keyes. All units will have the capability in 18 months.
4. Implementation actions for the Maine Emergency Management Agency and Bureau of Veterans' Services are unchanged from your October 4, 2000 report.
5. Questions can be referred to Major Kevin L. McDougall, Director of Information Management, 626-4448 or Kevin.McDougall@me.ngb.army.mil.

DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

The Department of Economic & Community Development is in compliance with the requirements of the new policy.

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

The Department of Education is in compliance with the requirements of the new policy.

DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

- Provided the policy to all employees when it was issued.
- Have never had front line automated answering lines, and no nested menus.

- Nearly all of the policy is the way we were already doing business.
- Only continuing work is every now and again reminding employees to keep their voicemail updated.

DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES

The Department of Human Services is generally in compliance with the policy.

With regard to the regional offices:

- Voice mail is not allowed on any telephone number publicly listed (central answering points) in the Bell Atlantic telephone directories.
- These published numbers are not left unattended. If the regular employee is unavailable, a substitute performs the functions or the "ring" is forwarded to another central answering point for a live response.
- Other employees have been directed to provide an "0" option on their individual voice mail to connect to a live person during business hours.
- There are no menus on voice mail applications.
- We have been providing copies of the policy to employees and expect everyone to comply with the prescriptions therein as well as the spirit of the policy.

The new South Paris office is now in full compliance with the policy.

Also, with some smaller office non-AT&T Systems, it may not be possible to forward the central answering points.

DEPARTMENT OF INLAND FISHERIES & WILDLIFE

The policy on the use of Automated Telephone Answering Equipment has been implemented and we are pleased to report that the vast majority of the Department is in full compliance with this policy. We recognize the limitations of voice mail and automated answering equipment and have attempted to achieve a balance between staffing limits and customer service.

There are some small regional offices and fish hatcheries where full compliance is not possible. In these offices, there is no office support staff and the employees headquartered there are field staff. In those locations, automated answering equipment serves a useful purpose.

We are proud of our efforts to serve the public and are note aware of any adverse reaction to our systems.

DEPARTMENT OF LABOR

All units are now in compliance with the policy.

DEPARTMENT OF MARINE RESOURCES

The Department of Marine Resources strives to provide professional and courteous service to our constituents and the general public. To meet that goal, we have taken measures to implement the requirements of LD 2176 and the new Policy on Automated Telephone Answering Equipment (requiring that a live operator answer incoming calls to state agency reception desks). The following steps have been taken to implement this policy:

The following reception lines at the Department are attended by a live operator during Department business hours, 8AM to 5PM, Monday through Friday:

- Hallowell Administrative Services office (624-6550)
- Bureau of Resource Management's West Boothbay Harbor facility (633-9500)

Callers to these lines are always asked first if they wish to be transferred to voice mail if the staff person is not available.

The Bureau of Marine Patrol has two field offices (West Boothbay Harbor and Lamoine) and one administrative office in Hallowell. The main phone lines for these offices are:

- Bureau of Marine Patrol Administrative Offices in Hallowell (624-6571)
- Bureau of Marine Patrol, Division 1 Headquarters in West Boothbay Harbor (633-9595)
- Bureau of Marine Patrol, Division 2 Headquarters in Lamoine (667-3373)

The Bureau does not maintain sufficient staff at these field offices to provide live telephone attendants but accommodations have been made to ensure that the public has immediate access to live staff via message which directs callers to contact their local state police office for assistance in an emergency. The offices in Hallowell and West Boothbay Harbor have '0' options on voice mail that direct callers to a live attendant.

The Department has informed all our employees of the new policy and LD 2176 both through staff meetings and by publishing in our newsletter and on our intranet web site. We invite you to review those at: <http://only.state.me.us/dmr/Intranet/Newsletters/March13-27.pdf>

We have informed all employees that they should regularly update voice mail messages and that they should always indicate the '0' option to callers.

To date, we have had no reaction from the public to this policy to report.

Please feel free to contact Gilbert Bilodeau, Director of Administrative Services if you have any questions or concerns with regard to this policy for the Department of Marine Resources.

