



March 30th, 2017

Re: GM 19.5 Additional Incremental Ongoing Costs Associated with the Implementation of the Social Assistance Management System (SAMS)

CUPE Local 79 represents approximately 2000 frontline workers in Toronto Employment and Social Services. An extensive consultation process recently conducted with these workers shows that SAMS is having long-term impact on the Division's ability to provide services to our most vulnerable residents, and affecting the health, safety, and well-being of front-line workers.

We echo the staff report's conclusion that the Province's funding model must change to take into account added burdens due to SAMS, the increasing complexity of cases and increased costs due to inflationary pressures.

We respectfully recommend that the Committee:

- Adopt the staff recommendation to send letter to the Minister of Community and Social Services calling on the Province to work with municipalities to develop a new funding model that takes into consideration additional costs due to SAMS changes in caseload and inflation.
- Further request that City Council distribute this letter to all other Ontario municipalities delivering income support programs, asking that they adopt a motion supporting Toronto's request of the Province, or send a similar request.
- Direct staff to report directly to City Council on current client service levels as compared to pre-SAMS levels, and on any ongoing health safety, and wellness issues faced by workers due to SAMS and associated costs for the City.

The 201 budget introduced a 2.6 cut to TESS. Due to our concern about this cut and ongoing issues with SAMS, the Local launched an extensive consultation process with our members in TESS. Through workplace meetings and an online survey, we gathered feedback from over 500 front-line workers.

The attached report provides detailed findings of our consultation. There are three key findings:

- The vast majority of workers report that there are still challenges with SAMS that have not been addressed.
- SAMS has increased administrative workloads and many workers report reduced ability to properly serve clients.

- Many workers also report repetitive strain injuries brought on by the extensive amount of mouse clicking the system demands, as well as added stress due to constant glitches and slow-downs in SAMS and the complicated “work-arounds” needed to address them.

While the staff report before the Committee recognizes that there is an overall increased administrative burden due to SAMS it fails to detail the impacts of SAMS both on service levels and on the health safety, and wellness of workers – two issues that were highlighted in the Auditor General’s report on SAMS in 2016. It is important this information be brought to light when City Council discusses this issue. Therefore, we request that you direct staff to report on the current impact of SAMS on service levels, and the health, safety and wellness of workers, directly to City Council when it considers this item at its April meeting.

As TESS manages about a third of all of Ontario’s income support cases, Toronto has an opportunity to show great leadership in pushing for better funding for the Province’s income support programs. Indeed, challenges experienced in TESS due to SAMS, changing complexity in cases and inflationary pressures can have significant impacts on the overall system of income support. Certainly the City is not alone in facing these challenges.

The City has a duty to advocate for these issues to be addressed and stands a better chance of success by encouraging other municipalities to do the same. We ask that the City distribute its letter to the Minister of Community and Social Services to other municipal delivery agents and encourag their formal support of Toronto’s request.

For more information, please contact:

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March 30 2017



SAMS: still **CODE RED**

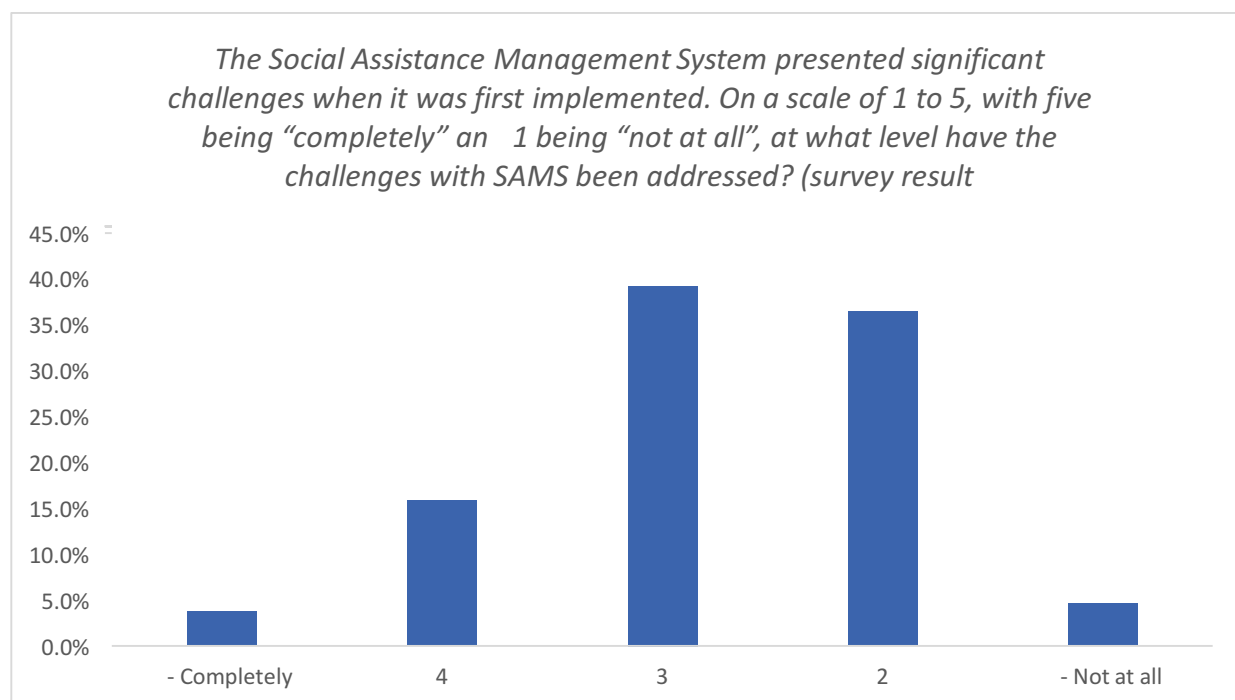
Findings from front-line workers at Toronto Employment and Social Services

