

Written Testimony for Legislative Hearing on May 26, 2020

I am an adjudicator who works out of the Bend Contact Center. While I am a little reluctant to share my name, I will do so because I believe in transparency. My name is Charles McCormick and I have worked for OED for 11 years, most of which were as an adjudicator.

When the virus story first broke I did not see the type of urgency from the Employment Department one might expect. I have asked in the past if the Department was working on a disaster plan and was told they were. Right now it does not appear there was anything done. In their defense, it was an avalanche of work dropped on the Department all at once and was unlike anything ever seen, including the recession. However the urgency for the safety of the employees doing the work was not there and getting Oregonians paid sooner rather than later also was not there. The Department has made strides in certain areas, but the Department did not utilize all of its resources when the need was clear. I have an underlying medical condition and my doctor strongly recommended I stay home to minimize exposure and risk because if I contract the virus the chances were good I would die. I asked to telework more than once before going out on leave because I knew I could help the people of Oregon in this unprecedented time. My request was denied even though telework has occurred in the past. I stayed away from work for eight weeks; time that could have been spent helping Oregonians had telework been allowed. It is my understanding several other experienced employees are out of the office for similar reasons.

Even though I am back to work, I am doing so because I can no longer sit by and watch the suffering of so many people. I take precautions by providing my own masks I purchased, taking my temperature twice a day, diligently practicing physical distancing, using hand sanitizer and washing my hands constantly along with cleaning my work space with sanitizers. Even with all that I still feel unsafe in the office because the common walkways do not allow for six feet of distancing. The restrooms are only cleaned one time, and it is after work.

In closing I would like to say it takes a year to get a good experienced adjudicator and several months to get a good claims taker. Without the time to properly train, any of the new hires will result in mistakes and WILL cause further delays. If the Employment Department had used its existing staff, who were at home for legitimate reasons, and gave them the ability to work, it WOULD have made an impact on the existing workload. Just counting myself, the Department lost eight weeks of productivity. Who knows how many others are/were out and more productivity slipped away?