

My name is Steel Turner. I have worked for the Oregon Employment Department (OED) for 17 years, 14 years with Unemployment Insurance (UI) and 3 years as a Tax Auditor. I work at the Central Office location in Salem.

I have not worked since March 19, 2020. My lung doctor has advised me to stay home until this virus passes as I am a high risk to exposure. I have applied 3 times to work from home and have been denied by OED management all 3 times. I have appealed to DAS who has affirmed all 3 denials. The reason given for the denials has consistently been security concerns. Having worked with OED for 17 years, I understand how important it is that the confidential information provided to OED by claimants and employers be protected. When I worked in UI, if there was ever a security concern raised, work was put on hold until it was resolved. Any potential breach to the system was taken very seriously.

Several of my fellow Tax Auditors have been telecommuting from home for well over a year working on audits as well as blocked claims which are essential to the processing of UI claims. These coworkers were working on audits and blocked claims up through the week of March 20, 2020 without any mention of concerns for security. In a meeting on March 18, 2020, Tax and UI management advised Tax employees they were determined to be essential employees and would be assisting in the processing of UI claims beginning March 23, 2020.

While my fellow coworkers have telecommuted from home for well over the last year, at no point has Tax management mentioned any concerns related to security. As I have asked Tax management to explain the security concerns that have prompted the 3 denials, no response has been given. If the system had been breached and security was at risk, I would understand the denials. But I have not been given evidence that anything like this has taken place.

When I became an auditor, I was issued by OED a laptop and work cell phone. The laptop has been equipped with VPN so that if I needed to access OED systems away from Central Office I could. Tax auditors who telecommute from home would have routinely accessed VPN to work on audits and blocked claims.

Though I cannot be at the office to work due to doctor's orders, I am more than able and willing to work from home if OED management would grant approval to telecommute. The equipment needed to work on blocked claims for UI is at my office and could be picked up easily. I have been trained and have worked a small blocked claim workload for well over a year. I am ready to help Oregonians to the extent that I can but OED management is not allowing me to do so.

Thank you for your time.

Steel Turner