In January 2017, CUPE Local 79 undertook an intensive consultation process with members working in frontline positions in TESS with respect to their ongoing experience with SAMS. This consultation was partially triggered by comments made by senior management during the 2017 budget process that problems with SAMS had been resolved and the system had stabilized. Anecdotal reports from members suggested otherwise, which led Local 79 to seek more feedback.

The Local collected feedback from 440 members through lunchtime meetings at thirteen different TESS offices. An online survey was used to collect thoughts from 147 TESS members who may not have been able to attend the workplace discussions. The feedback we received was very consistent across the face-to-face meetings and the survey.

The vast majority of front-line workers in TESS report that while SAMS has improved since it was introduced, there are still challenges that need to be addressed (Figure 1). The issues workers continue to face due to SAMS have wide-ranging impacts in the workplace, for the division, and for the clients we serve.

(Figure 1)



Increased workloads, reduced client service

Over half of those we drew feedback from said that SAMS remains a time consuming and administratively inefficient system that has led to increased workloads which haven't been fully addressed. In many cases, workers spoke to the direct impact this has on client services.

"SAMS increases the amount of administrative work and reduces in many cases the amount of discretion available to workers. In doing so, it means less time can be spent with clients service planning, and workers are less able to make decisions in the interest of their clients."

"SAMS has caused me to get behind in my work since it takes so much longer to do everything. Without a reduction in caseload size, it is impossible to maintain the caseload as well as you did before SAMS."

"It remains a very time consuming, error ridden and bulky system. It does not allow me to spend enough quality time service planning with Clients as the vast majority of my time is devoted to data entry."

Workers' comments are consistent with service level impacts reported by TESS and the Auditor General. In 2016, the Auditor General highlighted severe service impacts due to TESS during its first year of use (2015):

- Time spent to complete new applications grew from 15 minutes pre-SAMS to 45 minutes after SAMS. Re-applications increased even more from 18 minutes pre-SAMS to 70 minutes post-SAMS.
- Average phone wait-times for OW clients to reach a live staff person quadrupled at the TESS Application Centre from 3 to 12 minutes.
- The number of service plans completed pre-SAMS went from 18,000 in 2014 (pre-SAMS) to only 11,000 in 2015 in the first year of SAMS.
- The number of referrals to jobs/employment programs dropped 29% during 2015.

A recent report by staff shows that some improvements have been made. For example, referrals to jobs and employment programs has gone back up close to pre-SAMS levels, and the number of service plans completed per month is starting to improve. However, there is no comprehensive analysis available to show whether standards across all client service metrics are improving and at what rate. In many cases we don't know how far we've come, or how much further we need to go, to provide clients with the same level of service they experienced pre-SAMS.

Impacts on workers' health safety, and well-being

Another major area of concern for workers are health impacts brought on by using SAMS. The most common impact reported is strain due to a dramatic increase in use of a mouse to click on and fill in various forms.

“System is not user friendly and too much clicking is causing carpal tunnel. Workers complain of neck, wrist/arm strain. Every worker I know experiences health issues due to the computer system.”

“I am now using more of my health benefits to relieve the muscle strain I develop from sitting so long at my desk/interview room; I require progressive lenses because the text is so light coloured and small on the screen.”

Many also comment that increasing workloads and daily frustrations triggered by SAMS is leading to higher levels of stress at work.

The 2016 Auditor General's report on SAMS reported alarming health repercussions of SAMS. In 2015, there were 150 new WSIB claims directly attributable to SAMS. During SAMS implementation (Nov. 12 2014 – Dec. 5 2015) employee absenteeism showed a 48% increase in sick days. Since implementation, overall unplanned absences have risen by 29%.

