



Council of the District of Columbia  
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Dear Director Morris-Hughes:

Thank you for your testimony last Friday, and for your answers to Labor Committee questions. As you know, all five members of the Labor Committee had comments and questions, and Ward 2 Councilmember Brooke Pinto joined us as well. Other members not on the Committee also expressed questions and concerns. Colleagues have said in no uncertain terms that getting unemployment compensation into the hands of workers and their families is a top priority for them. It is in the interest of our local businesses and our city, as well.

We want to work with you to put the resources in place so that claimants are not waiting months for payments. Last Wednesday, we heard from dozens of witnesses who spent hours and hours calling and emailing but could not get issues resolved. They told us of very real consequences to not having these funds in their accounts. We recognize some cases are multi-layered and complicated, but four big areas emerged that we want to work with you with urgency.

**1. Back Pay.** We have heard of numerous claimants who are waiting for benefits they are owed for weeks of unemployment in 2020 and early 2021.<sup>1</sup> In many cases, claimants were unable to complete their weekly certification due to IT errors with the DOES online system. **We urge DOES to plan a claims-processing “blitz” in the next 30 days in order to expediently process all remaining claims from 2020 and the backlog of emailed weekly certification forms that resulted from recent IT errors.**

**2. PUA.** Many claimants who received PUA benefits at the \$179 weekly minimum were unaware that they had to request a redetermination from DOES in order to receive a higher benefit amount.<sup>2</sup> This may be due to issues with accessing their online accounts, problems with delivery of postal mail, or the agency losing submitted documentation, all of which witnesses have testified about to the Committee.<sup>3</sup> Using

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<sup>1</sup> For example, witness Kymberly Holmes testified that a computer error has resulted in her benefits being halted: “The last time I got benefits was the week of November 7, 2020. All of a sudden, when I logged in to my account in the on-line portal, the system would no longer let me upload my weekly certifications. The message was that there had been a gap in my certifications, even though there had NOT been one, and that, as a result, I could no longer upload my weekly certifications.”

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, UIPL 16-20, Change 1. (“An individual may submit additional documentation at any time during the Pandemic Assistance Period to substantiate wages earned or paid during the base period. The state must immediately issue a monetary redetermination if the state determines the wages documentation is sufficient to permit a re-computation. The monetary redetermination applies to all weeks of unemployment that the individual files during the Pandemic Assistance Period. The state must recalculate the WBA for any weeks previously paid and provide supplementary payment as appropriate.”)

<sup>3</sup> For example, at the September 16, 2020 Oversight Hearing, Laura Gardner testified about awaiting a redetermination of PUA benefits.

robocall and texting tools, **DOES should immediately notify all PUA claimants of their right to request a higher weekly benefit amount and provide them with instructions on how to do so. And we request a similar blitz on redetermination.**

**3. Out-of-state Wage Issues.** Many workers who have earned wages from work that occurred outside DC are frustrated when they learn that they have to apply for benefit in the other state (usually Maryland or Virginia) and receive a denial letter before being eligible to receive benefits in DC.<sup>4</sup> **We recognize this is a regional economy, and this is a regional problem. We ask that your agency immediately sit down with its counterpart agencies in Maryland and Virginia to request baseline rules that the District can apply when a claimant has wages from outside DC. Applying such guidelines would ensure efficient resolution for thousands of claimants in the greater Washington region.**

**4. New Biden Administration COVID Package.** Unemployment compensation extensions end at end of this week; we hope the new federal aid package will be signed into law by then but claimants will be confused about benefits. We ask DOES to issue clear, plain English language guidance about how the new package will be implemented and how benefits will be impacted.

Please let us know by Monday, March 22, 2021 how DOES is addressing these concerns. Thank you for your dedication and service to the District of Columbia.

Sincerely yours,



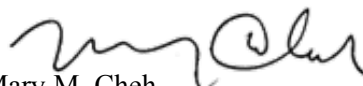
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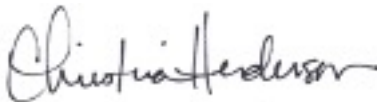
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<sup>4</sup> For example, at the March 3, 2021 Oversight Hearing, witnesses Trupti Patel and John Kilker described the way their out-of-state wages complicated their claims.



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