

Testimony

My name is Robert C. Warner, and I am a resident of Portland, Oregon.

I filed for PUA unemployment insurance on May 19, 2020. I filed via Fax on the PDF application that was available online at that time.

I know I am among thousands of Oregonians who have become unemployed because of Covid 19. I am a self-employed special events contractor who has been in business since 2002. I have had many clients over the past 18 years, but had to halt my work in March due to the pandemic.

My experience with the Oregon Employment Department has been abysmal since filing my PUA claim. I know I am not alone with this experience, but I will only speak of my experiences at this time.

As I said, I filed my PUA application on May 19, 2020 via FAX. Below is the chronological history of my experience since May 19th.

- After hearing nothing from the OED, I emailed the department on June 3, 2020 asking if they had received my claim.
- On June 16, I received an email saying my application had been received and please don't submit another initial application.
- I continued to file weekly claims online as I had been doing since my initial application.
- On July 24th I received a phone call from the OED saying my application had been received but it was blank and to please reapply using the new claim form online. (How do they know I had filed it if it was blank)?
- I submitted the new application on July 26th along with weekly claims from the weeks ending March 7th through July 25th.
- I received an email confirmation saying my initial application had been received and please don't resubmit it.
- I continued to send weekly claims via the online claim system.
- On August 12th I contacted my representative, Karin Power, and my state senator, Kathleen Taylor stating my frustration and concern over my PUA claim.
- Both of them responded within a day asking for additional information and saying they would see what they could do.
- On August 14th I received an email from the OED saying my initial application had been received but it had come through blank and to please resend it.
- I sent a copy of this email to Katherine in Senator Taylor's office. I did not resubmit my application.
- She suggested I use the Contact US form to communicate with OED. I used the form on August 14th and received no response.
- On August 20th I sent an email to Senator Taylor's office with the posting on the OED Dashboard: The Oregon Employment Department announced today that they met their FOCUS PUA goal of processing 70,000 remaining initial Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA) claims on August 4, several days ahead of the August 8 deadline the Department set for itself. The Department is now current with processing regular and PUA unemployment claims, and processing new ones that come in at a record rate, so Oregonians can start getting paid the benefits they are owed.

- This is a ridiculous statement since I had filed a PUA claim and had heard nothing at this time. I wanted Senator Taylor to see what was being posted regarding claims.
- On August 21st I received an email from OED saying my application had been processed and would be posted the following day, and I should expect to start receiving benefits once the weekly claims were processed.
- On August 29th I received 17 letters in the mail containing 17 forms each with a different week I had filed a claim for benefits. The letters said I had claimed the stated week before restarting my claim. I had 7 days from the date of the letter to submit the form and state that I had not been working. If I did not submit within 7 days my claims would be denied.
- I filled out all 17 forms with an explanation of my history on the back. I mailed the forms on Monday, August 31, certified mail, return receipt requested.
 - I wrote to Senator Taylor's office saying this was another example of ridiculousness on the part of OED. The letters were dated August 25, they were received the afternoon of August 29th (Friday) and say they must be returned by September 1 (7 days) or my claims would be denied.
- I received notice that my letters had been received and signed for on Wednesday, September 2, 2020.

Now I will wait and see what happens. To say this has been a frustrating situation is an understatement. I feel the only reason I have received any response from the OED is because of my contact with Senator Taylor's and Representative Power's offices. Katherine, in Senator Taylor's office, has been outstanding in her communication with me. I feel I finally have an advocate and only wish others in my situation did as well.

At the very least, the OED should confirm either by email or mail that your initial application has been received and will be put in the queue for processing. The fact that the OED says they have hired hundreds of employees to help with the over-burdened claims system doesn't make sense when it is impossible to get through on the phone lines, it takes days or weeks to get response on emails and even longer to have claims processed.

Thank you for giving citizens the opportunity to testify on this process. In closing, I would like to say that someone needs to step up and take a leadership role in getting the citizens of Oregon the money they are owed because of a situation beyond their control.

Respectfully submitted,

Robert C. Warner