

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

July 29, 2020

Michael Wisehart
Director
Arizona Department of Economic Security
4000 N Central Ave.
Phoenix, AZ 85012

Dear Director Wisehart,

We are writing in response to concerning reports regarding the distribution of unemployment benefits to Arizonans.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, through the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act, Congress created the Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA) program. This program authorizes an additional \$600 a week to individuals who are unemployed. Eligibility was also expanded to include self-employed workers, independent contractors, gig economy workers, and others who may not have worked long enough to qualify for unemployment assistance. The PUA has enabled families to continue paying their mortgage or rent, utility bills, going to the grocery store, and providing for their family's general well-being during the health crisis.

To this end, we are writing regarding recent actions from the Arizona Department of Economic Security (DES). We have received complaints from our constituents regarding their unemployment claims being flagged as potentially fraudulent, despite there being no obvious reason for DES to suspect this in so many cases. Oftentimes, there is no way for constituents to contact DES to rectify the situation. This interruption in benefits has the potential to completely undermine the intent of the PUA program and risks families being unable to pay their bills, despite individuals losing their jobs through no fault of their own.

We are demanding immediate answers from DES on why individual applications are being flagged as fraudulent, how these individuals can quickly appeal the decision, and what is the best way to quickly and efficiently check on the status of a claim. First, we are requesting a contact within DES who can acknowledge and respond to constituent concerns and referrals. Additionally, we request that your office provide answers to the following:

- 1) How many accounts have been flagged as being suspected of being fraudulent?
- 2) How many fraudulent cases have been found?
- 3) How specifically can Arizonans prove their claims are not fraudulent?
- 4) How long will a review of an individual's case take?
- 5) What additional resources are necessary to ensure that people's claims are handled quickly and what is being done to ensure that future payments are made on time?

- 6) What is DES doing to ensure that individual applications are not being inappropriately flagged?
- 7) How will DES adjust conditions for flagging individuals if the process is found to be ineffective and causing delays?

These recent actions by DES threaten the security that many families have received on a short-term basis by the PUA program. Please urgently address this, to ensure that Arizonans do not have to worry about being denied benefits, through no fault of their own, with no course of action to remedy the situation.

Sincerely,

Tom O'Halleran
Member of Congress

Ruben Gallego
Member of Congress

Raul Grijalva
Member of Congress

cc: Governor Doug Ducey