DEPARTMENT OF MENTAL HEALTH, MENTAL RETARDATION & SUBSTANCE ABUSE SERVICES

The Department of Mental Health, Mental Retardation and Substance Abuse Services is in compliance with the new policy and has not experienced any problems in implementation.

DEPARTMENT OF PROFESSIONAL & FINANCIAL REGULATIONS

Recently all agencies within the Department of Professional and Financial Regulation assessed their compliance with the Policy on the Use of Automated Telephone Answering Equipment dated February 14, 2000. This report indicates our efforts that have been made to address the implementation of this policy in the following areas:

- There must always be a clearly stated "O" option on every published number and every number with voice mail. This option must be stated early in the recording.

RESULT: All agencies are in compliance with this guideline including every published number and every number with voice mail.

ACTION STEPS: Agencies have required the use of the "O" option on every published number and voice mail and have made changes where appropriate. The option is stated early in the recording.

- All "O" options must always go to a live person during business hours.

RESULT: All agencies are in compliance. There are, however, circumstances when an "O" option will transfer a caller first to a secretary or staff person before the call is routed to a receptionist.

ACTION STEPS: Agencies have required this option and are currently reminding staff of the policy.

- There will be no "layered" or "nested" menus for office applications.

RESULT: All agencies within the department are in compliance.

- Menus for office applications should normally be limited to four.

RESULT: All agencies are in compliance.

- There will be no voice mail on reception numbers during normal business hours.

RESULT: All agencies are in compliance.

- Voice Mail should be updated when out of the office to include the day(s) the employee will be out and an explanation that by pressing "O" the caller will reach a receptionist.

RESULT: All agencies are reminding employees that it is necessary to update these voice messages when appropriate.

- Individuals who are responsible for answering published numbers for their units should be responsible for:

Asking each caller if they would like to be transferred to voice mail when the person they are trying to reach is unavailable. No caller should be transferred to voice mail without being asked first.

Making sure the voice mail of co-workers who are unexpectedly out of the office for the day is handled appropriately.

Reminding all co-workers to leave a voice mail greeting which describes where they are and when they will return.

RESULT: All agencies are in compliance. A copy of this policy is being electronically transferred to all employees within the department.

CONCERNS: The caller need not know where the employee is but when they will return to the office. The person who answers the "O" option should be aware where the person is and how to reach them during their absence when appropriate.

COMMENTS: All agencies within the Department of Professional and Financial Regulation have reviewed the telephone coverage path list that was provided by the Bureau of Information Services. Adjustments have been made when any phone line was found to be out of compliance with this policy. The dissemination of the policy to all employees will remind employees that they are responsible for following these guidelines.

We have also shared the Policy with all boards affiliated with the Department and believe that they are making efforts to comply with the policy.

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY

The Department of Public Safety has implemented the new policy. It has been distributed to DPS employees.

The vast majority of telephones that fall under the legislation are in compliance and the few that are not will be addressed in the near future.

There are two phones with layered menus that will be revised: State Police Licensing - 624-8775 and Fire Marshal Licensing - 624-8744. There are also a number of employees who will need to be retrained on voice mail procedures to familiarize them with the system and how they can utilize voice mail to better serve the public and themselves.

Two common problems cited by employees about the new policy are:

1. In small offices and bureaus, there is commonly only one receptionist and if they are away from their desk, a voice mail is preferable to having the telephone ring with no answer or getting a busy signal. With voice mail, the caller at least has an option to leave a message vs. no one answering the telephone.
2. It is very common to transfer telephone calls to another extension, but it is nearly impossible to determine if that call will be answered direct or go to voice mail, because the person on that extension may already be on the phone.

We pride ourselves at Public Safety in serving the public and giving prompt answers to telephone calls. I am not aware of any adverse reaction by the public to our past phone procedures and we will work toward improving that service in the future.

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

The Department of Transportation is currently in compliance with the new policy on the use of Automated Telephone Answering Equipment. The policy has been circulated to all DOT employees and is published on the MDOT Intranet, General Policy.

All voice mail lines at the Department have been set up with a "0" option and employees have been instructed to clearly announce this in their outgoing voice mail messages. They also have been instructed to update the outgoing message if they will be out of the office for any period of time.

STATE PLANNING OFFICE

The State Planning Office is in full compliance with this policy.