



NORTH CAROLINA GENERAL ASSEMBLY
NORTH CAROLINA SENATE

April 2, 2020

VIA ELECTRONIC MAIL ONLY

Tony Copeland, Secretary
Department of Commerce
acopeland@nccommerce.com

Dear Secretary Copeland:

This is a crushingly difficult time for thousands of employees and employers in our state. Many face unthinkable closures and layoffs. We are sure Mr. Lockhart Taylor and the Division of Employment Security know better than most that this is an unprecedented and difficult time. We thank them for their service.

According to media reports, more than 300,000 North Carolinians have filed for unemployment benefits in the last two weeks of March, with the vast majority of claimants citing COVID-19 as the reason for their claims.

According to the Tax Foundation, for the period covering March 14 to March 21, North Carolina experienced a greater than 2,500% surge in unemployment claims. That surge would inundate even the best-designed system.

Even with this unexpected surge, we know you also understand the challenges for our constituents as they face uncertain futures. Many of them have lost their jobs through no fault of their own. They have suddenly become dependent on the availability of the Department's unemployment benefits to pay bills and buy groceries for their families. Their need is immediate and critical. And they have zero patience for government inefficiency and bureaucracy.

In recent days, we have been made aware that the Division is increasing its capacity in response to the surge in new unemployment claims by: 1) opening a new call center with a private contractor, 2) hiring additional staff to help process claims and 3) upgrading the Division's IT capacity so that claims can be processed more effectively when filed online. We commend these concrete steps.

However, we continue to hear daily if not hourly from our constituents about the ways in which the Commerce Department's unemployment benefits system cannot respond adequately to the rapid increase in unemployment claims. These citizens are rightfully anxious about their newly desperate circumstances.

In this trying time, we write to offer help and support. But things need to improve quickly. We look to you and the Governor to lead. What concrete steps on manpower and technology are you taking right now to rectify a backlog that will hurt families all over the state? Should some or all of the entire workforce at the Department of Commerce be repurposed immediately to help Mr. Taylor and his division?

Are there things that we can do right now before the General Assembly returns to help? Furthermore, because the General Assembly is scheduled to return to session on April 28, we welcome your feedback on what policy changes could be enacted into law to allow the Department to better deliver critical support to everyday North Carolinians in a timely fashion.

Even in the face of this crisis, we are confident that we can come together as elected officials and public servants to ensure that our citizens receive what they were promised before it is too late. We are in this together, but our constituents need answers.

Sincerely,



Sen. Ted Alexander



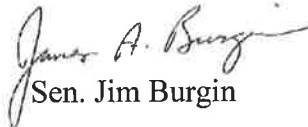
Sen. Deanna Ballard



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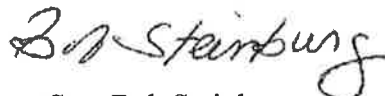
Sen. Bill Rabon



Sen. Norm Sanderson



Sen. Vickie Sawyer



Sen. Bob Steinburg

CC: Governor Roy Cooper
Assistant Secretary Lockhart Taylor