



THE COUNCIL OF  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK  
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NEW YORK, NY 10007

COREY JOHNSON  
SPEAKER

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April 1, 2020

Hon. Roberta Reardon  
Commissioner  
New York State Department of Labor  
Building 12  
W.A. Harriman Campus  
Albany, NY 12240

Dear Commissioner Reardon:

We are reaching out because we are concerned about the ability of unemployed New Yorkers to access critical unemployment benefits during this strenuous time.

As you know, over the last week alone, nationally, unemployment insurance claims rose to over 3.2 million—the highest ever seen by the U.S. Department of Labor. Although the numbers specifically for New York have not yet been determined, there is no question that New Yorkers are now facing an unemployment crisis. For those who have lost their source of income due to this pandemic, unemployment insurance is a lifeline to help them and their families survive until the economy gets back on track again.

New Yorkers have found it difficult, if not impossible, to reach the New York State Department of Labor to apply for benefits or get answers to questions related to their claims. There have been numerous reports of the DOL website crashing, phone lines jamming, and forms not saving progress. We have received a significant number of communications from New Yorkers who have not been able to file for unemployment insurance, despite repeatedly trying to get through to the DOL. Some of these constituents are not able to finish their applications without further assistance, while others are unable to submit their forms at all. All have said that they have not been able to reach your department.

We appreciate that the DOL has attempted to address this issue by adding server capacity, extending its phone hours, and hiring more staff members to deal with the influx in requests, but these efforts have not been enough. New Yorkers continue struggling to get through to your phone lines and continue to lack adequate responses to important, time-sensitive questions. While we understand that the NYS DOL is already experiencing unprecedented traffic, this activity will only increase as the economic crisis and workplace restrictions due to the pandemic continue.

We urge the DOL to create a system that can handle the influx of unemployment claims without delay. There should be better communication with New Yorkers regarding the timeline pursuant to which claims can be filed and questions answered, and a continued increase in capacity to serve the public now and in the near future as unemployment continues to rise.

Further, given the inability of many people to access benefits and receive necessary information regarding their claims and applications, we also urge the State to credit those who are unable to file for unemployment insurance immediately. New Yorkers should not lose access to their full benefits because of circumstances beyond their control.

We understand this is a demanding time of rapid change, but we must make all efforts to ensure New Yorkers can access unemployment insurance fully and immediately. To better serve our own constituents, we additionally welcome any suggestions on how to advise those who need immediate access to benefits, but are having difficulty receiving answers.

We look forward to working with you to keep our state strong during this difficult and unprecedented time.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'CJ', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

**COREY JOHNSON**  
Speaker