



Council of the District of Columbia
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Dr. Unique Morris-Hughes, Director
Department of Employment Services
4058 Minnesota Ave NE
Washington, DC 20019

Dear Director Morris-Hughes:

The Biden Administration's American Rescue Plan will help our unemployed workers by extending and enhancing benefit payments, but right now there is a lot of confusion about its implementation. Scores of Unemployment Insurance (UI) and Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA) claimants have contacted my office in a panic because they see their benefit year has ended, they are seeing a zero balance in their accounts, they have been unable to file weekly certifications, and a host of other problems that has led them to believe they will not benefit from the extensions. When they contact your agency, they have gotten different answers to their questions. **I write to partner with you in an effort to make sure workers understand this new plan, that resources are in place to make sure claimants efficiently receive payments, and that answers to questions are given uniformly.**

I fully understand that changing the coding in our outdated UI system is cumbersome, and that it is not a simple process to extend benefit weeks or change amounts. **What I ask is that all claimants are alerted in plain language how the new American Rescue Plan will benefit them, how long it will take to implement changes, what problems they might encounter as the agency alters the computer system, and what they can do to resolve them. I think the agency's infographic on the American Rescue Plan is quite informative, but it is written from a programmatic point of view not from a claimant's point of view. Plus, there are some gaps of information, such as what a claimant on Extended Benefits should do to continue receiving UI.**

Therefore, on behalf of the Council's Committee on Labor and Workforce Development, I ask we work on the following items:

- 1. The Department of Employment Services (DOES) should send an email to every claimant giving a plain-language explanation of the American Rescue Plan and how it will help them. Robocalls and text messages should be sent to alert claimants to the email.** The U.S. Department of Labor requires states to individually notify all unemployment compensation claimants of the American Rescue Plan.¹ I have asked claimants if they have received anything from the agency individually, and they inform me they have not. DOES should also include the

¹ Unemployment Program Insurance Letter (UIPL) No. 14-21, March 15, 2021 ("Such notification should address the new provisions of ARPA, specifically regarding changes to program dates and the maximum benefit entitlement for PUA or PEUC, as appropriate, as well as the change to program dates for FPUC or MEUC, as appropriate. Individuals who have exhausted PUA and PEUC must be provided instructions on how to reopen their claims. The distribution method for these notifications must be consistent with other correspondence provided to the individual by the state, which may include mail, email, or through the individual's online web portal.)

above information in its Tuesday and Thursday UI webinars, as well as provide a recording of the webinar that can be accessed at other times that are most convenient for claimants.

2. **Similar to the agency's infographic, the email should explain how the American Rescue Plan will help UI and PUA claimants, breaking out explanations for workers in the first 26 weeks of UI, workers currently receiving Pandemic Emergency Unemployment Compensation (PEUC), and workers currently receiving Extended Benefits (EB).** Right now, there is nowhere on the DOES website or UI portal explaining to those on EB how to extend their benefits. Those on EB are unsure whether the extension is automatic or if they need to re-apply to receive PEUC. **Plus, many unemployed workers who had mixed income are still unaware of the Mixed Earners Unemployment Compensation (MEUC).**
3. DOES needs to make sure that all call takers, including outside contractors, have proper training on the program so claimants do not receive a wide range of answers depending on the call taker. **Claimants need to get the same answer no matter who they call. And there needs to be a uniform answer and resolution to the top issues encountered by claimants.**
4. **Many claimants have not been able to file weekly certifications and have received messages from the agency saying they are now ineligible for benefits because they have exhausted traditional UI, PUA, PEUC, or EB. There needs to be a straightforward process to resolve these issues.**
5. DOES must keep its websites (both the DOES site and the DC Networks sites) up-to-date so that claimants can use it as a resource for information. For instance, DOES should remove the outdated information about the December 2020 Continued Assistance Act. This Act expired two weeks ago, and including those expiration dates, as well as other outdated information, on the website is confusing and misleading. Web pages should always note when the last update was made.
6. **DOES must notify the Council's Committee on Labor and Workforce Development any time there is an issue with the UI system that affects more than 100 people.** Currently, the Council only learns of these problems from the claimants.

Thank you for your dedication and service to the District of Columbia. I respectfully request a response by Monday, April 5, 2021.

Sincerely yours,



Elissa Silverman
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