
**Annual Report on
Reemployment Assistance Claims and Benefits Information System Modernization**

Pursuant to Section 443.1113 of the Florida Statutes.



October 2023

Table of Contents

Executive Summary.....	3
Introduction	4
Reemployment Assistance Modernization Program Overview	5
Funding	6
Florida Legislature.....	6
Federal Grants.....	6
Access Grant.....	6
Integrity Grant.....	7
The Reemployment Assistance Claims & Benefits Information System.....	8
Accomplishments in Fiscal Years 2021-22 and 2022-23	11
Increased Efficiency, Functionality, and Agility	11
Expanded Fraud Protection	12
Maintenance and Operations	13
A Three Year Outlook: Continuous Modernization.....	13
Fiscal Year 2023-24	14
Enhancing the Adjudication Case Management System	14
Enhancing the Appeals Case Management System	15
Continuing the Plain Language Effort	15
Fiscal Year 2024-25	16
Upgrading the Digital ID Verification Solution.....	16
Upgrading the Fraud Initiative Rules and Ratings Engine Technology	16
Improving the Overpayment Repayment Process.....	17
Implementing an Investigation Case Management System	17
Fiscal Year 2025-26	18
Fully Integrating SIDES Exchange	18
Reducing Technical Debt.....	18
Continuing the Archive and Purge Project.....	19
Continuing the Reports Project.....	20
Closing.....	20

Executive Summary

During the 2021 Legislative Session, Governor DeSantis and the Florida Legislature directed and provided funding for the Florida Department of Commerce (FloridaCommerce) to undertake a sustainable, continuous modernization effort of the Reemployment Assistance Claims and Benefits Information System. Pursuant to [section 443.1113\(5\), Florida Statutes](#), FloridaCommerce implemented immediate action to improve system performance and functionality which established an integrated, modular, cloud-based system that is secure, scalable, and sustainable. As of July 2023, the two-year modernization effort was closed out with the successful completion of 16 projects. These projects laid the foundation for continuous modernization and operations and maintenance.

This report highlights the accomplishments during the two-year modernization effort and includes a high-level plan of continuous modernization projects scheduled over the next three years. Through FloridaCommerce's modernization efforts, the system has increased efficiency, functionality, and agility and expanded fraud protection. To continue providing for an improved user experience, and the delivery of timely and accurate benefits, sustained investment is a necessity. In addition to funding provided by the Florida Legislature, FloridaCommerce continues to take advantage of the funding opportunities available through United States Department of Labor and other partners. Funding received through grant opportunities serve as supplemental funding to meet the remaining resource needs for continuous modernization projects disclosed under "A Three-Year Outlook: Continuous Modernization."

Additional updates outside of this report, are available at www.FloridaJobs.org/RAModernization.

Introduction

Pursuant to [section 443.1113, Florida Statutes](#), this report serves to update the Governor, the President of the Senate, and the Speaker of the House of Representatives on the following objectives:

- A summary of the maintenance, enhancement, and modernization efforts that have taken place over the last fiscal year (FY); and
- A 3-year outlook of recommended enhancements or modernization efforts, along with projected costs and timeframes for completion.

For monthly and quarterly updates about the Reemployment Assistance Modernization Program, please visit www.FloridaJobs.org/RAModernization.

Although the enhanced front-end customer and user experience is still being developed at the time of this report, this report and the following graphic is representation of the substantial amount of work that has been completed in two years to implement modern technology that provides a solid foundation for continuous modernization and secure and convenient access to Reemployment Assistance services.

Closed Projects			
<p>Cloud Migration</p> <p>Provides access to Reemployment Assistance 24-hours a day, seven days a week</p>	<p>Cloud Application Performance Management</p> <p>Monitors System performance and prevents System downtime.</p>	<p>System Development Life Cycle – Development Operations</p> <p>Improves the documentation needed to achieve goals for the Reemployment Assistance Program to improve service delivery.</p>	<p>Archival and Purge</p> <p>Updated the policies that govern the data retention to reduce the amount of stored data and improve System performance</p>
<p>Systems-Oriented Architecture and Application Programming Interface Layer</p> <p>Created a barrier of protection between the System and its various components, promoting faster restructuring and efficient System performance.</p>	<p>Business Rules Engine</p> <p>Hosts the business rules that govern how the Reemployment Assistance claims are processed in a separate, more manageable environment.</p>	<p>Reemployment Assistance Help Center</p> <p>Provides an interactive interface of self-service opportunities for individuals reporting fraud or identity theft, claimants, employers, and third-party administrators.</p>	<p>.NET and Object Relational Mapping Upgrade</p> <p>Upgraded the infrastructure–framework and software– to support continuous improvement.</p>
<p>Independent Verification and Validation</p> <p>Serves as an independent third-party consultant to provide objective and proactive risk identification and assessment.</p>	<p>Business Process Optimization</p> <p>Identified, cataloged, and reengineered business processes and requirements to improve the user experience.</p>	<p>Data Warehouse</p> <p>Enhanced System performance by establishing a separate infrastructure environment to store and report data.</p>	<p>Identity Management and User Authentication</p> <p>Updated the applicable policies while also enhancing the front end user authentication to ensure System access matches</p>

Reemployment Assistance Modernization Program Overview

In collaboration with its partners, FloridaCommerce assists the Governor in advancing Florida’s economy by championing the state’s economic development vision and by administering state and federal programs and initiatives to help visitors, citizens, businesses, and communities. In support of this mission and vision, FloridaCommerce maintains the Reconnect system, which serves as the central repository to file, track, view, and process Reemployment Assistance claims. Reconnect functions as the core benefits administration platform for FloridaCommerce staff, claimants, employers, and Third-Party Administrators (TPA). Reconnect provides online access to apply for benefits, view, and track claims, set up payment information, respond to fact-finding requests, and protest and appeal eligibility determinations. For employers, Reconnect allows access to respond to and protest inquiries regarding claimants receiving Reemployment Assistance benefits. Additionally, Reconnect allows employers to grant TPAs access to perform specific administrative functions.

