



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Pamela Helming

NYS SENATE REPUBLICANS: FIX THE BROKEN UNEMPLOYMENT SYSTEM NOW

PAMELA HELMING May 11, 2020



Albany, NY — Members of the New York State Senate Republican Conference today called on Governor Andrew Cuomo to fix his broken unemployment system and proposed a series of recommendations to remedy failures at the Department of Labor. Senate Republicans released a video with their call to the Governor and DOL, and the story of what is happening to real people because of the administration's failure.

As a result of the coronavirus pandemic, unemployment has skyrocketed to 1.76 million New Yorkers, and constituents, growing increasingly hopeless, have frantically called Republican state Senate offices reporting that they cannot get proper or timely assistance from DOL, or that they filed nearly two months ago and have not received a single check. Tearful callers say they cannot afford to put food on the table.

While the State has reportedly spent nearly \$88 million on high-end firm Deloitte to overhaul the DOL call system and for 200 firm employees, desperate unemployed New Yorkers still cannot get through or have legitimate filings stuck in the system.

Since DOL has been unable to fix or properly address these issues on their own, we are calling for the following immediate steps to be taken:

- The Governor must streamline application certifications and allow applicants to “certify” upon application, while still providing appropriate safeguards to help ensure that benefits only go to eligible New Yorkers;
- In addition to the 3,000 employees currently working phones, the DOL must collaborate with other state agencies to train thousands more of the state’s workforce, who are staying at home, to rapidly field calls and help New Yorkers file to receive benefits immediately;
- The State Comptroller, who oversees payments, contracts, and finances in the state, should be empowered to provide Emergency Oversight and Assistance to DOL;
- Comptroller DiNapoli should conduct an immediate, fast-track audit of the DOL’s procedures and administration of the program; and
- A State Legislative Joint Committee should conduct an immediate review and investigation into DOL’s failed handling of unemployment benefits throughout the pandemic.

“Our office receives calls starting at 6 a.m. with unemployed residents desperate for assistance, and we try as best we can to connect them to the Department of Labor and to help get them their desperately needed checks, but what is happening in New York to unemployed New Yorkers forced out of work is devastating. Unemployed New Yorkers do not want to hear that they will eventually receive money backdated to the time that they were unemployed because they need money now. This system needs to work to allow New Yorkers to pay their bills and put food on the table,” said Senate Republican Leader John J. Flanagan.

“People are hurting and the help they so urgently require, and are waiting patiently for despite facing devastating financial hardship, has not arrived and is unacceptable,” said Senate Republican Deputy Leader Joe Griffo.

“I fully understand these are unprecedented times and that the New York State Department of Labor is under immense pressure,” said Senator Patty Ritchie. “However, hundreds of the people contacting my office filed claims nearly two months ago and have yet to see a dime — or even get a call back — from DOL. With every day that passes it becomes more apparent that there are major issues with the system. This issue, and the struggle of these people, needs more attention.”

“The unemployment insurance issue has been an unmitigated disaster for thousands of families in the communities I represent and millions across New York. My office receives hundreds of calls every week from desperate families struggling to pay their rent, single moms with \$11.00 in their bank account struggling to feed their children and single fathers struggling to pay their bills and put food on the table. Rather than spending time talking to Stephen Colbert, Jimmy Fallon, Ellen DeGeneres or any other celebrity talk show hosts,

Governor Cuomo should be talking with the families suffering across his state who are desperately trying to survive. Enough is enough. It's time to fix this broken system," said Senator Fred Akshar.

"I understand the Department of Labor is facing unprecedented demand, but unemployed New Yorkers cannot wait any longer for help. Too many have endured weeks of delays, unanswered phone calls and unfulfilled promises that their benefits are on the way. Out of work constituents have been more than patient. Hundreds have contacted my office, frustrated and in desperate need of money to feed their families and to pay their bills. Efforts to fix the system have not gone far enough and the administration needs to do more to ensure our citizens get the help they need," said Senator Patrick Gallivan.

