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California State Senate

ANTHONY J. PORTANTINO
SENATOR

TWENTY-FIFTH SENATE DISTRICT



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July 31, 2020

Ms. Julie A. Su
Secretary of the California Labor and Workforce Development Agency
800 Capitol Mall, Suite 5000 (MIC-55)
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Secretary Su,

Thank you for working together with Governor Newsom to attempt to address the challenges many Californians are having applying for and navigating claims for Unemployment or Pandemic Unemployment Assistance. To follow up the Governor's Strike Team announcement and your letter of July 29, I wanted to share with you the most common issues experienced by constituents in the 25th Senate District when navigating the EDD system. At the top of everyone's list is the extreme difficulty reaching someone by phone for assistance. In addition, my constituents are experiencing these nine specific recurring problems:

(1) the extraordinarily lengthy ID verification process, during which constituents — and legislative staff — receive no communication whatsoever, and after which sometimes claimants are told they missed a deadline; (2) correspondence that directly conflicts with other correspondence, with no explanation of how to interpret the conflicting information, sometimes both even arriving on the same day; (3) automatic replies that messages will be responded to within 7–10 days when no reply ever comes, including when requesting a CAN; (4) confusing temporary SSN provided in mail sent with no explanation while a claimant's ID is being verified; (5) a significant number of applications submitted by postal mail or fax that never end up in the system; (6) a significant number of constituents who say tech support put them on the call-back list but they are never called; (7) inconsistent messaging regarding whether or how claimants can backdate claims; (8) ID verification challenges for immigrants or those with name changes; and (9) False Penalty issues, including apparently erroneous false penalties and how to receive retroactive CARES payments once cleared.

I appreciate the development of the new March/April list to address older claims more quickly. I hope more such ideas can be put into place to clear other bottlenecks to make a significant dent in the backlog of claims. I also appreciate your staff answering questions on CalOES legislative conference calls, which often provides clarity to more than just the asker. And I understand that EDD is working around the clock and that staffing resources continue to be increased to attempt to meet the needs of the millions of Californians who are filing for unemployment benefits. But still my staff has to explain to desperate constituents that even legislative inquiries won't receive attention for six full weeks, a window that continues to grow as time goes on.

I urge you to do everything in your power to improve these issues for the benefit of all Californians.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Anthony J. Portantino".

Hon. Anthony J. Portantino
Senator
District 25

Cc: Senate Pro Tem Toni Atkins
Governor Gavin Newsom
EDD Director Sharon Hilliard