



COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA
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May 20, 2020

Ellen Marie Hess, Commissioner
Virginia Employment Commission
6606 West Broad Street, Richmond, VA 23230
P.O. Box 26441
Richmond, VA 23261-6441

Dear Commissioner Hess,

I hope this letter finds you well during this complex time. My staff and I appreciate your hard work in the face of such unprecedented challenges. Certainly, the COVID-19 crisis has been devastating from a health and economic perspective and even most importantly, it has been devastating in the way it is personally impacting our families. It's appropriate that elected officials at the state, federal and local levels take this pandemic and its unique consequences seriously.

As the 82nd House District Delegate in Virginia Beach, I wish to emphasize that the single-most impactful issue we confront is **loss of income from company wages, "gig" jobs and small business closures**. We are continuously vetting calls and emails from local residents seeking **urgent financial assistance**. We are trying very hard to stay current with the myriad of federal, state and local waivers, memoranda and guidance so we are properly equipped to help our constituents. It is truly an overwhelming task for state legislative offices to navigate this maze of mass information, and it is all the more daunting for our frightened constituents seeking urgent financial help.

Here is a sampling of the VEC-related problems we have encountered:

- **(#1 Complaint)** Don't know how to get through to VEC – no response by email or phone or online; dropped calls; long waits for answers. **In short, they contact our office when they are unable to get through to your office.**
- Approved for Unemployment Insurance (UI), received one payment then stopped
- Approved for Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA) but didn't receive payment
- Lack of clear instructions, e.g. applicants are unsure how to fill out their UI application form for "employer" because they are so-called "gig" employees, so the system stops them from proceeding. However, in order for them to qualify for PUA they need to first apply for UI, which they are unable to do so, trapped in a vicious bureaucratic cycle.
- Related to the above issue, people then complain they feel guilty and even feel compelled to a lack of transparency, or to guess at answers just to get the UI application filled out and submitted (i.e. Questions don't apply to them)

- Uncertainly about appeals and appeal deadlines
- Need job search assistance, with age being an issue
- Need a PIN to log in
- Also related, we have seen a deep frustration on the lack of response on stimulus check applications. Since this is exclusively a federal issue, we forward those complaints on to Congresswoman Elaine Luria's office.

Especially during this time, my legislative staff aims to quickly respond to financial and VEC-related inquiries and to follow up with each constituent to make sure their problems get resolved through this bureaucratic maze. Unfortunately, we often leave as frustrated as our constituents in attempting to obtain answers, instruction and results.

My strong recommendation is for your office to conduct a top-to-bottom executive management review of your internal processes, communications, management and begin a daily, weekly and monthly tracking of the average response time to each and every Virginian constituent inquiry. A failure to measure this key metric means it is impossible for your office to identify the problem and whether the solution is a change in IT systems or in management or internal processes. In short, your office needs a clear idea of where you are, where you are going and how to identify any roadblock to success. The Virginia Employment Commission should have a goal of answering, responding and solving each and every constituent inquiry within 48 hours of first contact

First step? The Virginia Employment Commission should immediately conduct a telephone or email survey of every constituent who has contacted the VEC to get a standing metric of the wait time, response time and satisfaction with the customer service received. Right now, too many Virginians feel like no one is listening to their concerns and that is simply unacceptable.

Our government should always be accountable and responsive to those in need. I stand ready to help advise and assist you in solving this systemic problem. We are available to discuss this issue in more detail by cell phone at 757-679-5143 or by email at DelJMiyares@house.virginia.gov.

Praying for wisdom for you and your staff and for all state leaders trying to find solutions for Virginia.

Yours in Freedom,



Jason S. Miyares
Virginia House of Delegates
82nd District