In response to the impact on Reconnect throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, FloridaCommerce partnered with a third-party contractor to perform a study, including an assessment of the Reemployment Assistance Benefits Information System built in 2013, actions taken to stabilize the performance of Reconnect in 2020 and to compare solution options to enable immediate usability improvements and a sustainable continuous modernization path. On February 26, 2021, the [Final Report for Improved Delivery of Reemployment Assistance Benefits](#) (“Final Report”) was published, and included a recommended approach and implementation roadmap for future modernization efforts. The recommendations divide modernization initiatives into realistic, viable, and achievable projects and includes the acquisition of third-party services to support the efforts and initiatives referred to as the Reemployment Assistance Modernization Program (“Modernization Program”). The goals of the Modernization Program are to:

1. Implement immediate System performance and functional improvement needs while providing a secure, scalable, and sustainable system architecture and agile support processes.
2. Have a system that is efficient, scalable, and reliable when providing benefits to protect workers who lose their jobs through no fault of their own.
3. Achieve Reemployment Assistance national prominence, as measured through the federal core measures, program integrity measures, and Secretary standards required by the U.S. Department of Labor.
4. Improve access and reach in the delivery of Reemployment Assistance benefits.
5. Sharpen the Reemployment Assistance program’s focus on outcomes and accountability.
6. Promote self-sufficiency for Floridians.
7. Have a system that can rapidly and efficiently respond to changes in law and economic conditions.
8. Reduce cyber security risk and potential for fraud.
9. Improve information flow with claimants, employers, and TPAs to expedite decision-making.
10. Improve Reemployment Assistance program quality, accountability, performance, and integrity.
11. Leverage new technologies to improve claimants’, employers’, and TPAs’ overall experience with the Reemployment Assistance program, including reducing the amount of time it takes to file a claim for benefits.
12. Improve efficiencies and effectiveness in managing claim workload and being better equipped to handle unexpected spikes in the number of claims that may result from emergencies, disasters, or economic factors.

13. Eliminate manual, error-prone, and labor-intensive processes.
14. Enhance system usability including accessibility.
15. Reduce maintenance and support time and costs.
16. Incorporate technical standards (e.g., software development standards, database standards, and interface standards) and modern technologies.
17. Seamlessly integrate with other internal/external IT assets.
18. Modernize real time and batch interfaces, which include but are not limited to Employ Florida (WITS), SSA, IRS, NDNH, SIDES, SAVE, ICON, FDHSMV, and all other systems exchanging data with the Reemployment Assistance program.

In September 2020, FloridaCommerce requested historic funding and partnered with the Florida Legislature to support the needs of Floridians across the state. As a result of these efforts, [House Bill 1463](#) (HB 1463) was enacted, prompting FloridaCommerce to launch the Modernization Program in July 2021. FloridaCommerce has since made significant strides to deliver a Reemployment Assistance System that is sustainable, scalable, and secure.

Funding

Florida Legislature

As a result of HB 1463, FloridaCommerce was appropriated approximately \$92.4 million in General Revenue Funds for the FY 2021-22 and FY 2022-23 modernization and continued maintenance of the Reemployment Assistance Claims and Benefits Information System that complies with section 282.206, Florida Statutes. Of these funds, approximately \$19.3 million has been allocated for increased maintenance and operations of the system, \$71.9 million was provided for system modernization, and approximately \$1.17 million was allocated to competitively procure a provider with experience in conducting Independent Verification and Validation (IV&V) services of information technology to provide comprehensive review, analysis, and testing to confirm that each projects' requirements are correctly defined, and to confirm that each project is correctly implemented and functioning as part of the larger system.

Federal Grants

Access Grant

In August 2021, the United States Department of Labor (USDOL) announced a grant opportunity for promoting access to unemployment compensation (UC) programs. FloridaCommerce was awarded an \$8.4 million grant to fund projects designed to break down barriers to UC services. Potential barriers to be addressed specifically include those related to language proficiency, literacy, geographic location, and other barriers.

FloridaCommerce committed to improving the user experience through a complete transformation of all content. The ongoing transformation includes a transition to plain language for all UC applications (Reemployment Assistance, Disaster Unemployment Assistance (DUA), Extended Benefits, etc.), correspondence, determinations, web systems, websites, handbooks, guides, videos, etc., and translation of plain language materials and appeal decisions to Spanish and Haitian-Creole.

The events of 2020 highlighted the importance of UC in assisting unemployed Floridians, their families, and the broader economy. The goals for drafting the content in plain language and translating the materials has been to:

- Provide meaningful access to Reemployment Assistance for individuals with barriers such as limited education, limited English proficiency, and lower-income groups.
- Improve the public's understanding of the Reemployment Assistance Program's communications.
- Reduce the need for the public to call Customer Contact Center for clarification and, in turn, reducing the call wait time for individuals seeking assistance with other issues.
- Improve the public's understanding of program requirements and thereby increase the number of individuals who are in compliance with the requirements.
- Address the determination issued by the Civil Rights Center (CRC), stating that Florida must translate UC information to the top two languages in the state, other than English. The CRC determined those languages to be Spanish and Haitian-Creole. This population has previously been identified as underserved by a federal government agency, thus Florida utilized this finding and project to remedy the problem to the underserved population.

FloridaCommerce will continue to take advantage of opportunities to expand outreach, improve technology, provide translation services, address staffing concerns, and meet the needs of the communities served.

