

Dear Senate Labor and Business Committee,

Please accept this as my testimony as I wait going on 19 weeks of not getting my unemployment benefits or even any communication from them. Thank you for your time and efforts.

Finally, someone who is actually asking to hear from us and not just telling us “sorry there's nothing I can do, you just have to wait your turn like everyone else is.” My name is Melanie, and I am hoping you can add my testimony to the thousands of other Oregonians who are struggling to survive months and months after applying for our unemployment benefits. I have been trying to figure out any way someone can help me. I am on my 18th week, four and a half months, waiting for my unemployment benefits. It is in adjudication and I realize those are longer of a wait. However, when I initially applied, I was told 10-12 weeks. Once I got to 12 weeks, I was told 12-14 weeks wait on adjudications. Once I got to 14 weeks, they then told me they were taking 14-16 weeks. At 16 weeks I called and was told at any week now it could happen. I called Monday, after filing my 18th week, and said I am at 18 weeks now with my waiting week, and I have been told 10,12,14,16 weeks and am now past all of those times. Her response is that they were no longer giving out times now, I guess that's what they tell people once they've past four months of waiting. There is no problem with my claim either. I call every week to make sure. I'm only ever told that it's taking over four months because it's in adjudication and they are just backed up. I was told it wasn't even assigned to an adjudicator yet. The worst part is it has been four and a half months and my claim hasn't been processed or even worked on yet, not even looked at by an adjudicator. I keep calling to make sure they don't need any extra information and they always say that's not the problem, there is no problem with your claim, you just have to wait your turn in line behind everyone else who applied before you. Your claim hasn't come up yet to be worked on is the only issue you have. They say, there's nothing you can do to help because no one has even looked at it yet. I have used the online form “contact us” at least four times and have never received one email or phone response back. I cannot believe that at four and a half months that my claim just hasn't been looked at yet because it's in line with everyone else. When I hear reporters ask David Gerstenberg about the adjudication process taking so long, he doesn't answer you in complete honesty. He says well there could be something wrong with their claim, etc., maybe they need to call us because we're missing information, he never comes out and says yes, there are people out there going on five months who we haven't even had time to look at their claim yet by an adjudicator and there has been no communication with our department either to them, and this is normal for people who have nothing wrong with their claims where they are being held up by something, we just plain haven't even looked at adjudicated claims that were filed almost five months ago. I'm getting desperate. My home I've lived in 17 years is in foreclosure, we are at risk of losing our cars because we cannot make the payments, my car insurance is getting canceled tomorrow, my cell phones has already had two extensions on the bill due date, Monday will be the last day they will work unless they are paid, and if not I will lose communication with any prospective job opportunities and the employment department themselves, and the only reason we have power and internet is because those companies are not shutting off our services because we cannot pay for them. I have a chronic health problem that I need sterile medical supplies for, and if it is not kept clean, I will go septic as I have in the past, so I have had to go without clean and sterile dressings. I also take four daily medications that I cannot pay for now. I know there are so many others out there like me, and I wish I could help them as well. But i just don't know what to do anymore. It's like nobody is being held accountable. I never once have got any information when I've called them, Just the same message of I'm waiting in line by date. This isn't like any other situation in life where i can say, I need to speak to a manager because this is not right and someone needs to be held

accountable. We simply wait five hours to talk to someone to be told the same thing for the 20th time, but you keep calling because you cannot stand just sitting here doing nothing and sitting in disbelief that the State can do this to people who are struggling and are or getting ready to lose everything they have ever worked for. I mean yes, this was unexpected for the ED, but two months, alright there is a lot of applications, three months people are starting to lose things and are in a situation they are not going to be able to get out of, four months is unreal and unacceptable and going on five months waiting without even a call from them and nobody even assigned to your claim yet, is inhumane and a disgrace. Any information would be greatly appreciated. I'm filing every week, I call and check in by phone at least every two weeks just in case they need something, and I've filled out the contact us form at least four times without any response. They should have no excuse, at least in my case, Mr. Gerstenburg should have to at least man up on one of his recorded updates and say.....yes, we are taking almost five months on adjudication claims, just even looking at their file for the very first time with an adjudicator. He needs to admit that. They are taking close to five months, in my case, to even look at it for the first time and still haven't as of today.

Thank you for your time.

Melanie Hearn

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