

House Ways and Means Committee  
Written Testimony for House Bill 614  
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Dear Chairman Merrin, Vice Chairman LaRe, Ranking Member Rogers and members of the House Ways and Means Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to share my experience with Ohio's unemployment process.

I will try to keep this as brief as I possibly can, I promise you I could write a small novel. Little background on myself. I was a single parent raising 2 girls on my own. Our lives changed March 7, 2005 when I was STRUCK down with MS. When I say struck, I mean I went to work on Friday, then to bed that evening, thinking I was getting a touch of the Flu that was going around my office. Woke up Saturday not being able to walk and spent next 2 years in and out of hospitals trying to get my exacerbation into remission. I eventually had to leave my job after 16 1/2 years of service. I have had numerous challenges since then, cervical cancer, kidney cancer, osteopenia and numerous surgeries. I'm not telling you this for pity, it's so people can understand I'm not a poor me type of person. I'm an "Well ok, this sucks, what next" type of person.

I temporarily was laid off due to Covid-19. I have worked part-time jobs in order to stay active as well as make a car and insurance payments. I had called the Governor's office when all of this started asking the young gentleman that answered, my concerns about being unemployed by the executive decision that had just been issued by Governor DeWine and Dr. Amy Acton's orders. I understood completely but was worried how I was going to be able to pay bills and keep my car. The young gentleman that answered the Governor's phone was so polite and explained how I was able to collect unemployment, even being self-employed.

So, let's now take a moment to relish in my unemployment journey. I had to file with my phone due to not having access to a computer. I got on the website, sent in the information required, then waited for my approval. Instead I received a notification I was not able to retrieve without having to reset my sign in code. After an hour of trying to reset my code, my notice said I was denied and to please contact the office for questions. What? Why was I denied? I could not understand. I was then asked to send in my weekly claims as well. So I did that and sent in an appeal at the same time. Then I received 2 envelopes stating I needed to reset my password. That was the heading. Could I open them? No, but fortunately I was able to log on. I tried hundreds of time to call into the unemployment office. Not ONCE was I able to get through. I'm in a panic. I called Governor DeWine's office only to get a recording to press this number, that number if you know your parties ext. please enter it now. The operator and DeWine's mailboxes were both full. I can't tell you how many times I called his office to try to talk to a human being. I even called our local county Department of Unemployment asking for help only to be told I had to call Columbus they couldn't help me. Seriously? I decided my life at this point was to beg anybody for help.

I called DeWine's office and tried to contact Lt. Gov. Husted and was unable to get to him. I did get a message line of someone with the same last name but worked for the department of Medicaid. I'm not proud of this but I left a message begging this man to please give somebody my information and to call me regarding unemployment. I couldn't get through. Then I contacted a news reporter that I heard asking questions at the end of DeWine's daily State address to the citizens of Ohio. This reporter did respond to me. OMG FINALLY! A human! I gave him info on what I had been going through, the hundreds of calls, the not understanding why, trying to call Governor's office, relayed that each time you called the unemployment line, you had to go through 4 minutes of push this, push that, if you are this push that only to be told at THE VERY END OF THE LONG MESSAGE that due to a high call volume they were unable to take my call at this time and to please call back at a later time. Are you kidding me? He said he was so sorry that I was going through this and he would help out the best he could and to please send him information. I phone snapped my calls, my unemployment messages everything I could. Then I saw a report of people dying, bodies having to be placed in a park in New York due to hospital morgues and funeral parlors inability to keep up with the mounting virus deaths, people protesting in D.C and other states, so many other stories of crap going on due to covid-19. I became ashamed of myself asking for help with this when so many others were suffering too. I then asked the newsman to just forget it. I thanked him for just answering me so back to the phone calls I went.

Their available 7 days a week did not make a difference. I called everyday trying to get through. Sent an email to Governor DeWine asking for help with a standard response appreciating my patience in this pandemic crisis blah blah blah. Kept trying to call his office, standard recording mailboxes were full, so was the operators, please try back press this button etc. I'm losing my mind at this point. I even joined twitter to try to get DeWine, Husted to address this and get help. I posted a photo I snapped, from my phone that showed how many times I called the unemployment line. In one session it was 67 times, another it was 100. I finally decided to start calling at 6:50am. Just hit redial and go through the standard we are closed please try back during normal business hours 7am-7pm. I called at 6:59am and was told they were closed so I hit redial at exactly 7am! OMG OPEN! I got this! It was even a different recording. I was ecstatic, went through the entire recording of press this press that to get to the VERY END to be told that due to the high call volume of calls they could not take my call and to please try back later. I'm not a natural crier but I started to get emotionally frustrated and started to cry. I shouted a few cuss words, ate breakfast then sat myself down to try to get through, I timed this recording it was shorter, about 2 minutes which was down from the minutes it was originally. My frustration grew so I decided to just start hitting redial at 6:30pm. at 6:59pm I got the call back, I hit redial immediately it was 7pm to be told the office was now closed to please call back during normal business hours or non-peak times. My phone went flying, my anger surmounted and I was angry beyond belief. I had to call my daughter to talk me down because stress will exacerbate my symptoms and I had already been through enough crap back at the end of January into February.

