

COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS
SUBCOMMITTEE ON TRADE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON WORKER & FAMILY SUPPORT

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April 24, 2020

The Honorable Richard E. Neal
Chairman
House Committee on Ways and Means
1102 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Neal:

The *CARES Act*, which was signed into law on March 27, 2020, expands eligibility for Unemployment Insurance (UI) benefits, supplements weekly state benefits with additional federally-financed benefits, and provides additional weeks of federally-financed benefits during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, because UI is a federal-state program, the ability of unemployed workers to access the benefits they are owed depends entirely on how well or poorly the program is administered by the state in which they live.

To date, the state of Florida has profoundly underperformed in terms of making full and timely UI payments to eligible residents. Many individuals have been unable to submit online applications because the state-administered website crashes. Many others have applied but received no payment at all, despite clear eligibility. Still others have received payments, but less than the amount they are legally owed. Nearly every applicant has struggled to obtain information from the state regarding the status of their claim.

The statistics, which the Florida Department of Economic Opportunity began to release to the public last week, paint a dismal picture. For example, the state received at least 668,323 applications between March 15 and April 20, but made only 131,770 payments for \$600, even though eligible unemployed workers—whether they were employed by a business or self-employed—are entitled to this weekly federally-financed payment under the *CARES Act*. That's less than one in five applicants. That figure would be even worse if it accounted for unemployed workers who have been unable to submit an application for benefits due to website defects.

Because many of the problems with Florida's UI program were years in the making, I have asked the Office of Inspector General at the U.S. Department of Labor to conduct a performance audit of how Florida has operated and managed its UI program over the last decade, in order to identify the reasons for the program's deficiencies and help the state swiftly develop a corrective action plan.

In addition, given that my office has been inundated with calls from anxious and increasingly desperate individuals from across the state, I created an online survey for residents to describe their experience applying for UI, with the pledge that I would share the results with federal and state leaders in order to inform their actions going forward.

Over 8,300 Central Floridians completed the survey, the full results of which I have enclosed. Here are the main takeaways:

- Nearly 93 percent of respondents said they had a “very negative” experience with the UI application process, while only 0.5 percent rated their experience as “very positive” or “somewhat positive.”
- Only 1 percent said they encountered no problems during the application process, while nearly 93 percent reported that the website crashed, froze, or otherwise failed to load.
- Nearly 40 percent said they were unable to complete their application due to problems with the website or another aspect of the application process.
- Less than 3 percent said they successfully submitted an application and received their benefits.

These survey results are deeply disturbing and reinforce the conclusion that Florida’s UI system is failing precisely when it is needed the most, causing incalculable economic damage and emotional distress. As Congress and the President prepare to negotiate additional COVID-19 relief packages, we must hold states like Florida accountable and do everything possible to ensure that federal support reaches the people who need it, as national leaders intended, and that it is not squandered or delayed due to incompetence or indifference.

Sincerely,



Stephanie Murphy
Member of Congress

cc: The Honorable Kevin Brady, Ranking Member, House Committee on Ways and Means
The Honorable Marco Rubio, U.S. Senator
The Honorable Rick Scott, U.S. Senator
Members of the Florida Delegation, U.S. House of Representatives

Enclosure: Rep. Stephanie Murphy Survey for Central Floridians Seeking Unemployment Benefits