

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

August 27, 2021

Tiffany P. Robinson
Secretary
Maryland Department of Labor
500 North Calvert St.
Baltimore, MD 21202-3651

Dear Secretary Robinson:

In light of the upcoming expiration of federal unemployment programs and benefits, we write as members of the Maryland Congressional Delegation to obtain information on the support these programs have provided for Marylanders and the state's administration of the programs.

When the COVID-19 pandemic began in the United States, Congress acted quickly to provide expanded unemployment benefits to workers and administrative funding to states charged with processing UI claims and implementing these new assistance programs. However, many of our constituents dealt with delays and were unable to access their benefits. Almost a year and half later, we continue to hear from Marylanders needing assistance who have been unable to access their benefits or get answers from the Maryland Department of Labor (MDOL). As a delegation, we have worked to provide federal resources to help Maryland improve its UI system. Most recently, Congress passed the American Rescue Plan, which included \$2 billion in funding to modernize our unemployment systems.

While we recognize that you must balance speed with preventing fraud and ensuring program integrity, Maryland has continued to lag behind other states and the national average in its distribution of benefits. In the first and second quarters of 2021, only 50.1% of first payments were made to Marylanders in 21 days, making Maryland one of the 10 slowest states to get benefits to claimants.¹

In the first and second quarters of 2021, Maryland only resolved 34.6% of nonmonetary determinations (i.e. eligibility issues) within 21 days, well below the national average of 49.6%.² Maryland is one of four states – along with North Carolina, Montana, and Alaska – that consider mitigating circumstances in determining eligibility, and the other three states with similar rules all process a larger percentage of nonmonetary determinations within 21 days. In addition to Marylanders with pending claims, some claimants who are actively receiving weekly benefits have not been paid retroactive benefits for their full period of eligibility.

The expanded federal UI benefits have provided a lifeline to struggling families across Maryland as they have dealt with an unprecedented crisis and faced extreme hardships. But too many Marylanders have to contend with the added hardship of struggling to access the benefits they are owed. Too many have spent

¹ <https://oui.doleta.gov/unemploy/ranking/rankingrpt.asp>

² *ibid.*

hours on the phone or contacted MDOL with no response and dealt with extensive delays as they try to access the benefits they need.

In order to improve our federal and state UI systems and help our constituents access much-needed benefits, we ask that you respond to the following questions:

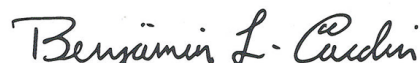
1. How many Marylanders have received payments under each of the following federal unemployment programs: Pandemic Unemployment Assistance, Pandemic Emergency Unemployment Compensation, Federal Pandemic Unemployment Compensation, and Mixed Earner Unemployment Compensation?
2. What is the total amount that Marylanders have been paid through each of the federal programs listed above?
3. How many complete initial claims for unemployment compensation that have been filed by Maryland workers are currently pending a final eligibility determination?
4. Of these complete initial claims that are currently pending a final eligibility determination, what is the average length of time, taken from the date of the completed initial filing of the claim to the current date, that these claims have been pending?
5. For claims that undergo the adjudication process, what is the average length of time, taken from the date of the completed initial filing of the claim to when the adjudication is completed, it is taking for these claims to be fully processed and for the claimant to receive a final eligibility determination?
6. The United States Department of Labor DOL (USDOL) recently announced that it has begun to utilize funding from the American Rescue Plan to help states improve their UI systems.³
 - a. Has MDOL requested or planned to request the assistance that USDOL is offering on identity verification to combat fraud and reduce claims backlogs?
 - b. USDOL has deployed “Tiger Teams” teams to six states to identify process improvements that can speed benefit delivery, address equity, and fight fraud. Has MDOL requested a Tiger Team to help it reduce its claim backlog?
7. What is MDOL’s procedure for resolving retroactive payment issues?
8. As federal payments terminate, what is MDOL’s plan and projected timeline to ensure that all Marylanders receive the full amount of federal benefits they are due?

As the federal unemployment benefits come to a close, we urge you to take steps to expedite adjudications, provide claimants with eligibility determinations, and to prioritize providing relief to claimants who have been waiting months to receive their UI benefits. We remain committed to partnering with your department to improve our state’s UI system to ensure that Marylanders facing unemployment and economic hardships receive urgently needed relief.

Sincerely,

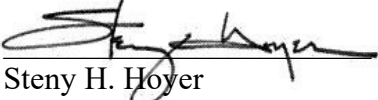


Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator




Benjamin L. Cardin
United States Senator

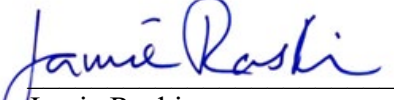
³ https://oui.doleta.gov/unemploy/pdf/FactSheet_UImodernization.pdf



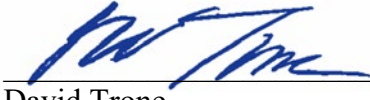
Steny H. Hoyer
Member of Congress



John P. Sarbanes
Member of Congress




Jamie Raskin
Member of Congress



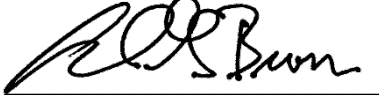
David Trone
Member of Congress



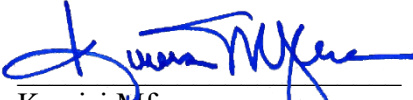
C.A. Dutch Ruppersberger
Member of Congress



Andy Harris, M.D.
Member of Congress



Anthony G. Brown
Member of Congress



Kweisi Mfume
Member of Congress

cc: Hon. Adrienne A. Jones, Speaker of the Maryland House of Delegates
Hon. Bill Ferguson, President of the Maryland Senate