Integrity Grant

In July 2023, USDOL announced a grant opportunity that deploys modernization funds to strengthen program integrity and resiliency, as well as an opportunity for states to participate in a National ID Verification Offering for both online and in-person ID verification services, under the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA). At the time of this report, FloridaCommerce has received preliminary approval for its application for funding through the Integrity Grant opportunity.

The Integrity Grant would provide FloridaCommerce with \$3,479,750 for further investments in antifraud strategies like ID verification, data analytics, and cross-matching. More information on the following projects is available starting on page 15:

- Employing a qualified contractor that has a fully functional, deployed Software as a Service (SaaS) and Commercial off the shelf (COTS) statewide Identity Verification Solution or an innovative solution which uses a combination of services or products that meets the business requirements.
- Upgrading the Fraud Initiative Rules and Rating Engine (FIRRE) to address new technological and business requirements.
- Implementing a Case Management Software solution to help manage workloads and digital information related to fraud investigations.

Table 1: The following table is the estimated cost breakdown of the projects identified to improve fraud prevention and prosecute bad actors who commit Reemployment Assistance fraud.

Estimated Cost Breakdown	
Project	Estimated Cost
Digital ID Verification Solution	\$1,400,000
Digital ID Verification Solution Implementation	\$300,000
FIRRE Technology	\$1,290,000
Fraud Case Management Solution	\$489,750
Total	\$3,479,750

The Reemployment Assistance Claims & Benefits Information System

The Modernization Program was comprised of several projects grouped into the following categories: infrastructure, software, data and analytics, and security. These initiatives addressed the immediate need to improve performance and usability of Reconnect, while also establishing the architectural framework and processes necessary to implement future business operations and technological changes efficiently and effectively. The following details summarize each of the projects that were included for the Modernization Program:

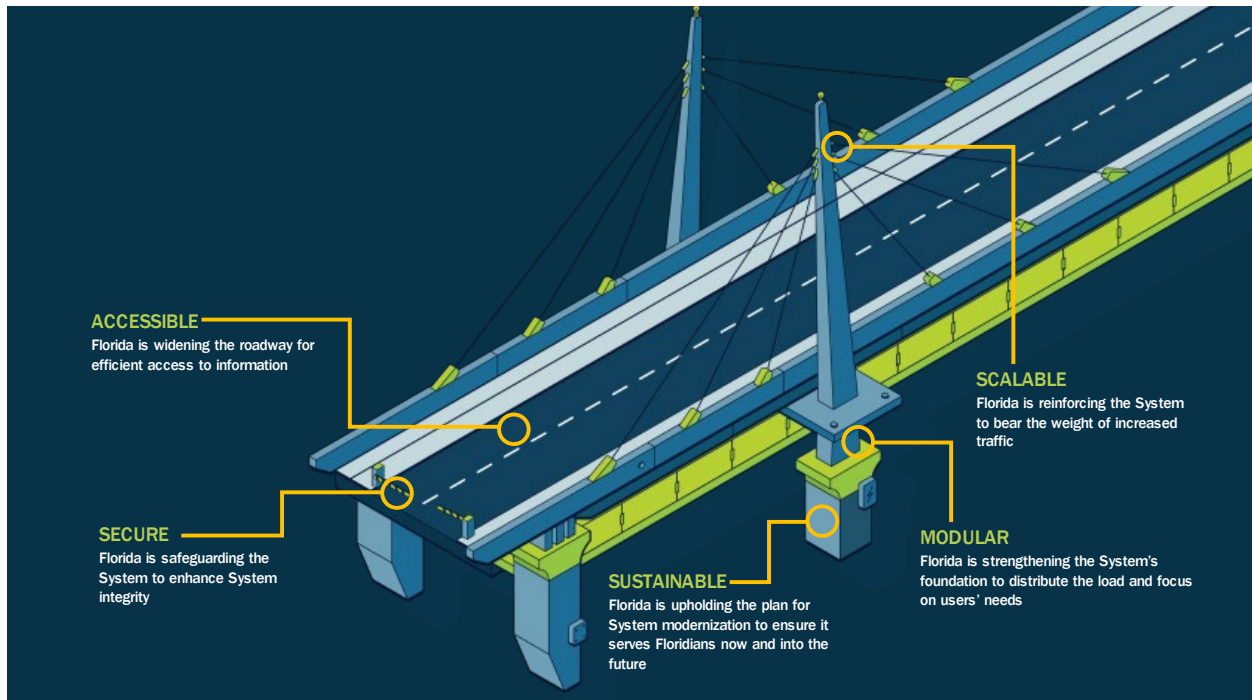
- Infrastructure
 - Cloud Migration: Complete planning for remaining migration readiness activities, and migration of Reconnect’s infrastructure from the State Data Center and disaster recovery sites to a cloud service provider using an Infrastructure as a Service hosting model.
 - Cloud Application Performance Management: Provide application performance management, including functionality like root cause analysis, custom dashboards showing key performance indicators to communicate performance at-a-glance, and system monitoring with clearly defined thresholds for remedial action and definitions of remedial actions.
- Software
 - Cloud Contact Center as a Service: Replace or migrate the current Reemployment Assistance Contact Center solution with a cloud-based contact center solution. The new system should be able to replace the current phone system and Interactive Voice Response (IVR) system. This project was previously included in the Cloud Migration project.
 - System Development Life Cycle – Development Operations: Ensure the completeness and correctness of the application design documentation, related artifacts, and dataflow diagrams for Reconnect and ensure that a process is in place that aligns Reconnect’s functionality with business requirements, including secure development best practices.
 - .NET and Object Relational Mapping Upgrade: Establish a solid architectural basis in support of continuous system modernization by upgrading Reconnect’s application to the latest version of the .NET Framework and defining a new architecture based on .NET Core and upgrade the Object Relational Mapping software to the most current version.
 - Systems-Oriented Architecture and Application Programming Interface Layer: Establish a solid architectural basis in support of the continuous modernization by defining a new architecture based on .NET Core, Web application programming interface (API)

framework, and a service-oriented architecture for the modernized Reconnect application.

