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NEW JERSEY LEGISLATURE

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July 8, 2020

Commissioner Robert Asaro-Angelo
NJ Department of Labor and Workforce Development
1 John Fitch Way
Trenton, NJ 08611

Dear Commissioner Asaro-Angelo,

As you know, legislative district offices have been assisting constituents with their unemployment issues since the onset of the COVID-19 outbreak in New Jersey. Our District 37 staffs have been dutifully assisting constituents to support them during this difficult time. We understand the reasonable delays with processing during this pandemic, but it is disconcerting to learn from many of our residents who contacted us in the last few months for assistance that they still do not have their unemployment claim issues resolved. Our constituents spend countless hours on the phone trying to contact someone at the NJDOL call centers, only to be either disconnected or told to call back at another time. They are desperate to speak to a live human being at the NJDOL to adjudicate the problems with their claim. They contact our staff begging for assistance and at this point, if they have been waiting since March for an answer, they refuse to believe that we don't have any authority to "fix their claim".

We have complied with every protocol given to our offices by NJDOL to aid in resolution of claims. First, submitting cases via email, next, using NJDOL's online form, -- each time the NJDOL changed the system, our offices complied. Then in late May, we were provided with NJDOL representative, Margaret Tyson, who was assigned to handle all our referrals. Now on Tuesday, 6/30/20 staff was given yet another task of entering all of our unsolved cases on a spreadsheet, resulting in hundreds of phone calls to the many District 37 residents we have been trying to assist with their issues during the last four months.

Due to shifts in constituent intake between legislative offices and DOL, we are inquiring -- who in the Department of Labor has been following up on the legislative referrals submitted by our staff since March? Additionally, we are disappointed that our offices need to follow up with constituents to ascertain their claim status despite having already contacted DOL on their behalf.

We appreciate the efforts of DOL staff to assist constituents around the state, however, there is no question that there is something drastically wrong with our system. We are looking for feedback and information as we continue to follow up with our constituents without updates to their cases.

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Today is July 8, 2020, over four months since our staff first began to file referrals with the NJDOL and still many continue to wait for their benefits. They are emailing, calling and pleading for our intervention, yet our offices are hamstrung on how to help. Your staff doesn't speak with them on a regular basis, our staff does. They are our neighbors, our constituents and members of our communities who feel betrayed by the system.

We have a suggestion which might help and could be a model to be utilized throughout the state. The NJDOL should set up a satellite location in Bergen County, enlist the services of about 10 -15 claims representatives to adjudicate claims in-person. The site should be large enough to social distance the NJDOL personnel, accommodate claimants by appointment, who would have their temperatures taken, be masked and have their issues resolved in a one stop appointment. We would be happy to help locate a venue for this endeavor.

As our State continues to re-open, we believe that our constituents must come first. If we are looking to move forward with a stronger, economically stable New Jersey, our constituents must have access to the benefits that they deserve.

Once again, we thank you for your hard work and dedication to the people of New Jersey. We hope to work with you in partnership to better serve our constituents and to get them the help that they need.

We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



Loretta Weinberg
Majority Leader
Senator, District 37



Gordon M. Johnson
Speaker Pro Tempore
Assemblyman, District 37



Valerie Vainieri Huttle
Deputy Speaker
Assemblywoman, District 37