

Dear Kansas Senate Commerce Committee:

My name is Dale Long and below is a brief outline of my recent experience with the Kansas State Unemployment System.

I realize that both you and the Department of Labor are busy with the current state of affairs and unprecedented level of overload on our infrastructure and systems. I filed my initial claim for unemployment in March 2020. From the beginning, the website has not allowed me to file my weekly claims. Initially, the consistent messaging was that I had no weeks to report and it showed a claim status of pending a determination. I have since received the positive determination letter dated 4/14, (received 4/25) from examiner #742 with a benefits start date of 03/02/2020. The web site continued to not allow me to file weekly claims for several weeks. The messaging on the site stated that there were no weeks to report when trying to file the weekly claims and the status has changed to not having a claim on record. I believe this is due to the standard system programming to de-activate a claim when a claimant fails to file weekly claims. Although this does not accommodate those of us who have been locked out during the recent change in claim volume or due to other system programming updates.

I have had made many calls to the Kansas Unemployment Contact Center over several weeks. (sometimes 15 – 20 per day) I have never been able to make contact to re-activate or fix my claim in the system. Most days, the call wait queue is full. Other days, I am on hold for 2-4 hours and get disconnected. Over the past several weeks, the phone message immediately switches to the "all contact center representatives are busy and the hold queue is full, go to the website" message when the phones go live at 8:00 am. I know this is because their department is overwhelmed with the Covid situation and massive overload of claims, and some sort of operational intervention to manage the call volume and time for call backs.

With some level of desperation and frustration over the more recent weeks, I have also attempted to activate or re-activate my claim by re-entering or filing the claim again based on some website messaging suggesting that this might work, although other messaging says not to do this. This has not helped either. I have attempted to mail and e-mail the contact center, but no responses. It has been several weeks for me without any income and I am in need of some progress. I did reach out to both my Kansas State Representative and Kansas State Senator in hopes they might be able to direct me to another path to get my claim unstuck or connect me with someone at the Kansas State DOL to explain my situation and get the claim activated. My thinking was that hopefully this would be an easy fix if I could communicate with someone there to activate or re-activate my approved claim so that I can enter my weekly activity for the past several weeks and going forward in order to get the benefit payments moving through the process.

While I did not hear back from the DOL, Julie Menghini at the DOL was helpful in activating my claim for a 10 day window which provided some level of progress. However, the system configuration was not set up to allow me to complete my weekly filings back to my benefit start date, just a few of the most recent weeks. I have since continued to call the contact center and have we-mailed Julie in an effort to get access to complete the other weeks based on the approved benefit start date. A simple programming change on this point could alleviate some of the contact center call volume.

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