

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

BLUE DOG COALITION  
CO-CHAIR FOR ADMINISTRATION

FUTURE FORUM  
CHAIR



CONGRESSWOMAN STEPHANIE MURPHY  
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
FLORIDA, 7TH DISTRICT

WASHINGTON OFFICE  
1710 LONGWORTH HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING  
WASHINGTON, DC 20515  
(202) 225-4035

ORLANDO OFFICE  
225 E ROBINSON ST, SUITE 525  
ORLANDO, FL 32801  
(888) 205-5421

SANFORD OFFICE  
110 W FIRST ST, SUITE 210  
SANFORD, FL 32771  
(888) 205-5421

April 24, 2020

The President  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Ave., NW  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

The *CARES Act*, which you 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 his or her claim.

Statistics that 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 an 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 national leaders 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 we intended, and that is not squandered or delayed due to incompetence or indifference.

Sincerely,



Stephanie Murphy  
Member of Congress

cc: The Honorable Mike Pence, Vice President of the United States  
The Honorable Eugene Scalia, Secretary, U.S. Department of Labor  
The Honorable Scott Dahl, Inspector General, U.S. Department of Labor

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