

Testimony: House Bill 614

Testimony of Jacqueline (Jackie) Mitchell

House Ways and Means Committee

June 3, 2020

Chairman Merrin, Vice Chair LaRe, Ranking Member Rogers, Members of the Ways and Means Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to share my experience from an HR Managers perspective regarding the Unemployment process due to COVID-19 as part of your fact-finding process under House Bill 614.

I am the HR Manager for the Reineke Family Dealerships. We are an organization of 8 EIN's with approximately 460 employees within those EIN's. The Unemployment process during the COVID-19 pandemic has been challenging to say the least. I understand that it was hastily put upon the State to set up a plan based on Federal guidelines to ensure that all employees Laid off/furloughed would be able to have an income during this unprecedented time.

Some of the issues that I have had and continue to have are:

- I gave our Laid Off employees the Mass Layoff Instruction Sheet, pre-filled with the information for the store they work at. Even using that form I have multiple employees who are still not receiving Unemployment Compensation.
- Because of the additional Federal \$600.00 paid to each employee collecting Unemployment there is no incentive for some employees to return to work as this brought some individuals wages higher then if they were employed.
- The paperwork involved is inefficient and unmanageable. Some of the documents I received from ODJFS are: *Determination of Unemployment Compensation Benefits, Request to Employer for Separation Information and Notice that a Request for Appeal has been Filed*. For some employees I received up to five (5) documents that I needed to respond to. In a two-day period I received almost 100 forms that needed a response. It was overwhelming for myself and my staff.
- It has been very frustrating that I did not (don't) have the ability to assist any of our employees when they were (are) having problems with either their paperwork or the filing process.
- I have one employee that filed on 5-20-20, received notice on 5-21-20 that his claim was accepted then received two payments on 5-27-20. The payments were substantial which has caused some concern to him. He was uncomfortable when he saw the deposits, called me and the best I could tell him was to call ODJFS. It took multiple calls over two days before he finally spoke with someone, who then transferred him to someone else, who then needed to speak with a Supervisor. He was then told that he could send an email explaining the situation, but basically it is Federal funds so he shouldn't worry about it. He is still uncomfortable with being paid that amount of money with no resolution. (i.e.: If he spends the money and the Federal government comes back a year from now demanding the funds be repaid, what does he do then?)

- There are employees we Terminated before COVID-19 that were then Laid Off from their new employer that we are being Charged for. These previous employees were terminated for reasons such as sexual harassment, racist posting, etc. Due to these reasons these individuals should not be eligible for unemployment or the additional Federal unemployment and we should not be responsible for any of their Unemployment Charges.
- There are employees that quit to take jobs elsewhere that we are being charged for. It takes time to appeal these Determinations making the process that much more cumbersome.
- We have several employees that we only call to work as needed, on call employees, that were not Laid Off by us and have applied for and received Unemployment Benefits.
- A lot of the forms came with a Proportional Charge to us. The amounts were also on the monthly *Notice of Benefits Paid and Charged to the Employer*. Per the Governor's Order and the CARES Act, these charges should be charged to the mutualized account. These notices, also, required me to file an appeal.

I feel there are several ways to make the Unemployment Filing Process easier in the case of a pandemic or other major event:

- A spreadsheet updated weekly listing the Employee name, EIN and any other information required by ODJFS for those either being Laid Off or being asked to Return to Work would have made the entire process easier and more efficient.
- A dedicated ODJFS agent that we could call when there are questions or issues with an employee would eliminate a lot of hassles.
- The Delivery Center should be based on location of the Employer versus the last four of the Employee's SSN.

I appreciate the opportunity to air my grievances and suggestions to the Members of the Ways and Means Committee. I hope this helps the Committee to come up with a more efficient way that would be a benefit to both the Employer and the Employee to handle Unemployment Claims should the need arise again.

Sincerely,

Jackie Mitchell

HR Director

Reineke Family Dealerships

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