



Senate Government Oversight and Reform Committee

Auditor of State Keith Faber

**House Bill 614
September 22, 2020**

Chairman Coley, Vice Chair Huffman, Ranking Member Craig, and members of the committee, thank you for allowing me to provide testimony today as an interested party of House Bill 614.

The COVID-19 crisis has created a lot of pressure on all levels of government.

The citizens of Ohio expect their government to serve them efficiently and effectively. I have hosted roundtables around the state with members of both chambers and unemployed Ohioans who have had first-hand experience trying to file for unemployment and I can tell you that the unemployment system is failing Ohioans.

I was in Westlake a few weeks ago where I heard from a gentleman who after 5 months, has given up even trying to get his issues resolved. He has resigned himself to the fact that he will not get the help he needs from the state. He made the decision that for his mental health and well-being he needed to simply focus on moving forward.

This story is not unique. Every Senator on this committee has received calls from constituents unable to get through to the system. So many Ohioans are struggling to get their payments.

They are sinking into debt.

They are late on their mortgages.

They can't afford to put food on the table for their children.

Government mandated many of their companies to close operations and government has failed to make available a system that gets them the relief they were promised and desperately need.

What we have heard in our roundtables is that there are two main issues: technology and customer service.

Citizens are waiting on hold for 2 hours just to talk to a person. Then, they're disconnected.

They call back. Another 2 hours later, they finally get somebody on the line.

They're told that their case can be settled if they call this person or email that person. But their calls and emails go unanswered. When they call back, they're told that information was incorrect.

Others are told that their information has been received and they'll get a call back in the next few days, but their phones never ring.

I'm thankful Lt. Gov. Husted, through Innovate Ohio, has been working through some of the technology issues and we need to make sure that any new system addresses these failures.

I'm grateful for those employees taking the tough calls, and I know they're doing their best.

I'm not blaming them, because it is a failure in training - a failure in empowering these individuals to make decisions that can help those who need it most.

Many of the people I've spoken with, who have had their cases resolved, credit their success to getting the *right* person on the line, who elevated their case or went above and beyond to help them receive the assistance they have earned.

But we cannot operate a government program whose success is dictated by which person answers the phone. We need to take a look at what is going wrong and what can be done to fix it. House Bill 614 requires my office to examine and make recommendations for the unemployment claims process. Our auditors are best-equipped to take on this task and I thank Representatives Fraizer and Richardson for including us in this important work.

My office stands ready to help identify the problems and come up with solutions.

Ohioans don't want bigger government, they want better government. With the mandate to carry out this audit, my office will help make sure they get it.

Again, I thank you for allowing me the opportunity to testify on this important legislation and thank the sponsors for their leadership. At this time, I would welcome any questions you may have.