

Committee on Labor and Workforce Development
Elissa Silverman, Chair
Department of Employment Services
Oversight Hearing
John A. Wilson Building

September 16, 2020

Testimony of Trupti Patel, ANC Commissioner-2A03

My name is Trupti Patel, and I am the ANC Commissioner for 2A03. I used to be a tipped worker, but on March 18, 2020 I was laid off along with thousands of restaurant workers due to Covid-19.

The trauma of having lost our livelihood was amplified by the failure of the Department of Employment Services (DOES) Unemployment Insurance (UI) portal. The UI portal is built on platforms that utilizes technology that is inefficient and extremely outdated. As a result of this the website could not handle the amount of claims submitted causing the site to crash and then would force workers to overwhelm the phone lines.

I myself experienced the horrendous wait times on numerous occasions. The average wait time reported by media outlets was 11 hours. When I finally did get through to an agent-I would be informed that I had an overpayment allegation due to my former employer misreporting my wages. I had to go six weeks without unemployment due to this.

My story is nothing compared to that of Ms. Naghmeh Yazdanfar who suffers from a digital divide and not getting clear direction from DOES agents on how to access her benefits and went nearly six months without them. Another tipped worker by the name of Shanara Lucas didn't get access to benefits until this past week. The stories keep getting worse and worse-Jon Rybka, a tipped worker, who's UI determination is \$108 a week due to the fact his former employer only reported his sub minimum hourly wage rate causing him to be cheated out of the full max he is entitled to.

DOES has completely failed the people of DC in the midst of a crisis where it is imperative that with extreme urgency people should have received their direly needed funds. As proud and fierce advocate for ROC-DC our members have stepped up and created a restaurant worker mutual aid-the only one in the country.

Agency head Dr. Unique Morris-Hughes should be fired for the incompetence that workers have had to endure. Her failures have caused severe cases of PTSD and depression and that is unacceptable.