- Rules Engine: Establish business rules into a user-visible and user-maintainable business rules engine. This will allow both maintaining business rules and developing new business rules without requiring code changes and subsequent deployments.
 - Business Process Optimization: Identify, assess, analyze, and redesign Reemployment Assistance business processes, and develop business and technical functional and non-functional requirements into a customer-centric business framework that leverages improvements and supporting technologies to deliver world-class customer service.
 - Incremental Customer Experience (CX)/User Experience (UX) Mobile-Responsive Software Transformation: Establish an agile and incremental solution to ensure that business process optimization is incorporated into the customer and user experience transformation activities for each of the functional modules within the scope of the CX/UX project.
 - Systems and Software Integration Procurement: Procure the contractual services of a third-party System and Software Integration services provider with experience in strategic planning, design, development, and integration for large multi-component system modernization efforts.
 - Strategic Planning Office: Enables FloridaCommerce to maintain focus and direction across all projects within the program. Serves as a single point of contact for budget, scope, and status reporting.
 - Independent Verification and Validation Procurement: Procure the contractual services of a third-party consulting firm with experience in conducting Independent Verification and Validation assessments to provide these services for the Program and the CX/UX Mobile-Responsive Transformation project.
 - Reemployment Assistance Help Center: Includes the development of a front-end website that is a one-stop site for citizens/claimants to find answers to commonly asked questions and to enable easy navigation through all Reemployment Assistance processes and related documentation.
- **Data and Analytics**
 - Data Warehouse: Establish a cloud-hosted data warehouse designed for reporting purposes. The warehouse will establish a single source of truth for customers, be independent of batch cycles, and maintain historical transactions.
 - Reporting Project: Rewrite all in-scope system reports and write any additional reports, as requested, using the existing data warehouse as a source of reporting data.
 - Archival and Purge Project: Establish a process and execute archival and purge of data in both the production database and file store.
 - Master Data Management and Interoperability Project: Create a data catalog and data dictionary to enable standardization of data elements and interoperability across business units and other Departments per Florida Digital Service and section 282.206, Florida Statutes, requirements.

- Security
 - Security Architecture Review Services Project: Application security architecture services will ensure the application, underlying platform, and associated operations and development processes meet modern application security standards. Incorporating appropriate security controls from early in the application and system development lifecycle ensures security is inherent to the application and avoids incurring significant risk to users and prevents major costs from rework needed to meet security and compliance needs later.
 - Identity Management and Access Control Project: Acquire and integrate an identity and access management control service for utilization by all Reconnect users. This project includes the updating of identity management policies and procedures as well as any necessary migration of existing user accounts and roles to the new service.
 - Security Architecture Audit Services Project: Perform a technical audit consisting of a system, platform, application, and network hardening review, including a penetration testing engagement with scope involving, at a minimum, all application user and administrative interfaces, a sampling of all application environments and tiers, critical application infrastructure, access management platform, and staff resources.

The following image is a visual representation of how, through modernization, redesign of the Reemployment Assistance system will improve the delivery of Reemployment Assistance benefits.



Accomplishments in Fiscal Years 2021-22 and 2022-23

Under the leadership of Governor Ron DeSantis, FloridaCommerce implemented an aggressive modernization schedule where 16 of the projects mentioned above have been completed and several key milestones have been met to improve the user experience as detailed below.

Increased Efficiency, Functionality, and Agility

- In the last two years, the Robotic Processing Automation (RPA) has resulted in more than \$15 million in cost savings for FloridaCommerce. RPAs replace manual processes, creating efficiencies that allow staff to focus more complex activities and tasks that cannot be completed by an automation process. FloridaCommerce is currently operating 13 RPAs consistently; however, there are 31 other RPAs currently being maintained for use as needed. The main 13 RPAs average \$49,430 in cost savings per process, per month, with an overall cost savings of \$642,590 per month.
- FloridaCommerce increased system availability for all users during periods of high demand by transitioning Reconnect from the State Data Center and Winter Haven disaster recovery sites to a cloud-hosted environment, including files, databases, applications, and environment infrastructure. The migration to the cloud has helped resolve defects related to system load capacity and batch processing and employed several other technologies that support the Reemployment Assistance program to also transfer to the cloud, including the Digital Appeals Recording Solution (DARS), Visual IVR, and ChatBot.
- Migrating DARS into a cloud-based environment allows FloridaCommerce to record appeals hearings and provide transparency to all parties involved in an appeal. Recording appeals hearings provides due process to employers, TPAs, and claimants who have filed an appeal on a Reemployment Assistance claim.
- The Visual IVR was also deployed to the cloud-based environment to enhance FloridaCommerce's existing Customer Call Center technology and provide additional self-service options for claimants.
- With the creation of the Data Warehouse, FloridaCommerce migrated Reconnect reports to develop and validate 39 federally mandated Reemployment Assistance reports, supporting the accurate and timely submission of information about Florida's Reemployment Assistance Program. The data warehouse improves the accuracy of federally mandated Reemployment Assistance reports and improves Reconnect's overall performance for claimants by reducing its demand.
- FloridaCommerce promoted Reconnect's efficiency by creating a layer that serves as the messenger for all data exchanges between Reconnect's components through the Systems-Oriented Architecture & Application Programming Interface Layer project. The new layer helps reduce demand on Reconnect and maintains its performance for claimants.
- FloridaCommerce finalized the System Development Life Cycle and Development Operations, which improves and sets the standard for maintaining System documentation and plans the deployment of Reconnect enhancements that align and prioritize Reemployment Assistance Program requirements with Reconnect's functionality. By upgrading Reconnect's infrastructure, FloridaCommerce can ensure that it will continue to support modernization and positively impact claimants' day-to-day activities within the System.

