

Dear Member of the House Committee for Business and Labor,

My name is Desiree Barksdale and I am a fellow Oregonian. It has come to my attention that you have a unique opportunity this week to ask questions to the Employment Department Director, Kay Erickson. As someone who has had zero response (besides weekly letters stating my claim won't be paid) from the employment department in almost 10 weeks, this sounded almost too good to be true!

You see, over 38,000 Oregonians like me have yet to receive ANY response from the employment department since filing their initial claims almost 10 weeks ago. Many of us receive a letter each week stating that our benefits are not being paid this week, with no further explanation. Some don't even receive a letter.

If you try to call the employment department's phone number, you will receive a busy signal. If you happen to make it through, you will be put on hold for many hours, often until the office closes - at which point your phone call will be disconnected. If you respond to the letters (if you receive them) or attempt to email, these will go without response. I am one of 38,000 Oregonians who are being ignored every day for almost 10 weeks.

Over 38,000 people. For scale, that's about two entirely full Moda Center arenas - full of previously-working Americans who are being left to explain to their families that they can't put food on the table or pay rent for the 10th week in a row and they don't even know why.

The Employment Department of Oregon received \$85 million dollars over ten years ago to improve the system that is failing our state. Gail Krumenauer, the communications director for the Oregon Employment Department, stated that they began to explore options for updating this system (which dates back to the 1990's) back in 2017 and yet no changes were ever made.

Why did it take them so long to get the ball rolling, and why have we seen no actualized improvements since then? Where is our unemployment money? Where did the \$85 million given to their department in 2009 go? Why was this system never improved? Why are 38,000 Oregonians still without any response after 3 months?

These are just some questions that over 38,000 recently unemployed Oregonians are desperately wishing they could ask Employment Director Kay Erickson.

I hope you'll understand how disappointed I was to learn that only 3 of your Committee's members submitted questions to be asked about this situation. Only 3 members wanted to know why their fellow Oregonians were being made to suffer without pay in silence during a global pandemic.

If you were one of the Committee members who did not submit a question, I genuinely hope that you will reconsider. Kay Erickson and the Employment Department of Oregon need to be held accountable. PowerPoint presentations won't cut it anymore. If you are one of the Committee members who did submit questions, I thank you from the bottom of my heart.

If you have any questions for me, one of those 38,000 Oregonians, I urge you to reach back out to me. As just a regular citizen, there isn't much I can do. But you are in a unique position - please utilize your privilege to speak up for us.

Thank you for reading,
Desiree Barksdale
Single-mother, formerly employed in production
(503) 875-4763

<https://katu.com/news/following-the-money/the-feds-gave-oregon-money-to-update-employment-dept-computers-where-did-it-go?fbclid=IwAR3zgW-J3G0RIgZesqzcU9ykDGVw-7r5sKyEnPPIBSIyTnVrwaEnn1PzHsE>

<https://www.kgw.com/mobile/article/news/health/coronavirus/oregon-employment-department-director-testifies-on-pandemic-response-in-front-of-legislative-committee/283-963bdb4-61c1-4c9f-ac97-cefb50842035?fbclid=IwAR1jK76bwhKnWYIPHG91Rmg7ly7RNGwyMa05Qu5vzBmi-sbnwjkIY7uVoAH8>