



KATE BROWN
Governor

April 15, 2020

The Honorable Ron Wyden
United States Senate
219 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Jeff Merkley
United States Senate
313 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Peter DeFazio
U.S. House of Representatives
2134 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Earl Blumenauer
U.S. House of Representatives
1111 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Greg Walden
U.S. House of Representatives
2185 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Kurt Schrader
U.S. House of Representatives
2431 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Suzanne Bonamici
U.S. House of Representatives
2231 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Members of the Oregon Congressional Delegation,

Thank you for your letter yesterday regarding our efforts to ensure that Oregonians receive the maximum unemployment benefits available to them. This is an unprecedented time in our state's history, and I am grateful for your partnership as we navigate the impacts of COVID-19.

As you know, a record number of Oregonians have either temporarily or permanently lost their employment due to this public health crisis. In response, the Oregon Employment Department has been moving quickly to scale up to meet the demand for unemployment benefits and process claims as efficiently as possible so that Oregonians can continue paying rent, car payments and child care, among other expenses. Since the implementation of public health and safety measures related to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Employment Department received nearly 300,000 initial claims for unemployment benefits. During the week of March 29 - April 4 alone, \$94 million in benefits were distributed to 95,000 Oregonians. While there is a backlog of claims, the department is processing an average of 7,000 claims every day.

Oregon Congressional Delegation
April 15, 2020
Page 2

To help meet the demand for claims processing, the department has undertaken a hiring surge. Over the past month, the department's unemployment claim section has gone from 100 employees to 400, and the department is working toward an additional 400 employees to process claims, for a total of more than 800 claims processors.

This surge in staffing, and prioritizing programming has allowed Oregonians to receive enhanced unemployment benefits under the CARES Act, which Congress passed less than three weeks ago. The first priority of the department has been ensuring that Oregonians receive their supplemental \$600 payment as soon as possible. The first payments were distributed on April 10. The second focus is to prepare Oregon's unemployment system to provide benefits to self-employed Oregonians and "gig economy" workers, another key provision of the CARES Act. The department is already preparing its systems for this significant expansion of benefits to those never before eligible in the Unemployment Insurance system.

Finally, I am working with the department on waiving the "waiting week." As you know, the department operates an older UI system, and it will take thousands of hours of programming to make this change. However, I am committed to ensuring that all eligible Oregonians receive the maximum benefits available to them. While this change will not speed up the delivery of benefits, in cases where it enables Oregonians to get additional unemployment benefits, the department will be working to make those benefits available.

I appreciate your outreach as we work together to ensure Oregonians are able to stay afloat during these challenging times.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kate Brown" with a horizontal line extending to the right.

Governor Kate Brown