



## State of Connecticut

### SENATE

STATE CAPITOL  
300 CAPITOL AVENUE  
HARTFORD, CT 06106-1591  
SENATE REPUBLICAN OFFICES

April 17, 2020

Commissioner Kurt Westby  
Department of Labor  
200 Folly Brook Boulevard  
Wethersfield, CT 06109

Dear Commissioner Westby:

We are writing to raise our continued concerns about the personal, social and economic crisis that tens of thousands of residents across our state are facing as a result of the Department of Labor's unemployment processing backlog and diminished accessibility to the public.

We were very pleased to hear the news on Wednesday that significant system upgrades have been made with the goal of speeding up unemployment claims processing so more struggling families can finally start receiving the benefits they are entitled to. We would like an update on Monday or Tuesday of next week on how these upgrades are working. We are very hopeful that these changes will help our constituents obtain the financial assistance they so desperately need and have been waiting on for many weeks.

However, we also cannot ignore that this potential solution is not only extremely delayed, it also only appears to solve half the problems our constituents have experienced. Specifically, we are not aware of any plan to take unemployment claims over the phone leaving anyone without a computer or internet access completely unable to file for benefits they are entitled to. We also continue to hear from constituents who have questions about the status of their claims, why they aren't receiving benefits, whether their application is complete, and many more case specific issues. These individuals are still struggling to get answers from the Department of Labor. There is no excuse for why our constituents and individual senators still cannot get answers about specific cases.

On April 14, Governor Ned Lamont said that reopening the state's economy could take place "over the next 2,3,4 months." If jobs are going to remain out of reach for such a period of time, Connecticut cannot falter when it comes to providing unemployed residents with the support they are entitled to and the answers and assistance they deserve.

If we can be of assistance in any way please let us know. We have vocalized our concerns and ideas in conversations with Department officials, and we remain ready to help you help our residents.

We would like to ask for a status update early next week on how the system upgrades implemented this week are working including but not limited to:

1. A summary of the 60,000 claim test performed on April 15, 2020,
2. How many claims have been processed since the system upgrades were implemented,
3. How many outstanding claims remain,
4. Whether or not the Department remains on track to begin distributing the additional weekly \$600 benefit in federal stimulus funds by April 24<sup>th</sup>

5. Whether or not Department remains on track to begin the new benefit program for self-employed individuals by April 30th
6. A timeline for processing claims over the phone.
7. A timeline for being able to address case specific questions over the phone.


For weeks our constituents have shared with us their stories about their fear, anxiety and inability to support their families as they continue to wait on unemployment benefits and hear nothing back from the Department of Labor when they run into an issue. Just like the virus itself, fear of the unknown is a major part of the problem. We need the Department of Labor to not only process claims in a timely manner, but to provide solutions, answers and predictability for every resident.

Thank you for your attention to our concerns and all the work you and your staff are doing every day to help the thousands of unemployed residents in Connecticut.

Sincerely,



Len Fasano  
Senate Republican Leader



Kevin Witkos  
Senate Republican Leader Pro Tempore



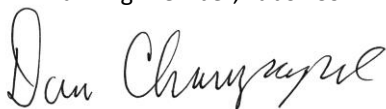
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Senate Republican Whip




Dan Champagne  
Senate Republican Whip



Paul Formica  
Deputy Senate Republican Leader



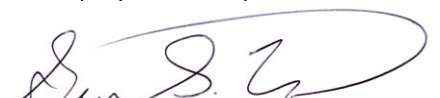
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Heather Somers  
Assistant Senate Republican Leader

cc: Paul Mounds, Chief of Staff