I then decided that if people were going to protest then I'm going to as well. I'm not protesting the orders, I was going to protest 8,000 new employees with only 1 person answering the doggone phones!! Got in my car with my MS rollator, a small cooler, facial mask, card board signs, and a baby play yard fence which would help insure people would not invade my social distancing requirements. It takes 2hrs to get to Columbus from Orrville. I arrive right at around 1:30, drive around to find a parking spot, see a few empty ones with those meters. Did I know how to use them? NO. I finally drove around until 2pm in a panic not finding anywhere to park until I realized there wasn't anyone out front except one guy just sitting. I put on the Ohio Channel to find out that he was not going to talk that day. It was the first time since he started, he did not talk. It was a Wednesday. Apparently I had missed that because I turned off his speech at the question's part. I have watched these religiously never missing ONE! You can only imagine my anger.

I decided to use the internet at my disposal when I got back. I found an email for Lt. Husted and decided to try him instead. I sent it in and to my utter surprise and excitement I received a response about a day later assuring me this would be handled and to expect a call from someone from unemployment within the next few days. If I did not hear from anyone I was to email them back. I was elated!!! Then my mother had seen on Cleveland's News Chanel 5 a program call PUA. I'd never heard of it. Nothing had ever been mentioned in the daily Ohio televised State address or anywhere else. What is it? I had to look it up on Channel 5's website. It was for people denied unemployment due to not making \$269 a week being part time. NO WAY!!! This can't be right I've never heard of it.

This was this past Sunday. I couldn't believe it. I had to google how to sign up, then of course I had some problems. They wanted copies or send files of my income tax forms. Um ok. I couldn't email anything so I decided to photo snap it. I would send it that way because that's the way I was able to send in my driver's license to verify I am who I say I was. Some company asked me some questions. One question was my astrological sign. Um WHAT? I had to recheck where I was submitting information. It was correct. I got shut down a few times and had to go back through the questions. Each time it asked something else. It was a different company that helped unemployment verify my identification. I figured it was a dating site. MY SIGN? With the luck I was having I wouldn't score a date anyway. Technically I was right. Another question was to verify my license tag number which I had to go out in the pouring down rain to verify in my jammies and slippers. But it needed done. It took me 1 1/2hrs to fill out this form. I was so excited when I was finally able to hit submit. Not more than 15 minutes later I received a phone call from a very nice young lady, from UNEMPLOYMENT for the Governor's office, offering to help me regarding my claim. NO WAY. I told her I figured out that I was denied because I didn't bring home at least \$269. She said yes that it why. She said there's a program out now call PUA that I would qualify for. I told her I JUST finished completing the online application before she called. I asked why they did not explain this at any of the briefings before? Not ONCE

was this mentioned or I would not have wasted my blood, sweat, tears, gas money, time, anxiety and unnecessary worry. She said it was a program that had just become available.

I began to wonder why I had to go through all this crap to get an answer that took less than 5 minutes to answer? I pulled up some information to find that Ohio is number 1 when it comes to unemployment filing, reviews and payments. I want Ohio to be number 1 but not in situations like this! When other states are up to date ours is so outdated it's a complete dinosaur. I don't pretend to understand how things work but I do understand that it shouldn't have been like this. PERIOD. I have never been into following our Government or politics, but I've been following this since day one. I have supported and will continue to support how Covid has and will continue to be handled. I get it. I don't get this unemployment. I survived on the stimulus. Thank God I got that and have put it away only using it when necessary as well as my increase on my EBT allowance. I went from \$16 to \$98. That's huge and again it's appreciated. I hope that unemployment can get their crap together. I thank everyone for their hard work but I know there are some changes in my future when it comes to some of the programs I am a part of. But like I say, "Well ok, this sucks, what's next?!"