- FloridaCommerce completed Business Process Optimization to ensure a more efficient claims process for Floridians, employers and FloridaCommerce staff by identifying, cataloging, and optimizing business processes and requirements necessary to improve the user experience.
- FloridaCommerce completed the first iteration of a Rules Catalog to develop a continuous Reemployment Assistance Modernization plan to determine the future needs of the Rules Engine. The Rules Catalog identifies all state and federal rules that govern the administration of the Reemployment Assistance Program, the number of times each rule has changed, the date(s) each rule has changed and the relative complexity of each rule. The Rules Catalog will help determine if there is a need for a business rules engine to manage business rules and help guide modernization efforts.
- FloridaCommerce deployed Cloud Application Performance Management, a cloud-based version of the existing application performance management tool to enable rapid scalability to accommodate claimants and identify requirements to maintain peak system performance and prevent Reconnect's downtime. This provides visibility into Reconnect's key performance indicators and allows FloridaCommerce to set defined thresholds for performance and receive notification if remedial actions are needed.
- Promoted data sharing and standardization among information technology systems through the Master Data Management and Interoperability project, which created a data catalog and data dictionary for FloridaCommerce.
- Issued a Request for Information as the first step for implementing an Archive and Purge process to reduce FloridaCommerce's data storage costs and maintain the efficiency and stability of the System. This process sets the stage for purging data that is no longer required to be maintained by FloridaCommerce and allows for secure data storage and record-keeping.

Expanded Fraud Protection

- FloridaCommerce has prevented more than \$23 billion in fraudulent benefit payments through multiple tools and mechanisms that monitor fraudulent activity in real time. Preventing, detecting, and combatting Reemployment Assistance fraud has been and continues to be a top priority for FloridaCommerce. These systems helped mitigate risks related to fraud, and the number of attempted potentially fraudulent claims decreased from a rate of 70 percent in March 2021, to 8.7 percent in August 2023. Having adept systems in place to reduce fraudulent and potentially fraudulent claims allocates sufficient time for FloridaCommerce to support legitimate claims from Floridians.
- By upgrading the .NET and Object Relational Mapping platforms to the latest, most secure version, Reconnect is allowed to receive security fixes, updates and technical support that align with industry standards. These platforms create and run various software applications that make up Reconnect, as well as ensure claimant information is secure and protected.
- FloridaCommerce completed Identity Management and Access Control policies and implemented enhanced front-end security measures to authenticate System users, ensuring individual users are provided the appropriate amount of access for their needs.

Maintenance and Operations

The Reemployment Assistance Program prioritizes paying claimants quickly and accurately, implementing immediate solutions to ensure continuity of operations. Tickets are created for residual issues and are reviewed weekly to plan monthly System maintenance builds.

FloridaCommerce made several improvements to Reconnect through routine maintenance, including but not limited to:

- Included the ability for claimants, employers, and TPAs to upload multiple documents simultaneously when filing an appeal. This enhancement shortens the time required to file an appeal.
- Improved the interface communication between Reconnect and Conduent (Way2Go Debit card) to avoid the rejection and return of payments meant for claimants.
- In response to an IRS preliminary finding, a new banner message was added to display on all Reconnect screens where Federal Tax Information is present.
- Included additional functionality in the workflow queues to assist staff in handling claimant, employer, and TPA protests timely.
- Improved the timeliness of fact-finding delivery to claimants, employers, and TPAs.
- Updated the criteria for all messages displayed to the claimant while filing to ensure the most applicable message is always displayed. This change will decrease claim filing errors.
- Rapidly responded to System changes related to Hurricane Ian, impacted counties, and DUA.
- Improved the automated overpayment offset process to prevent Reconnect from incorrectly reprocessing undue payments to claimants.
- Enhanced the interface communication between Reconnect and the Integrity Data Hub.
- Improved the functionality of workflow queues to automatically push pending work items to staff and display the correct number of work items when organizing an open search or using search criteria.
- Created an automated process to send USDOL files every two months.
- Improved the interface communication between Reconnect and Appriss to address incarceration issues timely and appropriately.
- Enhanced the System-generated correspondence to ensure claimants, employers, and TPAs do not experience unnecessary interruptions when responding to FloridaCommerce requests.
- Expanded the acceptable file types (.doc, .docx, .xls, .xlsx, .txt, .jpg, .jpeg, .png, .tiff) to allow a larger variation of document types to be uploaded.

A Three-Year Outlook: Continuous Modernization

In FY 2021-22 and 2022-23, Florida made significant investments to upgrade and enhance Reconnect by implementing immediate system performance and functional improvements while positioning FloridaCommerce with a secure, scalable, and sustainable system architecture with agile support processes.

During the two-year modernization effort, FloridaCommerce engaged in 19 projects, including a Business Process Optimization Project, which underscored the need for continuous modernization. Of the 19 projects, the Incremental CX/UX Mobile-Responsive Transformation is a multi-year project that is ongoing,

the Security Architecture Audit was deferred to accommodate the completion of the Incremental Mobile-Responsive User Interface project, the System and Software Integration project is ongoing due to its dependency on the CX/UX solution, and 16 were completed.