"New York State dramatically scaled back the economy for public health concerns and it's long past time for the Governor and DOL to deliver to those in need. New Yorkers don't want to hear about a bureaucracy doing 'its best.' They don't want to be on the phone for 12 hours and they don't want to be waiting eight weeks for their benefits," said Senator Rob Ortt.

"I'm approaching 500 calls from my constituents who can't access unemployment benefits that their families desperately need," said Senator Rich Funke. "I'm calling on Governor Cuomo to take control of this situation personally and ensure it's fixed. He prides himself on how he can manage a crisis. The mess at unemployment is a crisis. It's long past time for him to take responsibility and handle it."

"The State Department of Labor's continued inability to correct the growing problems within New York's broken unemployment system is unacceptable and has become a national disgrace. This problem has been ongoing for weeks with still no end in sight. As our economy has crashed, unemployment has now exploded to 1.76 million New Yorkers. Unemployed workers unsure how they'll pay for food for their families don't want to hear more Albany

bureaucratic doublespeak and empty promises. This problem needs to get fixed. Now. If there's time for daily press conferences then there's time to fix the system and get folks who are unemployed and hurting the help they so desperately need, deserve, and have been waiting for," said Senator Daphne Jordan.

"Across New York State, families are still struggling to put food on the table and pay their bills because of continued delays with unemployment. To many, these delays are the difference between being able to keep their lights on and their rent/mortgage paid. New York has one of the largest, most expensive state governments in the nation and should be able to figure out how to process these applications in a timely way. This system has been a total disaster and needs to be fixed fast," said Senator Pam Helming.

"I realize the Labor Department has been hit with an unprecedented amount of unemployment insurance claims due to the COVID-19 pandemic and I've been very patient with them in addressing their backlog. However, it's now been almost two months and my office continues to be inundated with hundreds of calls, emails and messages a day of outraged New Yorkers who can't get ahold of someone at the Labor Department or are getting the runaround from them. Totally unacceptable! My staff and I are working day and night to help them get their benefits but we need a functioning department that is responsive and accountable to taxpayers and we need it now!" said Senator Jim Tedisco.

"My office is being inundated with calls and emails from residents literally pleading for help accessing their unemployment benefits. These are single parents, seniors, veterans, small business owners, all real people who are being pushed to their financial breaking points as a result of gross bureaucratic dysfunction. These New Yorkers are unemployed through no fault of their own, but because they are doing their part to promote public health. Enough is enough. New York needs to step up and immediately provide them with the relief they have been promised," said Senator Sue Serino.

“At a time when individuals and families need the state to come through for them they are instead left hurting and in the dark. Many people have been waiting weeks, even months, for essential unemployment benefits to feed their families and maintain some semblance of a normal life. The inability of the Department of Labor to process these claims is nothing short of a disaster. This is a crisis we cannot tolerate any longer,” said Senator James L. Seward.

“My staff and I basically spend all day, every day, assisting constituents trying to obtain the unemployment benefits they need and deserve. These reforms are necessary immediately - or I am concerned we are going to see tragic actions taken by desperate individuals,” said Senator Phil Boyle.

“The unemployment fiasco at the Department of Labor is a bureaucratic failure of epic proportions. In the past two months, the Governor has mobilized state resources to achieve some big goals like building field hospitals and procuring scarce COVID-19 testing kits and ventilators. Yet, he has shown none of the same urgency in tackling this problem and that needs to change immediately. The desperation of my laid off constituents is rising as their ability to feed their children, pay the rent or mortgage and keep the lights on gets harder,” said Senator George Borrello. “However, the best and most lasting fix for this problem is the safe restarting of our economy so people can get back to work. That will reduce the unprecedented need for unemployment benefits and halt the mounting damage to our economy.”

VIDEO: <https://youtu.be/k73KdxPMDJQ>

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