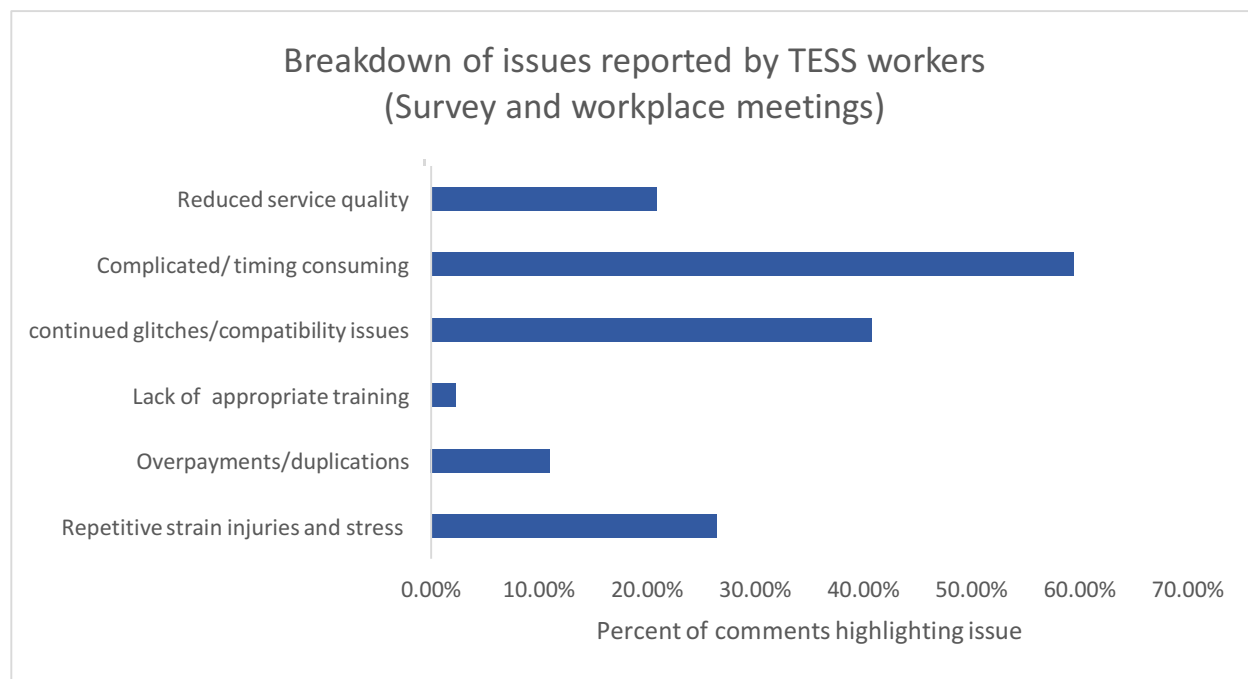
The findings from our consultation with workers show that health and well-being in the workplace is still a major issue that may be leading to increased WSIB claims and absenteeism. These costs, both to the workers' wellbeing and the City's finances, are not reflected in recent reports from the division regarding ongoing issues with SAMS.

Continual errors and glitches

Although glitches and errors with the system are being solved more quickly due to the additional staff that work to trouble-shoot problems, they still occur regularly and impact both workload and client service. For example, the system still causes significant problems for workers using the Dragon voice recognition system to input data. Others have difficulties accessing the appropriate education, health and social supports for their clients. Some report that overpayments are still an issue.

Many workers have reported that SAMS is incompatible with other systems they are using, causing further errors and frustration. These incompatibility issues are often not resolved. Instead complicated work-arounds are put in place to mitigate them, adding to the workload.

(Figure 2)



System's overall incompatibility with the service

Embedded throughout workers' feedback is a constant refrain that SAMS is a barrier to effective service delivery. Even with all the efforts to fix issues with "work-arounds", workers are still left with a system that hinders their work more than helps it.

"After having further training I feel much more comfortable with the system. Having said that, the system still creates errors that I'm unsure of what I may have done. All I keep saying is, how much did this piece of crap cost? "

"I find SAMS to be extremely difficult to maneuver, the entire system does not make sense. You are going in circles wasting valuable time for you and the client when servicing clients. The system is not effective and in fact has caused so many issues, and unnecessary errors, delays in service. I cannot believe this is the program we have been waiting for. I had very high hopes thinking that SAMS would help me do my job better."

Conclusion

When the 2017 budget introduced a 2.6% cut to TESS, CUPE Local 79 became deeply concerned about the impacts of such a cut when issues with SAMS remain. Our extensive consultation process with our members in TESS shows that challenges brought on by SAMS have not been overcome and continue to impact client service levels as well as the health, safety and wellbeing of front-line workers. The added administrative burden of SAMS matched with

increasing complexity in the cases managed in TESS mean that it takes more resources to manage and complete cases that it did a few years ago. The City and the Province must work together to improve the support provided to clients and to the case workers who help them navigate the support system and create a path back to well-being and independence. Sober thought must be given to whether SAMS ultimately helps or hinders that objective.