Based on the funding expended to support Maintenance and Operations in previous fiscal years, FloridaCommerce estimated FY 2024-25 Maintenance and Operations costs would total \$11.6 million, \$224,518 of which will be paid from the reappropriated amount and \$11.4 million to be funded out of contracted services general revenue. The requested funding would support the necessary software and hardware that make up Reconnect as well as staff augmentation services that maintain and support the System.

In 2022, Florida's rate of unemployment returned to record lows. While a strong and healthy economy is beneficial for Floridians, it results in reduced funding for the Reemployment Assistance program, as federal funds are allocated based on workload (when unemployment rates are low, workload, as calculated by USDOL, is presented as low). While continuous modernization of the Reemployment Assistance systems and processes is required to increase efficiency for claimants, there is an underlining obligation to ensure that these efforts also aid in the reduction of labor intensity for the workforce charged with maintaining these systems; in turn this will increase retention rates in jobs that have had historically high turn-over. Continuous modernization has become a cyclical process in that it is required to maintain the workforce responsible for the direct support of the unemployed population and the implementation of both current and future systematic advancements.

In addition to Reemployment Assistance Maintenance and Operations, FloridaCommerce has identified several projects to start, continue, or complete from now through FY 2026-27. The resources required for these projects have been identified at a high level and will continue to be realized as FloridaCommerce readies for each to start.

Fiscal Year 2023-24

Enhancing the Adjudication Case Management System

Adjudication is a unit and a functional business process within the Reemployment Assistance Program that is charged with reviewing nonmonetary claim issues and resolving the claim issues to determine eligibility. Nonmonetary claim issues are automatically or manually created in Reconnect when potentially disqualifying circumstances are presented. These issues can either be auto adjudicated based on pre-defined business logic within Reconnect, or manually handled by an Adjudicator. Once a claimant has been determined monetarily eligible, non-monetary issues are adjudicated. After reviewing the available facts, the Adjudicator may be required to contact one or more parties to gather additional information and rebuttals prior to issuing a quality determination based on state law. Nonmonetary determinations have the potential to affect the claimant's past, present, or future benefits. Once a determination is processed, the claimant and affected employers will then receive copies of the nonmonetary determination.

The current adjudication business process within the Reconnect does not have a usable claims management inbox for the collection of work or an effective means of distributing those work items. The current Reconnect adjudication inbox distribution logic does not allow for the ability to customize and prioritize work based on business needs. When attempting to work out of the inbox, adjudicators

experience several technical errors including “run-time” errors and system slowness. As a result, adjudication management must manually assign work to staff using excel spreadsheets. This non-automated process of work distribution allows for human error, duplication of assigned work, and inefficiency as adjudicators must request work versus having it pushed to them.

The Reemployment Assistance Program has chartered this project to enhance the case management system by streamlining business processes using automation and communicating with Reconnect to send and ingest data. This enhancement would increase the speed in which FloridaCommerce delivers Reemployment Assistance benefits to claimants and improve the customer service and USDOL quality measures. This project was approved and funded through “Continuous Modernization” funding and is scheduled for completion by the end of FY 2023-24.

Enhancing the Appeals Case Management System

Appeals is a unit and a functional business process within the Reemployment Assistance Program. When an appeal is filed, the Office of Appeals must provide an opportunity for an administrative hearing that provides all due process rights and complies with Florida’s administrative code, evidence rules, and applicable rules of procedure. Claimants may appeal any adverse monetary or nonmonetary benefit determinations, and employers have the right to appeal adverse nonmonetary or charge-related benefit determinations to which they are a party. Employers may also file appeals on determinations of their tax liability tax rate and benefit reimbursement. If a determination is provided that adversely affects a claimant or employer, the affected party may file an appeal regarding eligibility, qualification, experience benefit charges, child support deductions, overpayment, special programs eligibility and/or fraud.

This project is interconnected with the project to enhance the adjudication case management system. When adjudication distributes a determination on the claimant’s eligibility or employer’s chargeability, either of those parties may appeal if the determination is adverse. Employers and claimants often exercise these appeal rights, which increases the need for timely appeal hearings. Currently the automated process in Reconnect distributes a set number of cases to each referee in alphabetical order, but it leaves those at the beginning of the alphabet with substantially more than those toward the end of the alphabet. This project would ensure that Appeal Referees have work automatically distributed to their queue overnight in equal quantity, which would ensure more timely scheduling and execution of all hearings. With the success of this project, staff would be able to manage work queues with less constraint.

This project is meant to enhance the existing case management system by streamlining business processes using automation and communicating with Reconnect and ingest data. At the time of this report, the project has recently launched, and the scope will likely grow past managing workflow queues. This project was approved and funded through Continuous Modernization funding and is scheduled for completion by the end of FY 2023-24.

Continuing the Plain Language Effort

In FY 2022-23, FloridaCommerce committed to improving the user experience through a complete transformation of all content. The chief goal of the plain language effort is to review all existing documentation used for the Reemployment Assistance Program replace it with plain language content for all new and existing materials that are easily read, understood, and used by the public, including

claimants, employers, and TPAs. Content for Reconnect is in progress; the regular and DUA applications were transformed and updated in Reconnect in June 2023.

Applying plain language to the remaining correspondence associated with the Reemployment Assistance Program is a multi-year effort. As the mobile-responsive user interface continues to be developed, content will be finalized and translated to ensure all system users have an optimal user-experience.

At the time of this report, FloridaCommerce does not anticipate that the continuation of this project will require more than Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) to confirm the rewritten content, the Reemployment Assistance Translations and Interpretation unit to translate to Spanish and Haitian-Creole, and the Reemployment Assistance Information Technology team to implement the changes in Reconnect, on FloridaJobs.org, and in the Reemployment Assistance Help Center.

