



**Sponsor Testimony: House Bill 614**

**State Representative Mark Fraizer, District 71**

**House Ways and Means Committee**

**May 12, 2020**

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According to the most recent data from ODJFS, there were 1,059,617 unduplicated total filed claims in Ohio since March 15<sup>th</sup>. For perspective, over the previous seven weeks, there have been more initial jobless claims filed than during the last three years combined.

Out of the 1,059,617 unduplicated total filed claims – ODJFS has distributed more than \$2.1 billion in unemployment compensation payments to more than 559,000 Ohioans. Now we know not everyone who applies may be eligible to receive benefits, but the fact is there are too many eligible Ohioans who are not receiving benefits.

These are not statistics. These are Ohioans. These are our constituents. They've worked hard, played by the rules and, through no fault of their own, are now facing economic uncertainty. They need this crucial funding to continue to put food on the table, keep the lights on, and provide for their family. Our constituents rely on this system and now they are relying on us to make it better.

While we understand the system is being utilized at an extreme rate and some individuals have been paid, we are also hearing stories from individuals who were laid off due to the coronavirus – applied for unemployment benefit right away and are returning to work while never receiving one check. We need to understand how and why it can take weeks to receive benefits.

Additionally, separate from the "traditional" unemployment system, in March, the U.S. Congress authorized expanded unemployment benefits through the CARES Act. Provisions within the CARES Act extended unemployment benefits for individuals that are not traditionally eligible for unemployment benefits. As of today, individuals have only been able to pre-register. Ohio's unemployment system must be able to scale to handle greater volumes while being flexible enough to meet additional Federal requirements during disasters and pandemics for expanded eligibility.

As my joint sponsor mentioned, we view H.B. 614 as an opportunity to learn what went wrong and where we can make improvements to the actual system. H.B. 614 provides a unique opportunity to allow all stakeholders to help shape the legislation. The committee process

enables everyone to have a voice in a public forum and will let Ohioans to have a better understanding of the actual unemployment system. Additionally, the committee process allows us as the General Assembly to make recommendations and provide solutions via the legislative process.

As we hear from experts, citizens, and the administration, below are some of our goals for H.B. 614.

1. Understand the existing process for both typical and non-typical unemployment recipients during Covid-19.
2. Review the approval standards and technological improvements to ensure future efficiency.
3. Determine measurable metrics to ensure positive constituent experience.
4. Solicit expert opinion on best practices for technology, customer relationship management, customer service, customer experience, and review other State's operational models and technological investment.
5. Recommend improvements for the process, technology, and future enhancements; ensure metrics and recommendations are used to improve the existing system.

We ask for the committee's support to help improve the unemployment system for Ohioans and we welcome any questions members may have at this time.