



Sponsor Testimony: House Bill 614
State Representative Tracy Richardson, District 86
House Ways and Means Committee

May 12, 2020

Good afternoon Chairman Merrin, Vice Chair LaRe, Ranking Member Rogers, and members of the House Ways and Means Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to provide sponsor testimony today on House Bill 614.

COVID-19 has had a widespread and dramatic impact on all Ohioans. Over the last seven weeks, over one million Ohioans have filed for unemployment. That's more than in the last three years combined.

We've all heard from constituents regarding the challenges they have faced trying to file for unemployment. One of my constituents, Lia, started filing for unemployment in March when the restaurant she manages furloughed her. She recently emailed my office stating, "I have been unemployed now for over two months battling this system." At present, she is "getting by" with money provided to her by friends via PayPal and cash. Lia's story is all too familiar across Ohio. We've introduced this legislation to have a better understanding why Ohioans are facing these circumstances and how we can assist in helping to fix the problems.

The bill before you today is one page long – for now. It expresses the legislature's intent to study and reform the application, processing and administration of Ohio's unemployment system. In short, how do we improve our system so that it is better and more responsive for the people of Ohio?

Clearly, our bill is unique from what we are used to seeing initiated in the House. Normally, a bill will contain specific issues and the goal of committee is to determine whether those recommendations are relevant and necessary. Committees discuss and debate the value of the proposal/proposals contained in the bill and then ultimately vote to either support or reject it. Our approach is different.

As a trained military leader, I've learned to define a problem, work with others to determine ways to resolve it, decide on a plan and then execute the plan. In our approach with this bill, we

have no predetermined recommendations or outcome, other than to improve the system. That's why we're here today, in the spirit of finding answers. Our goal is to work collaboratively with you, the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services, stakeholders, subject matter experts and constituents to determine how we can proceed to improve the process and provide legislative options.

While we know there will be conversations regarding the solvency of the system in the weeks and months ahead, which are important, it is our intent that House Bill 614 focus solely on the system and process itself – the actual delivery of services and relief.

I wish to state upfront that House Bill 614 is not an attempt to look for a scapegoat to blame for the cumbersome, delayed and frustrating experience our constituents are encountering in the unemployment application process. It is our goal to keep the focus on understanding the challenges and identifying potential solutions so we can better serve Ohioans.

My colleague Representative Fraizer will now provide more details for you.