



May 14, 2024

Via Electronic Mail

The Honorable Tina Kotek
Office of the Governor
900 Court Street NE, Suite 254
Salem, Oregon 97301

Dear Governor Kotek,

In the digital age, government agencies have increasingly relied on online platforms to improve the efficient delivery of services to citizens, making the continued challenges of the Oregon Employment Department (OED) to implement Frances Online¹ a source of stark frustration to Oregonians. Frances Online was billed as an opportunity to streamline unemployment claims, enhance user experience, reduce processing times, and minimize errors. The unfortunate reality is that the OED is continuing to fail our citizens when they need these funds the most.

To many of us in the Legislature, it seems as though state agencies continue to grow and multiply. Time and again, agency failures are met with increased budgets and additional FTE. While the expansion of government services can be necessary to meet peoples' needs in times of crisis, the lack of identifying the catalysts for breakdowns in efficiency and instilling the accountability necessary to get agencies back on track, raises serious doubts about how citizens' hard-earned dollars are being spent – as is the case with the Employment Department.

Oregonians deserve assurance that their contributions to a state-run program meant to sustain them during a period of job loss will do just that. But today, federal data shows nearly a third of unemployed residents are forced to wait at least three weeks to get their jobless benefits paid². This staggering figure indicates a steep decline in timely payments, which is a troubling downward trend that began a year ago. In extreme cases, our offices have heard from constituents that have waited several months since filing claims to receive payments.

The Oregon Employment Department's failure to process claims in a timely manner has profound and immediate impacts on the financial hardship of workers across the state as they face economic uncertainty due to periods of job loss. Even the OED's stated goal of processing claims in three weeks³ puts citizens at an increased risk of utility shutoffs,

¹ [Oregon finally gets new computers for paying jobless benefits, but they won't fix all issues](#)

² [New data suggests Oregon taking longer to pay jobless claims; state will increase overtime to pick up pace](#)

³ [What Happens After I File?](#)

food insecurity, and houselessness. With soaring inflation and housing costs, too many Oregonians are forced to live paycheck to paycheck and disrupting that tenuous balance by delaying their benefit claims by even three weeks can be too much for them to bear while supporting their families. We see this in our inboxes from constituents every single day.

These processing failures also extend beyond individual hardships. Public trust in our government institutions is essential for fostering cooperation and civic engagement. The failure to deliver on promises of an efficient service provision erodes this trust, casting doubt on the OED's competence and accountability. In a time of increasing state agency turmoil, it is critically important that OED, in coordination with the Governor's office, face these issues head-on — taking fast and effective steps to correct them.

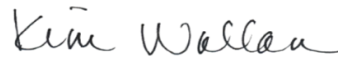
We implore you to prioritize restoring the public's trust in the OED by publicly releasing a detailed plan of action — beyond the normal increases to staffing — complete with aggressive increases in agency performance targets at set deadlines, as well as how the agency will achieve them. The backlog of cases at the department must be cleared, and a better strategy for communicating with claimants implemented. Oregonians need to see a shift in ethos in our state agencies, with a restoration of putting customer service first from every level of leadership. Citizens need to see true transparency in delivering results of equitable access to unemployment benefits, and an upholding of the OED's mandate of supporting Oregon's workforce.

We appreciate your attention to this urgent matter of improving such a vital state agency and look forward to your response.

Respectfully,



Jami Cate
State Representative, District 11



Kim Wallan
State Representative, District 6



Virgle Osborne
State Representative, District 2



Boomer Wright
State Representative, District 9



Dwayne Yunker
State Representative, District 3



Charlie Conrad
State Representative, District 12



Christine Goodwin
State Representative, District 4



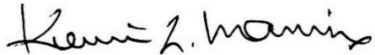
Shelly Boshart Davis
State Representative, District 15



Ed Diehl
State Representative, District 17



Rick Lewis
State Representative, District 18



Kevin Mannix
State Representative, District 21



Tracy Cramer
State Representative, District 22



Anna Scharf
State Representative, District 23



Lucetta Elmer
State Representative, District 24



Brian Stout
State Representative, District 31



James Hieb
State Representative, District 51



Jeff Helfrich
Republican Leader, District 52



E. Werner Reschke
State Representative, District 55



Emily McIntire
State Representative, District 56



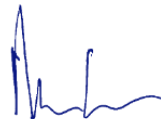
Greg Smith
State Representative, District 57



Bobby Levy
State Representative, District 58



Vikki Breese-Iverson
State Representative, District 59



Mark Owens
State Representative, District 60



David Brock Smith
State Senator, District 1



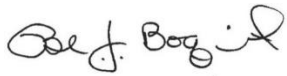
Dick Anderson
State Senator, District 5



Fred Girod
State Senator, District 9



Suzanne Weber
State Senator, District 16



Brian Boquist
State Senator, District 12

cc: David Gerstenfeld, Director, Oregon Employment Department
