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NEWS RELEASE

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**Democratic Leaders Call for \$500 Emergency Relief Checks
to Oregonians Waiting for Unemployment Help**

SALEM, Ore. – Today, Speaker of the House Tina Kotek (D – Portland) and Senate President Peter Courtney (D – Salem) proposed the immediate distribution of emergency relief checks of \$500 per person for Oregonians who have applied for unemployment benefits and have not yet received their benefits from the Oregon Employment Department.

Kotek and Courtney will ask for \$35 million in CARES Act Coronavirus Relief Fund dollars to serve nearly 70,000 Oregonians who are still waiting for benefits from the state. The Legislative Emergency Board will meet on Tuesday, July 14 to consider this proposal, as well as other critical funding for Oregonians impacted by the pandemic.

“People need help now,” Speaker Kotek said. “While the department works on processing all the claims, we can make sure desperate Oregonians get some direct cash assistance as soon as possible.”

“This isn’t a fix, this is a band-aid,” President Courtney said. “We need to get cash into the hands of Oregonians who have been waiting on their benefits for months. As the department continues to clear claims, this money will help those who are still waiting.”

The proposal would direct the Department of Administrative Services to develop a simple process where Oregonians who have been waiting for benefits from the Oregon Employment Department can apply. The agency would then issue a \$500 payment to those individuals as soon

as possible. These one-time payments would not be linked to their future benefits. Individuals who have filed for, but not yet received, benefits from either the Unemployment Insurance program or the Pandemic Assistance Unemployment program would be eligible.

The delays at the Oregon Employment Department are the result of the historically high number of claims filed since the start of the pandemic, the requirements of new benefits designed by the federal government, and the constraints of an inflexible legacy computer system. The emergency relief checks will provide some direct support to Oregonians while the agency continues to work through its backlog.

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