Fiscal Year 2024-25

Upgrading the Digital ID Verification Solution

Last year, FloridaCommerce spent \$1.2 million to continue use of a digital ID verification solution for the Reemployment Assistance Program. In FY 2022-23, FloridaCommerce initiated a competitive procurement process to acquire a contractor who could provide the state with an integrated, adaptable, and scalable web-enabled system to support the services required by the Reemployment Assistance program. At the time of this report, negotiations are underway. The following would be achieved with the solution in place:

- Prevents fraudulent claims or digital identity theft of claimant information and prevent benefits from being issued by FloridaCommerce.
- Provides a cost-effective approach of delivering the services and achieving goals of FloridaCommerce.
- Monitors and prevents new schemes, including any new and emerging threats and attack patterns for dark web activity.
- Assists with identifying individuals generating fraudulent claims for criminal prosecution and alerting other agencies with public assistance benefit programs.

FloridaCommerce has identified that part, if not all, of this project's funding would come from the Integrity Grant referenced on page eight. At the time of this report, no additional funding had been requested.

Upgrading the Fraud Initiative Rules and Ratings Engine Technology

The Fraud Initiative Rules and Ratings Engine (FIRRE) is a system designed to detect and stop potential Reemployment Assistance fraud before benefits are paid to a claimant. Established claims that meet certain criteria are also re-run through FIRRE to safeguard against bad actors attempting to hijack a claim to fraudulently obtain future payments on that claim.

While the FIRRE system is operating efficiently, it has not undergone systematic enhancements or improvements since 2018. The Integrity Data Hub (IDH), designed and maintained by the National Association of Workforce Agencies (NASWA), is a robust repository of intelligence information related to fraud submitted by all 50 states used to crossmatch their claims data against other states' data sets that have already been identified as being potentially fraudulent. While FloridaCommerce is working towards

establishing a live interface with IDH, there is much programmatic work to be done in FIRRE to receive and interface with IDH to reduce manual queries and processing by staff.

The staff augmentation team would update software code and add functionality to the FIRRE system. Enhancements would include bringing all the code and software up to the latest editions and adding available tools to improve fraud detection system capability. Developers would create added functionality to better utilize data from the NASWA IDH national integrity system to gain all state crossmatches and better trace suspicious IP addresses. Additionally, developers would update reporting and enhance existing system rules.

For FY 2024-2025, FloridaCommerce has prepared a Legislative Budget Request (LBR) totaling \$2.5 million that, if funded, would support Reconnect User Experience Enhancements. One of the enhancements included in the LBR is an upgrade to the fraud detection tool, FIRRE. In addition to the LBR, FloridaCommerce applied for the Integrity Grant referenced on page eight to support three projects in the coming years, including the FIRRE system upgrade. Any funding received through the Integrity Grant would serve as supplemental funding to meet the remaining resource needs for upgrading the FIRRE technology.

Improving the Overpayment Repayment Process

The current process to apply a claimant's repayment of an overpayment to Reconnect is manual, which often results in delays in documenting that the repayment has occurred and, in some cases, impacts the future payout of benefits. Currently, claimants must visit FloridaJobs.org to repay overpayments, and the repayment must be manually attached by a FloridaCommerce employee to the claimant's account. Enhancing this process would allow FloridaCommerce to build a new repayment application that directly communicates to Reconnect and would result in a timely application of the claimant's repayment to their claim, thereby eliminating a manual process and preventing the potential interruption of future benefit payments.

A technology solution would be implemented to build a new repayment application and a direct line of communication from the repayment tool to Reconnect. This solution would be an API between the FloridaJobs.org repayment application and Reconnect. The implementation of this API would result in a timely application of the claimant's repayment and the elimination of manual processes would allow FloridaCommerce staff to prioritize other workflow items.

As additional licensing and infrastructure will be required to support this project, FloridaCommerce has prepared an LBR that, if funded, would support planning, development, testing, software and licensing, and integration services in FY 2024-2025. The LBR totaled \$2.5 million to support Reconnect User Experience Enhancements.

Implementing an Investigation Case Management System

The implementation of a successful Case Management Software solution would create efficiencies for the Reemployment Assistance program by helping manage workloads and digital information. This solution would create a space for the team to manage investigative data, generate referrals for prosecution with all applicable evidence to file a formal complaint, coordinate ongoing activities with internal and external parties, and keep leadership apprised. The benefits include:

- The ability for more than the investigators to file a ticket to open an investigation.
- The opportunity to add reporting to pending and complete investigations and the investigation results.
- Real-time investigation statuses, including the assigned investigator and the steps left in the investigation flow.

FloridaCommerce has identified that part, if not all, of this project’s funding would come from the Integrity Grant referenced on page eight. At the time of this report, no additional funding had been requested.

Fiscal Year 2025-26

Fully Integrating SIDES Exchange

NASWA developed the Unemployment Insurance (UI) State Information Data Exchange System (SIDES) to allow electronic transmissions of information regarding UC claims between agencies and employers.

As of August 2022, Florida met USDOL's expected usage of “at least 50% or higher” by 23.04 percent of combined responses received via UI SIDES and SIDES E-Response, and all active TPAs in Florida respond to requests for separation information via the SIDES Exchange. Employers are mandated to respond electronically to requests for information, fact-finding, and to view determinations.

As it relates to this project, expanding the SIDES Exchange would include the following exchanges:

- Monetary and Potential Charges Exchange
- Additional Fact-finding Exchange
- Determinations and Decisions Exchange
- Earnings Verification Exchange

Some of the benefits that would be afforded to claimants, employers, and TPAs through this project include:

- Less time to process a claim and employer response.
- Reduced tax rates, improper payments, and overpayments.
- Increased accuracy on claimant eligibility determinations.
- Included data checks to ensure the exchange of complete and valid information.
- Enhanced data integrity and confidentiality.

