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## House of Representatives

Commonwealth of Pennsylvania  
Harrisburg

AMERICAN LEGION BUILDING  
3 WEST RIDGE STREET  
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WEDNESDAY 10 A.M. TO 2 P.M.

**COMMITTEES:**  
APPROPRIATIONS  
HUMAN SERVICES  
TOURISM &  
RECREATIONAL DEVELOPEMENT  
TRANSPORTATION

Pennsylvania Secretary of Labor and Industry

Jennifer Berrier  
Room 1700  
651 Boas Street  
Harrisburg, PA 17121

July 15, 2021

Dear Secretary Berrier,

I write today to express my extreme dissatisfaction with the operations of Pennsylvania's Unemployment Compensation (UC) system. My office staff is currently fielding regular calls from constituents who are having problems claiming the compensation due to them. Many of these claimants are first-time users of the UC system, and though they and their employers have paid into the system for years, in their time of need, the system is failing them.

Our office has been handling calls from claimants who have not been able to collect benefits due to them, or who are awaiting adjudication from a UC referee for several months. These claimants are doubly frustrated because they cannot get through on the phone or via email to anyone in the UC office. When they do get through to someone, they are told the person answering the phone cannot help them – they will just take the claimant's name and number, and assign them a number in the queue to have someone call them back. Many claimants have been waiting weeks for a call back. This is unacceptable. Your department is failing the citizens of our Commonwealth.

In the calendar year 2019, in my office alone, my staff assisted 16 constituents with UC related issues. Since March of 2020, we have helped close to 1,000 constituents. While I understand the shutdowns due to the COVID-19 protocols in Pennsylvania created a massive uptick in those applying for benefits, there does not seem to be an end in sight for the inefficiencies that those who are applying to the UC system are experiencing. Through the LegWeb system that was set up to accept claimant help requests made to the legislative offices across the state, we have submitted hundreds of inquiries. Things seemed to be getting better, as we were getting answers (albeit some rather poor answers) within a five-day turnaround. We were also starting to see a slowdown of the requests being sent through our office – an average of seven requests per week between December and June, down from the average of 18 per week in 2020. With the institution of the new UC system, however, the inefficiencies seem to be on an uptick – we are now getting again an average of 17 to 20 calls per week, and the turnaround time for an answer from the Department of Labor and Industry (L&I) is now topping 18 days.

Now we are facing an onslaught of cases involving local employers who are receiving claim verification requests for employees who are currently still working for the employer, or people who have never

worked for these employers. It is a problem that requires a great amount of time for local businesses and their employees to have to go through the UC fraud process.

In addition, we are dealing with claimants who are older and applying for UC benefits for the first time in their lives. They are not tech savvy, and have no computers to receive information from L&I, or to communicate any requests for help or to receive any information or to send any emails to L&I.

Here is a sampling of the kinds of issues we are submitting for our constituents:

- Claimant has pending claims for the weeks ending 5/15, 5/22 and 5/29 that are showing "in progress" on his dashboard, claims for weeks ending 6/5 and 6/12 that show a "partial check was issued," but he never received payment, and for week ending 6/19 that shows "taxes withheld," but no payment was issued. His claim for the week ending 6/26 shows that it was paid, and he DID receive payment for that, then his claim for week ending 7/3 is showing "pending." Can you tell me why he received payment for only one of these weeks (week ending June 26, 2021) and not any of the other weeks he claimed?
- Claimant applied for benefits around May of 2020, and has been receiving payments, established a Keystone ID and is now on the new system, but his payments stopped as of June 12, 2021. Can you tell us why his payments have stopped?
- Claimant tried to file for the week ending 6/26 and will have to file for the week ending 7/10 this Sunday. (He works for Mack Truck, and is off periodically for a week here and a week there.) When he did his weekly claim, he got a message that he was disqualified due to having workman's compensation. He DOES NOT have workman's comp., and has never had workman's comp. What should the claimant do at this point?
- Claimant is having a great deal of trouble with the new system. He has a Keystone ID and registered password, but cannot get through the questions on the system without being put in an endless loop. He tried the advice stated on the video, but still gets the endless loop after verifying his Social Security number. He has completed steps 1 through 9 on the instructions for setting up his dashboard, but it doesn't take him to a dashboard - instead it takes him back to step 7, which he does again, then step 8 then step 9, and then it loops him back to step 7 again in an endless circle. He cannot get any further, and as a result has been unable to file weekly claims. He needs to file for the week ending 6/26 and 7/3, plus will need to file going forward. What should he do at this point? He has tried to call the helpline numerous times but can never get through. Can someone reach out to him?
- Claimant is a seasonal food service worker for a local school. She routinely reopens a claim whenever school is not in session. Her payments keep saying "in progress," but are not being paid out. I understand there is a glitch in the system for seasonal workers who are affiliated with schools but are not under contract with schools (food service, bus drivers etc.) that needs to be manually fixed. Can someone please fix her claim so her payments can be processed?
- Claimant received a message on her dashboard that was a notice of overpayment. She believes this is in error and is based on the fact that the system is showing she had no base earnings in 2019, although she has repeatedly uploaded records of her earnings for 2019. She has appealed this overpayment, and the appeal paperwork is attached here with her record of earnings of

2019. Can you tell me why it was determined that she was overpaid? If it is because L&I is saying she had no earnings in 2019, then L&I made an error. Please advise.

- Claimant does seasonal work in a tax service company during tax season. She was able to set up her dashboard, but cannot get through the claim screening process because when she chooses the "Seasonal Work" category, it limits her to farming-related questions, and when she chooses the "temporary" category, it gives her an error message and will not allow her to go any further on the claim. Also, she gets a message that she has a workman's compensation claim, and she DOES NOT have a workman's comp claim. Please advise what this claimant needs to do to be able to file her claims.
- Claimant has been on partial UC benefits, but has not been paid since the end of May. Used to use the PATT phone number, but was unable to access it. She has since set up her dashboard with her Keystone ID, but when she tries to do a weekly certification, she is unable to enter her partial earnings, so she has been unable to do weekly claims since the new system went into effect. What does she need to do at this point?
- Claimant works for a school bus company, and files every summer. Her last day of work was June 14, 2021, and she set up her Keystone ID and her dashboard for the new UC system. She filed for the week on June 20, and when she went to do her claim for the week of June 27, she got an error message that said "this site cannot be reached. Benefits.uc.pa.gov refused to connect. Check proxy and firewall. err\_connection\_refused." Can you tell me what is going on with this claim?

I could go on and on with these issues. We currently have over 60 inquiries in the LegWeb queue. When can we expect an end to the frustrations and long wait times our citizens are experiencing? What is being done to make your department more efficient? When will our citizens, who are depending on your office to feed their families and to keep them from losing their homes, be able to get the benefits they deserve?

I would like to hear your answers to these questions, and your plans for fixing this untenable situation.

Sincerely,

Doyle M. Heffley  
State Representative  
122<sup>nd</sup> Legislative District