



Council of the District of Columbia
John A. Wilson Building
1350 Pennsylvania Ave, NW
Washington, DC 20004

Elissa Silverman
Councilmember At-Large
Chair, Committee on Labor and Workforce
Development

Office: (202) 724-7772
Fax: (202) 724-8087
esilverman@dccouncil.us

December 8, 2020

Director Unique Morris-Hughes
Department of Employment Services
4058 Minnesota Avenue, NE
Washington, DC 20019

Dear Director Morris-Hughes:

Yesterday's announcement by Mayor Bowser of a \$1,200 supplemental payment to some of our unemployed workers was great news, and I was glad to see you at the press conference to explain how the payment will work. Still, there are many questions about who will get the money and when. As you know, this is a scary time for our unemployment claimants, because federal CARES Act funding will end in less than three weeks. If Congress doesn't take action, the program that has provided weekly checks for an estimated 40,000 DC independent contractors and gig workers will evaporate, as well as money to extend traditional unemployment insurance for another 120,000 DC workers.

That's why I am pleased you have agreed to testify at a rescheduled Committee on Labor and Workforce Development roundtable next week regarding the stimulus payment and other unemployment compensation issues; we will still hear from our public witnesses who have signed up to testify at the roundtable tomorrow. The coronavirus pandemic is not only a public health emergency but an economic crisis as well, and your agency is truly on the front lines helping to stabilize our impacted workers in this incredibly difficult time. Information and clear guidance from you and your agency is essential to helping our workers get and maintain eligibility for unemployment compensation, and those dollars quickly cycle back into our local economy helping local businesses.

Given that unemployment compensation is a federal program administered on the state level, there are lots of regulations that are confusing to our unemployed workers. The uncertainty about whether federal funding will continue for pandemic-created programs and extensions creates even more anxiety for them. They need clear guidance that only you can provide on questions such as:

- If CARES Act funding is not extended, will the Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA) program end?
- If I applied for Pandemic Emergency Unemployment Compensation (PEUC) after my UI benefits ended, will that end when the federal CARES Act money expires?
- If I am owed back pay under PEUC, PUA, etc., will I still receive that money?

- Will the Extended Benefit program end as well?
- I applied for PEUC but was told I have earning in another state and now I'm ineligible for PEUC in DC. What's going on?
- Are there any other programs available to help me stay afloat financially?

Every day, I personally get at least a dozen email messages from District workers asking for help with their unemployment insurance claims. Sometimes they simply need basic information clearly explained so they can resolve their issue. As government officials, we need to be doing everything we can to get the right information into residents' hands. The oversight hearings the Council holds are an important part of helping to inform the tens of thousands of District workers whose lives have been upended by this pandemic. We owe it to them to go above and beyond what is normally expected.

I know that responding to the pandemic has been a strain on the agency and its workers. We are proud that many of our District workers, including many DOES employees, are working overtime to help our workers stay afloat at this incredibly challenging time.

I look forward to our discussion at next week's rescheduled hearing.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Elissa Silverman', with a stylized, cursive script.

Elissa Silverman
Chair, Committee on Labor and Workforce Development
Council of the District of Columbia