

PUBLIC TESTIMONY
(W/ATTACHMENTS)

OF

TAALIB-DIN UQDAH

1373 JEFFERSON STREET, NW (WARD 4)
WASHINGTON, DC 20011
TAUQDAH@AOL.COM
202-421-8945

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 23rd – before receiving my first payment September 3rd. 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 23rd thru June 27th – 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 6th thru August 13th – composed as

part of my response to a DOES August 20th e-mail inquiry – Exhibit 2 – asking if all questions from my July 8th 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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