Funding for this project has not been received as Florida was not approved for the IT Modernization grant opportunity provided by USDOL. However, FloridaCommerce is committed to improving the user experience and will continue to seek and take advantage of opportunities for funding. Although this project may be initiated at any point within the next three years, FloridaCommerce anticipates completion by FY 2025-26 if funding is obtained.

Reducing Technical Debt

FloridaCommerce saw a drastic increase in the number of claimants receiving Reemployment Assistance benefits in March 2020. Prior to March 2020, Florida’s economy was strong, resulting in very positive economic data. Between January and February 2020, an average of 23,059 claimants were receiving Reemployment Assistance benefits per week. After the initial influx of Reemployment Assistance claimants, FloridaCommerce continued to see a drastic rise in Reemployment Assistance applications and

claimants. By the height of the pandemic, there were more than 1.4 million individuals receiving Reemployment Assistance benefits (week of May 9, 2020). These results represent an almost 6,000% increase in the number of individuals receiving benefits compared to the pre-pandemic average. Due to the unprecedented increase in Reemployment Assistance claimants visiting the Reconnect, FloridaCommerce experienced an extreme load on server resources across system servers and the database.

The pursuit to modernize swept across the nation as systems struggled under the pressure to protect against unprecedented identity theft while simultaneously supporting millions of citizens in receiving unemployment benefits. FloridaCommerce continues to seek ways to reduce technical debt, the result of inefficient or outdated software and applications, because of its devastating impact on the user experience and the efficacy of Florida's mission.

Funding one or two dedicated teams comprised of subject-matter experts (SMEs) and developers to reduce the technical debt incurred from years of business policy and functionality changes would help FloridaCommerce continue to leverage microservice technologies and take advantage of current modernization efforts. This project would be delivered in sprints to make incremental improvements each month, employing the delivery of a better CX and cost savings to all stakeholders.

Coupled with the transition to the cloud, refactoring Reconnect's code would help create a more efficient, scalable, mobile-responsive system that will be sustainable for years to come. This means that services currently supported by Reconnect would be isolated and more tolerable of failure and these same services could be scaled independently to meet business functionalities and system user needs.

Funding for this project has not been received as Florida was not approved for the IT Modernization grant opportunity provided by USDOL. However, FloridaCommerce is committed to improving the user experience and will continue to seek and take advantage of opportunities for funding. Although this project may be initiated at any point within the next three years, FloridaCommerce anticipates completion by FY 2025-26 if funding is obtained.

Continuing the Archive and Purge Project

In June 2023, the Archival and Purge Project was successfully closed out; however, continuous modernization efforts are anticipated to support the archival and purging of data from Reconnect's database. FloridaCommerce has begun the procurement process to implement the use of a suitable technology tool for archiving and purging data. The Reemployment Assistance Program would identify a team to assess and map the location and interactions of all the current uFACTS data stored by the business support units within the program and identify data that may be addressed with an archive and purge tool.

A strategy to purge data from Reconnect would improve system runtime performance and provide a cost savings. Retaining data in Reconnect consumes needed file storage space, requires physical resources to maintain system performance, and complicates the database backup and maintenance. Reconnect currently stores approximately 20 terabytes, resulting in diminished system performance. Funding and staffing resources are allocated to implement expensive hardware upgrades that are likely unnecessary because the matured data should no longer be stored. This process should complement Florida's Cloud First strategy as performance of Reconnect will improve when Reconnect's database size is better managed.

Funding for this project has not been received as Florida was not approved for the IT Modernization grant opportunity provided by USDOL. However, FloridaCommerce is committed to improving the user experience and will continue to seek and take advantage of opportunities for funding. Although this project may be initiated at any point within the next three years, FloridaCommerce anticipates completion by FY 2025-26 if funding is obtained.

Continuing the Reports Project

The Reporting project was one of the initial projects associated with the Modernization Program and has been marked complete since March 2023. This project included migrating all system reports from the Data Warehouse and developing and validating all federally mandated Reemployment Assistance reports. Reconnect produces more reports than those initially identified for this project (39); therefore, the project should continue to ensure standardized data and further reduce the need for staff intervention for future reporting activities.

The Reemployment Assistance Program estimates that more than 300 reports are produced by Reconnect, leaving about 260 reports awaiting migration. The initial project required three developers, two testers, and one business analyst, totaling about \$96,000 per month for two years. This project is likely to continue once the Incremental CX/UX Mobile-Responsive Transformation project has made more progress. At which point, more staff are likely to become available to significantly shorten the 13 years it would take to migrate the remaining reports to the Data Warehouse. The Incremental CX/UX Mobile-Responsive Transformation project is forecasted for completion in 2025, at which point, FloridaCommerce will be better positioned to assess the associated cost and resource needs. At the time of this report, no funding had been requested.

Closing

In 2020, Governor DeSantis, FloridaCommerce, and the Legislature recognized the need to make necessary changes and updates to the system to address the needs of claimants, employers, and TPAs as users of Reconnect. Today, FloridaCommerce remains committed to ensuring that the scope of ongoing and newly identified projects will achieve the goals of the modernization effort. The projects completed in FY 2021-22 and FY 2022-23 laid a foundation for the work ahead in continuous modernization, pursuant to [section 443.1113\(5\), Florida Statutes](#), to provide Floridians with a secure, reliable, sustainable, and scalable system that will be adaptable for the future.

To follow progress made via the Reemployment Assistance Modernization Program and view monthly and quarterly status reports, please visit www.FloridaJobs.org/RAModernization.