

May 18th, 2020

To the House Ways and Means Committee

As COVID-19 quickly swept across our nation and millions of Americans started to become temporarily, if not permanently, unemployed I started following the numerous updates to the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services Unemployment Division. Unfortunately I can quite certainly say that the process did not work, even with the updates.

I currently work for a small manufacturing company based in rural Ohio. My job title is HR Manager. During the last week of March 2020 my company made the hard decision to furlough the majority of our employees for a short time, rather than have to permanently lay any of them off. During the month of April 2020 if we had any employees working, none of them were working full time.

I started compiling information and delivering it to my employees because I wanted the unemployment claims process to be smooth and efficient. I believed I personally would be able to quickly get approved because I have experience on the employer side of unemployment. Unfortunately that was not the case. Although I only qualified for one week of unemployment, the claim was denied for some odd reason. The stress of having one claim denied wasn't that bad, but my significant other was having his claims held up as well. Because the people in my life trusted my judgement/experience with this system they were continuously reaching out to me in the hopes that I could navigate them through whatever they needed to do to be paid. Below is a list of the people in my life and how long they have waited to be paid:

- Matthew P. – 5 weeks – Eventually Paid
- Marie P. – 5 weeks – Eventually Paid
- Scott S. – 3 weeks – Still Not Paid
- Christian T. – 5 weeks – Still Not Paid

This list doesn't include the employees I have that would reach out to me in frustration because it had been weeks since they were paid. One of my conversations went as follows "Amber, do you have any good numbers to call unemployment? I haven't seen any money. It keeps saying that I have a break in claim. Don't have a clue what's going on with my unemployment" My response? I'm sorry, I wish I did. I haven't been able to get through myself.

The frustration I was feeling wasn't just my own or my own families, it was the frustration of every Ohioan who would call countless times and not even be able to get on hold. I even said to others, if I could just get on hold I would sit my phone down and stay on hold all day if I needed to.

Eventually, one by one we started getting ahold of people at the unemployment office. To our frustration though, we couldn't be helped. We would be told, "You need a Tier 2 person for that. They will call you back in 72 hours". We would wait and never received a call. (To this day, I've need been called back). Again, we would call and get placed on hold and finally things would be fixed, but without any explanation as to what went wrong. One employee told us it was luck of the draw.

Finally, I try not to complain without offering solutions. I'm a part of a huge network of HR Professionals around the country. I was reading about how other states were utilizing the employer to provide details for the unemployed employees. It is much easier for me to create a file with all the information needed for each employee and send it over to ODJFS, then it is to have each of my employees try to do it themselves. I'm not saying this option is the option we need to go with but we can't sit back and let millions of Ohio families starve and not be able to pay their bills because they can't even get through on a phone line.

Thank you,

Amber Shape