

tgarr2009

FEATURED: Special Reports 9/11 anniversary State salaries Archives

SEARCH



ADVERTISEMENT

Advocates: TennCare call-in process for aid program isn't fair

Advocates say need for speed is unfair

4:12 AM, Sep. 14, 2011 | 8 Comments

Recommend

Be the first of your friends to recommend this.

Recommend

0

0

A A

SEE OUR WEEKLY DEALS



Written by Tom Wilemon | The Tennessean

The competitive dialing system for TennCare Standard Spend Down unfairly pits the disabled against people with faster fingers and quicker minds, advocates say.

FILED UNDER

News School News

The 2,500 slots for applications were all filled within an hour and a half after the call-in began Monday evening — a process made even more confusing because of a technical glitch that kept any calls from getting answered for 20 of those minutes.

Advocates believe the state's cumbersome application process for the [health](#) insurance violates the Americans with Disabilities Act.

"Did it not occur to anyone that making it like the Oklahoma Land Rush isn't fair?" said Michele Johnson, managing attorney for the

ADS BY PULSE 360

AdChoices

Nashville: Dermatologists Hate Her

Local Mom Exposes an Anti-Aging Miracle. Her \$5 Trick ERASES Wrinkles!
ConsumerProductsDigest.com

Nashville: 53 yr Old Mom Looks 30

\$5 Wrinkle Cream EVERYBODY Is Using. Find Out Why Millions Look 25!
www.consumerlifestyledeals.com

Nashville: Mom Makes Botox Doctors Furious

Mom Reveals Clever \$4 Wrinkle Therapy That Makes BOTOX Doctors Furious
TheHigherLifestyle.com

Tennessee Justice Center, an advocacy organization for the state's vulnerable populations.

The call-in actually increases accessibility for the disabled, said Susan Sizemore, director of communications for the Tennessee Department of Human Services, which handles the applications.

People in wheelchairs or with other mobility issues don't have to leave their homes to vie for an application. Sizemore also pointed out that the state had a TTY system — a special text telephone for the

deaf and speech-impaired — in place to take their calls.

But the woman who heads the Tennessee Disability Coalition says the call-in does not make the program more accessible.



ADVERTISEMENT

MORE HEADLINES

- TennCare call-in line expects flood of calls seeking help with medical bills
- Employers tell workers to get healthy or pay up
- TSU to host diet and nutrition workshop

MOST POPULAR

- PETA: ILVTOFU plate request misinterpreted by TN
- Hunters, farmers needed to save bobwhite quail
- Newborn twins found dead in Hendersonville
- Tennessee Titans go on guard against cheap shots
- Gibson CEO to face feds



Caught You Cute at Nordstrom Gala



A Night at Nordstrom



Nordstrom Gala

MOST COMMENTED

Work on Murfreesboro mosque delayed

"I think there is an argument to be made that they have not been open to reasonable accommodation," said Executive Director Carol Westlake. "Essentially, what the ADA says is that states have to make reasonable modifications to their policies and procedures in order not to discriminate against people with disabilities."

Westlake, who is in Atlanta this week for a meeting with Medicaid officials, said she plans to bring up the fairness issue. Standard Spend Down is intended to help low-income people with high unpaid medical bills who are elderly, blind, disabled or the caretaker relative of a Medicaid-eligible [child](#). The state sets limits on how people can apply because DHS does not have the manpower to process a larger number of applications while complying with timeliness requirements.

Westlake said her organization has complained to state officials, but "it essentially fell on deaf ears."

Johnson noted that there are many types of disabilities, ranging from mental issues to rheumatoid arthritis, that can put someone at a disadvantage.

"If you have one of those disabilities, without help, you would have been locked out of the program," Johnson said. "That's what the ADA is about — giving people a fair shot."

Dan Ramey, a social worker, volunteered his time to help a woman blind from a stroke do her competitive dialing. They got through about 10 minutes after the state began taking calls. She's now on the list for an application.

"It's more restrictive and more cumbersome with whatever disability or medical problem that you've got," Ramey said.

One year after Spend Down was set up, only 935 people have gained admittance into the program even though it is supposed to cover up to 7,000. The state has opened enrollment three times with the evening call-ins. The 2,500-applicant limit was reached in about an hour with the two previous call-ins.

This time it lasted longer, but that was probably because of the glitch.

Tony Garr, policy director of the Tennessee [Health Care](#) Campaign, who called in for a client, said he got a recording at 6:29 p.m. saying the call-in period had closed. Subsequent messages said all circuits were busy. He kept trying until he got the client signed up at 7:17 p.m., minutes before the limit was reached.

"Due to a technical issue with a long-distance phone carrier, the phone lines during the Standard Spend Down were not operating between 6:25 p.m. to 6:45 p.m. when callers either heard an on-hold message or a busy signal," Sizemore said. "The situation was quickly remedied and by 7:30 p.m. all 2,500 calls had been taken."

Cash-strapped adults hunker down, bunk up	88
David Climer: Practice can cure Chris Johnson's ills	68
Rent hike distresses vendors at TN fairgrounds' sites	58
Opposition to photo ID bill speaks to Democrats' appeal	39

ADVERTISEMENT

The program receives its [funding](#) from seed money raised by Tennessee hospitals, which pay an “enhanced coverage fee” so the state can receive two-to-one matching federal funding. The self-imposed fee covers a variety of TennCare programs.

