



Dear State of Missouri Team,

Like every state agency, the Department of Revenue team has experienced its share of challenges during the past six months. Like every state agency, we've learned from those challenges. We have found new ways of working and serving our customers.

Early on in the COVID-19 pandemic, the Department granted automatic extensions of driver licenses and license plates. These were necessary at a time when citizens were concerned about their health and many contract license offices throughout the state were closed. In fact, as many as 140 out of 173 were closed at one point. This led to processing backlogs as customers increasingly used our mail-in and online services. License offices also saw an influx of customers as they began reopening. We knew we needed to quickly increase our processing capacity. This would help keep pace with customer demand and ease congestion in license offices.

Thanks to CARES Act funding, we opened three temporary, state-operated license offices. They are in Kansas City, Springfield and St. Louis. The funding also enabled the Department to open a new, temporary phone-in renewal service for license plates. These provide another safe renewal option during COVID-19. But customers have shared that this is also a great option for those who can't easily get away from work or who may have difficulty using technology. Combined, the four offices have already processed over 8,800 motor vehicle and driver licensing transactions.

We also made the decision to automatically renew and mail Permanent Disabled Placards for eligible individuals. This change eliminated the need for approximately 208,000 Missourians to visit a license office.

Expanding our use of technology has been critical to assisting customers throughout the pandemic. In May, we implemented a "virtual lobby" in our state-managed central office in Jefferson City. When the Department's doors reopened to the public, customers were able to receive a text message when it was their turn to be served. This allowed them to wait outside the building if they preferred.

We have continually updated our 24/7 virtual assistant chatbot, DORA, to respond to changing customer needs throughout COVID-19. On one day during the pandemic, DORA handled more than 12,800 customer inquiries. Every week, DORA's development team continues to review the data to see what questions customers are asking. They then make any necessary programming changes. Since going live in November 2019, DORA has handled over 1.3 million customer inquiries. That's 1.3 million calls and emails that didn't need to be processed.

On the tax front, COVID-19 posed a number of challenges related to continuing operations. Solving those challenges as quickly as possible was paramount as we were in the thick of tax season. In the face of adapting to remote work, social distancing and extended tax deadlines, our Taxation Division never stopped providing services to customers.

The Tax team greatly benefited from data-driven preplanning and cross-education that expanded the number of teammates who were able to move between areas as needed. This preparation resulted in the team successfully processing more individual income tax returns (over 3 million) and issuing more refunds (over 1.7 million) in 2020 than by the same time in 2019.

Shortly before the pandemic hit, the DOR had developed a new vision statement: To provide every customer the best experience every time. I've often thought about these words in the months since we pieced them together. This is something we always want to do. But this year has taught us that it's one thing to deliver on this goal when times are good and stable, but it's another to do it when the going gets tough. However, as public servants, we know that's precisely when making it happen is most important.

COVID-19 challenged us to find new ways to accomplish our vision, and we did. We will continue to use the lessons we've learned to refine our processes and strategies. We will enhance our ability to serve the people of Missouri. Throughout these last six months, our dedicated team has also grown into a more resilient one. I know the same can be said for every State of Missouri team.

The countless ways we've worked together across all departments, sharing best practices and finding innovative solutions, is nothing short of incredible. Thank you to my DOR teammates for being such great friends and colleagues. Thank you to every State of Missouri team member for the amazing work you do each and every day. Keep up the fight and remember that we really are stronger together.

Sincerely,

Ken Zellers
Director of Revenue