

PUBLIC TESTIMONY  
(W/ATTACHMENTS)

OF

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BEFORE

**COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA**

1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20004

**CHAIRPERSON ELISSA SILVERMAN  
COMMITTEE ON LABOR AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT**

**PUBLIC OVERSIGHT HEARING**

The District's Unemployment Compensation Program During  
the COVID-19 Pandemic and The Unemployment  
Compensation Employer Classification Amendment Act of  
2019 (B23-500)

**Wednesday, September 16, 2020, 10:00 a.m.  
Virtual hearing via Webex**

Thank you Councilwoman Silverman, the Committee on Labor and Workforce Development – and to your staffs – for scheduling this hearing on the District’s Unemployment Compensation Program During the COVID-19 Pandemic.

My name is Taalib-Din Uqdah, native Washingtonian, self-employed Ward 4 entrepreneur and victim of the District’s Unemployment Compensation Program during COVID-19 where we continue to suffer from both, (to be clear), COVID-19 and DOES’s failure to perform.

I can’t speak for DOES’s director, managers and supervisors, I never had the opportunity to speak with them, but I did speak with the hardworking, frontline staffers, who could only offer me stock speeches, sometimes pep-talks, and at their worse – while trying to do good – promises that never came true. I can’t tell you the number of times I heard the words “escalation,” “subject matter expert,” “7-21 days,” “supervisor,” “validation to be attached to the file,” and “PUA examiner,” all in the same sentence. To that end, I’ve attached Exhibit 1 – a chronology of just my July and early August conversations with DOES’s PUA department – to make my point.

My case is one where I had to wait 4 months – starting May 23<sup>rd</sup> – before receiving my first payment September 3<sup>rd</sup>. To date, I have not received all the money I’m entitled to and what I have received, I suspect came as a result of the closing line on Page 2 of Exhibit 1, dated August 27, 2020 that reads:

***“Hopefully, you all can answer these questions or in the alternative see that I receive all the money I’m entitled to, before offering public testimony before the City Council – Elissa Silverman – Wednesday, September 16, 2020, 10AM.”***

So, here I am, one single payment – 9 out of the 15 payments due to me – well short of what I am owed, if you consider the 6 missing payments – from week ending May 23<sup>rd</sup> thru June 27<sup>th</sup> – what DOES calls “back pay,” which includes my baseline payment, plus \$600 from the CARES Act that I have yet to receive. It’s been promised, but it’s like a chicken whose egg hasn’t hatched.

Not that I did anything wrong, the process is fraught with an antiquated system that 6-months into this COVID thing – since DC’s shut-down – DOES is still finding its way and I don’t have a lot of confidence that it’s going to get better. Unfortunately, I’m not allowed to speak to anyone who can articulate what the problem is and (truthfully), I don’t think they even know.

What I do know is this: If there were real empathy for the tens-of-thousands of us caught-up in this mess, they would have gone “old school” and found a cadre of entrepreneurs – those of us who already know how to think outside the system – to help them vet alternatives to whatever their problems are; we still have bills to pay, families to sustain and food to put on the table. If they cared, they could have hired and trained more staff, on a temporary basis – after all, we are unemployed – we could have helped speed-up the process. If we truly consider this to be an emergency, how hard would that have been to implement? It’s not rocket science.

In closing, as part of my testimony, I respectfully ask that you read the Attachments I’ve provided – especially Exhibit 1 – I purposely avoided reading it as “testimony” to protect DOES employees from further public scrutiny. It chronicles seven (7) conversations with DOES’s PUA department – July 6<sup>th</sup> thru August 13<sup>th</sup> – composed as

part of my response to a DOES August 20<sup>th</sup> e-mail inquiry – Exhibit 2 – asking if all questions from my July 8<sup>th</sup> e-mail to them had been answered.

Thank you for the opportunity to offer this testimony; I'd be happy to answer any questions you or your Committee members may have.

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