

December 17, 2020

The Honorable Mike DeWine
Governor of Ohio
Riffe Center, 30th Floor
77 South High Street
Columbus, OH 43215

Dear Governor DeWine:

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to affect the lives of all Ohioans and has caused hundreds of thousands of Ohioans to lose their jobs or income. Unemployment insurance (UI) is intended to provide these workers a safety net until they are able to return to work, but too many have difficulty contacting the Ohio Department of Jobs and Family Services (ODJFS) and have been forced to go without the benefits they deserve. ODJFS employees are important public servants that provide critical services to Ohioans, and it is imperative that they are given the resources, training, and staffing levels to ensure they can help Ohioans. I urge you to take action to improve the accessibility and quality of ODJFS services by fully supporting ODJFS employees and hiring additional employees to ensure all Ohioans who are eligible receive the UI benefits they deserve.

My office has heard from hundreds of Ohioans who have not received their UI benefits because they are unable to reach someone at ODJFS. These constituents report that calls and emails go unreturned, often for weeks or even months. Individuals are frequently forced to wait on the phone for hours, and some individuals, even after waiting that long, report being disconnected before they talk to any official at ODJFS. In some cases, Ohioans have made hundreds of unsuccessful attempts to contact someone at ODJFS.

Even when contact is made with an ODJFS employee, Ohioans report that their UI complications go unresolved. In some instances, they are redirected to another department and then another one without finding anyone who is able to answer their questions. Constituents have also written to me reporting that they are given conflicting information from different ODJFS employees. In other cases, Ohioans are told that ODJFS cannot explain why their UI case has not been resolved or when it will be resolved.

Additionally, inaccurate information and mistakes have prevented Ohioans from getting their UI benefits. I have received message from individuals who cannot get fraud alerts removed from their accounts, even though they have provided all the requested documentation. Constituents also inform me that ODJFS is still denying individuals UI eligibility, even when they meet the

criteria under the state or federal UI programs. Furthermore, Ohioans are still being forced to repay UI overpayments even when the errors were made through no fault of their own.

ODJFS employees have been tasked with implementing a new federal UI program plus processing hundreds of thousands of UI claims. They have been forced to do so while working with the state's outdated UI IT system and while taking the necessary precautions to protect themselves and their families from COVID-19. ODJFS employees are dedicated public servants, but they cannot be expected to overcome years of neglect of Ohio's UI system or insufficient staffing levels during a pandemic. I urge you to invest more resources in ODJFS, including the hiring of more personnel, to make sure these dedicated servants are able to do their jobs and that Ohioans are able to get the support and the UI benefits they need to get through this pandemic.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Sherrod Brown". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Sherrod Brown
United States Senator