

Committee on Labor and Workforce Development
Oversight Hearing: District's Unemployment Compensation Program / B23-500

Wednesday September 16th
10AM

Councilmember Silverman
Committee Members

Thank you for taking the time to host this hearing and for giving us the opportunity to voice our deep concerns and issues with the Department of Employment Services (DOES). I am here speaking both on my behalf as a hospitality worker in the city and owner of a very small DC-based business. And, for other residents who have not had the opportunity to speak today. I want to speak about my experience and the experience I heard about when I took advantage of public forums across the city addressing quite frankly the crisis at DOES.

I guess in a way I was fortunate that I was in a job transition earlier this year and had been on unemployment, when the mayoral and regional governor orders began to strictly limit capacity forcing hundreds of thousands of people in the region to go on unemployment. Aware of the process and the many steps one goes through to qualify, the trainings workshops etc. I knew the process was not easy and designed to make sure the system is rightfully utilized by those on it. Is the wave of business closures bright waves of new batch of unemployment filings I understood how overwhelmed the agency workforce and DOES staffers were. I think they've done a hero's job in processing and dealing with this many claims and as the wave of business closures bright waves of new batch of unemployment filings.

But as the months wore on - It seems no adjustments had been made, incredible amounts of confusion and uncertainty, not knowing whether to answer a question truthfully might cause a disruption causing hours upon hours and days on the phone to no avail. I saw many ask how to answer not knowing if the truth would result in a suspension of their benefits as they struggled to pay their bills and put food on the table.

Throughout this process the leadership seemed absent - Clear directives and a sense of calm to let citizens know they could count on the process and the agency to be there for them in an absolute time of need.

I was lucky though. I had the fortitude and the resources to fight on with the process and make sure that when my benefits were disrupted I could get them back on track so I could pay my bills. But what of those not so fortunate? As I struggled to find a job and remained on unemployment I took part in forums across the city held by community and political leaders engaging their constituents, always well-attended within engaged, frustrated and disheartened citizens. If the people with resources were struggling to get help. How were those without resources accessing the benefits they needed to sustain during this very difficult time?

I'm not sure what the answer is but I do know there has been an incredible failure at multiple levels attuned to the needs of so many across the city that are reliant upon this money To simply survive due to circumstances completely beyond their control. Are we going to let so many citizens contributing in so many ways across the city remain in flux and confusion and reach destitution because we cannot execute a task in a moment of crisis?

All DC residents deserve better and particularly those that needed this assistance most.

Andrew Shapiro, K& B Sodas