MONTGOMERY COUNTY COUNCIL
ROCKVILLE, MARYLAND

April 29, 2020

The Honorable Lawrence J. Hogan, Jr.
Governor, State of Maryland
State House
100 State Circle
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Dear Governor Hogan,

The Montgomery County Council applauds your strong leadership in addressing the multi-faceted challenges presented by the current coronavirus pandemic. Your and your team's cooperative work throughout this extraordinarily difficult time is bolstering public health and improving ultimate outcomes throughout the State. We greatly appreciate the steps you have taken to keep us and the public informed throughout this time.

Necessary steps such as ordering the closure of non-essential businesses, closing schools, and asking residents to limit essential trips are having the desired effect of slowing the rate of the spread of infection in order to minimize the ultimate harm from the pandemic. One corollary impact has been an unprecedented surge in unemployment, including over 32,000 new unemployment insurance claims filed in Montgomery County in the past three weeks.

We know that the Maryland Department of Labor's Division of Unemployment Insurance is working hard to process new unemployment insurance claims in record numbers. We applaud the Division's efforts to extend the daily hours of the call centers; add Saturday hours; and launch BEACON – a new online unemployment insurance application. All of these efforts are in direct response to provide superior customer service to the people of Maryland in this great time of need. On the County-level, our offices are receiving voluminous requests from residents for help in navigating the State's unemployment application system.

Our constituents have reported difficulties, including:
- Not being able to get through on the phone line;
- Waiting on hold for long periods of time followed by dropped calls;
- The call back feature not working;
- The website being down or freezing while in progress; and
- An inability to create new usernames or passwords.

In order for us to better serve our constituents and ease the burden on the Division's staff, we are seeking additional data to allow us to provide information and context to our residents. Our ability to provide an understanding of the length of time the process will take from filing an unemployment insurance claim to receiving a first payment will help in reducing the burden on State staff.

If data are available, we ask you to direct the Maryland Department of Labor to post on the Division of Unemployment Insurance's website performance metrics, including daily or weekly moving average of:
- Number of days to process a new unemployment insurance claim;
- Length of time for a new claimant to receive a first payment;

- Time at Claims Centers for a call to be answered by a call-taker; and
- Call length.

This would give residents applying for unemployment insurance benefits a better sense of how the process should move forward, which can lessen uncertainty in a dynamic time when information is changing from day-to-day. Additionally and if the data are available, we ask you to direct the Maryland Department of Labor to provide County officials weekly data from the Division of Unemployment Insurance, including:
- Number of weekly continuing unemployment claims, by County;
- Number of additional Claim Center call-takers added since March 15;
- Average daily number of call-takers at Claim Centers;
- Rate of calls dropped by Claim Centers before the caller speaks to a call-taker.

If these additional data are available at the County level, they will allow us to help the State disseminate needed information to more residents; to help our residents better understand the system and process for filing unemployment insurance claims, and give us additional information about the magnitude of current unemployment in the State. Finally, we ask that you provide the data in multiple languages. In general, for this and other communication, a PSA in multiple languages for those who do not read or write in their languages would be incredibly useful.

Sincerely,

Will Jawando
Councilmember At-Large

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