

NEW YORK
STATE
SENATE



ALBANY, NEW YORK 12247

March 30, 2021

Roberta Reardon
Commissioner
New York State Department of Labor
Building 12
W.A. Harriman Campus
Albany, NY 12240

Dear Commissioner Reardon,

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused unprecedented job losses and economic instability, resulting in a major influx of unemployment insurance claims for the Department of Labor (DOL). As we mark one year of the pandemic and ensuing shutdown, constituents still face serious challenges in receiving unemployment benefits they are owed, and too often are unable to even receive a return phone call from the DOL.

Constituents contact our offices daily with issues concerning the DOL, almost all stemming from an inability to contact the Department via phone. Issues with unemployment make up a significant portion of our constituent service teams' caseload. Applicants are almost never able to even get in a telephone queue to speak with a representative because the phone disconnects them when the call volume is too high. Constituents report calling the DOL multiple times a day, at all times of the day, for weeks and months on end without success reaching a representative. Even quick, easily solvable questions such as missed payments, incorrect certification, and pending claims, take weeks or months to resolve. These delays result in missed rent payments, empty refrigerators, and further suffering. When these constituents reach out to our offices desperate for help, our use of the DOL's elected official inquiry form rarely results in timely calls back, and it takes multiple emails to the UI division for an individual constituent to receive a call or have an issue rectified.

Some delays and backlog are understandable due to the overwhelming demand. What defies understanding are the hours-long telephone queues, unresponsiveness to elected officials' inquiries, and the near impossibility of contacting a government agency responsible for the welfare of millions of New Yorkers after a year of the COVID-19 pandemic. We urge the Department to take immediate action to hire enough staff to deal with the backlog of cases and improve responsiveness to elected officials and New Yorkers applying for UI. Countless New Yorkers are not receiving benefits they are entitled to, risking the financial stability of their families, as a result of a failed bureaucracy.

We stand ready to ensure the DOL has the resources and staffing it needs to handle the unemployment claims backlog and ensure the integrity of the unemployment system.

We await your response to this letter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Elijah Reichlin-Melnick". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name being particularly prominent.

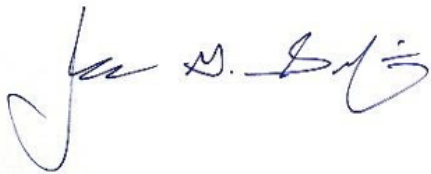
Sen. Elijah Reichlin-Melnick

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "A. Biaggi". The signature is stylized and cursive, with the first letter of the first name being a large, looped 'A'.

Sen. Alessandra Biaggi

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Brian Kavanagh". The signature is bold and cursive, with the first name being the most prominent part.

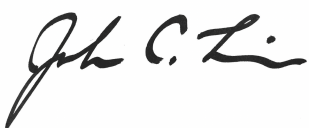
Sen. Brian Kavanagh

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "James M. Skoufis". The signature is cursive and somewhat loose, with the first name being the most prominent part.

Sen. James M. Skoufis

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michelle Hinchey". The signature is cursive and somewhat compact, with the first name being the most prominent part.

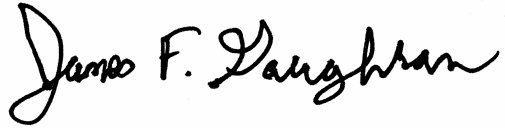
Sen. Michelle Hinchey

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John C. Liu". The signature is cursive and somewhat compact, with the first name being the most prominent part.

Sen. John C. Liu



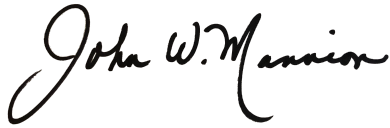
Sen. Timothy M. Kennedy



Sen. James F. Gaughran



Sen. Roxanne Persaud



Sen. John W. Mannion



Sen. Sean M. Ryan



Sen. Jeremy A. Cooney