Craig Becker, president of the Tennessee Hospital Association, said Standard Spend Down [accounts](#) for a small portion of the funding.

Hospitals wanted to support the program to lessen the burden of uninsured people going to emergency rooms for care.

Said Becker: “We would like to see 7,000 covered.”

Contact Tom Wilemon at twilemon@tennessean.com or 615-726-5961.

Recommend

0

0

View Comments (8) | Share your thoughts »

TOP VIDEO PICKS

selected by Taboola

Congressman: TSA Is A Failure

Sep 13, 2011

Driver stabbed after hitting and killing a 2 ye...

Jul 19, 2011

Federal grant will keep clinic for homeless ope...

Sep 13, 2011

YOU MIGHT BE INTERESTED IN

[Fair would have owed Sugarland thousands](#) (The Tennessean)

[2 Nashville-area hospital chains to merge](#) (The Tennessean)

[Summit High delights fans on first-ever football play](#) (The Tennessean)

[Memphis father and son drown on fishing trip](#) (The Tennessean)

[2 TN women accused of stealing Arby's lobby art](#) (The Tennessean)

SPONSORED LINKS

[As Jada & Will Smith Split I Wonder: Does Marriage Work?](#) (StyleCaster)

[How to Keep Bread from Molding](#) (Quick Dish)

[Taylor Swift's New Home Is the Historic Northumberland Estate in Nashville](#) (CasaSugar)

[Is Irish an Endangered Language?](#) (Rosetta Stone Blog)

[Kenneth Marsh Tried the Old 'My Other Personality Did It' Defense](#) (Daily Intelligencer)

[?]

[Motorized Wheel Chair](#)

9/10 People Pay Little Or Nothing For a Motorized Wheel Chair!
www.Hoveround.com/Wheelchairs

AdChoices

ARCHIVES

View the last seven days

Yesterday, Sep. 14

Tuesday, Sep. 13

Monday, Sep. 12

Sunday, Sep. 11

Saturday, Sep. 10

Friday, Sep. 09

EVENT CALENDAR

September

15

Amish, Hippies, Wine & Diners!

September

16

Step Back in Time Festival

DATA



Today's Traffic Incidents

MOST POPULAR

1. PETA: ILVTOFU plate request misinterpreted by TN
2. Hunters, farmers needed to save bobwhite quail
3. Newborn twins found dead in Hendersonville
4. Tennessee Titans go on guard against cheap shots

Thursday, Sep. 08

See our [paid archives](#) for news older than a week.

September

Chicago

17

Search » ALL EVENTS

[Crime Map](#)
[Property Transfers](#)
More data

- 5. [Gibson CEO to face feds](#)
- 6. [Spring Hill GM site hopes for new vehicle](#)
- 7. [Thursday's crime log](#)

ADVERTISEMENT

[Site Map](#) | [Back to Top](#)

NEWS

- [Crime & Courts](#)
- [Government & Politics](#)
- [Politics Blog](#)
- [Local Data](#)
- [Faith & Values](#)
- [Education](#)
- [State News](#)
- [Nation & World](#)
- [Special Reports](#)
- [Today's Traffic](#)

OPINION

- [Editorials](#)
- [Letters to the Editor](#)
- [Live Chats](#)
- [Forums](#)
- [Nashville Bloggers](#)

COMMUNITIES

- [Davidson](#)
- [Williamson](#)
- [Ashland City](#)
- [Dickson](#)
- [Robertson](#)
- [Rutherford](#)
- [Sumner](#)
- [Wilson](#)

ENTERTAINMENT

- [Event Calendar](#)
- [Music](#)
- [Restaurants & Dining](#)
- [Metromix](#)
- [Arts & Culture](#)
- [Crossword](#)
- [Sudoku](#)

SPORTS

- [Titans](#)
- [Predators](#)
- [UT](#)
- [Vanderbilt](#)
- [MTSU](#)
- [Colleges](#)
- [High Schools](#)
- [Baseball](#)
- [Motorsports](#)
- [Sports News](#)

OBITUARIES

- [Search Obituaries](#)

BUSINESS

- [Auto Industry](#)
- [Music Industry](#)
- [Real Estate](#)
- [Property Transfers](#)
- [Health Care](#)
- [Stocks](#)
- [Technology](#)

LIFE

- [Ms. Cheap](#)
- [Shopping Diva](#)
- [Society](#)
- [Nashville Lifestyles](#)
- [Moms Like Me](#)
- [Travel](#)
- [Home & Garden](#)
- [Health & Fitness](#)
- [Food & Wine](#)

HELP

- [Customer Services](#)
- [Feedback](#)
- [Staff Directory](#)
- [Place an Ad](#)
- [Submit a Letter](#)
- [Work for us](#)
- [Archives](#)
- [Buy a photo](#)

FOLLOW US

- [Twitter](#)
- [Facebook](#)
- [Mobile](#)
- [RSS](#)
- [E-mail Alerts](#)
- [Text Alerts](#)

[News](#) | [Jobs](#) | [Cars for Sale](#) | [Homes for Sale](#) | [Apartments for Rent](#) | [Real Estate](#) | [Shopping](#) | [Mom Groups](#)

GANNETT

Copyright © 2011 www.tennessean.com. All rights reserved.

Users of this site agree to the [Terms of Service](#), [Privacy Notice/Your California Privacy Rights](#), and [Ad Choices](#)

ADVERTISEMENT