

JOSH HARDER
10TH DISTRICT, CALIFORNIA

COMMITTEE ON
AGRICULTURE

COMMITTEE ON
EDUCATION AND LABOR

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

131 CANNON HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20515
(202) 225-4540—PHONE
(202) 225-3402—FAX

4701 SISK ROAD, SUITE 202
MODESTO, CA 95356
(209) 579-5458—PHONE
(209) 579-5028—FAX

www.harder.house.gov

August 11, 2020

Sharon Hilliard
Director, California Employment Development Department
PO Box 826880, MIC 83
Sacramento, CA 94280-0001

Dear Director Hilliard,

I am writing in reference to the 1.13 million unresolved unemployment claims at the Employment Development Department (EDD). I urge you to prioritize sending unemployment benefits out to these Californians that so desperately need assistance and streamlining the application process to minimize confusion and unnecessary errors that have contributed to the buildup of this backlog.

Months into this crisis, my staff and I are still on the phones with constituents who have yet to receive a single unemployment payment, some since March. My constituents need to pay their bills and feed their families. They are quickly running through their savings. The EDD reports that it requires two months — until the end of September — to process and pay approximately one-fifth of the workers in the current backlog¹. At this pace, payments to the remaining workers might not be completed until next year. Families in the Central Valley don't have that kind of time.

During this pandemic and recession, Californians need to be able to focus on staying healthy and taking care of their families, not on navigating an unresponsive unemployment insurance system. One applicant estimates that she has called the EDD over 1,000 times and still has yet to receive her benefits². Another had to call over 600 times before reaching a real person³. These cases are not aberrations. Hundreds of thousands of Californians are stuck in an endless limbo of calling and being ignored by the people whose job it is to help them. For individuals stuck waiting on a response, searching for new work or making informed plans becomes almost impossible.

¹ *San Francisco Chronicle*, "[California legislators rip into EDD for unemployment payment delays, technology woes](#)", July 30, 2020

² *SF Weekly*, "[Life on Hold: Unemployment Horror Stories](#)", July 13, 2020

³ *ABC 7*, "[California woman shares hack for getting through EDD's overloaded unemployment helpline](#)", August 6, 2020

EDD employees are just as frustrated as applicants. Both long-time EDD civil servants and people who were hired or transferred over from other departments are hampered by outdated technology, inefficient and chaotic organizational structure. Many received insufficient training and little to no support from superiors, and some don't have access to information that isn't already publicly available on EDD's website.⁴ I urge you to take steps to improve responsiveness, expand the number of people who can truly assist applicants, and use the resources that Congress and the state have granted you to improve the dismal response times at your agency.

In light of this urgent crisis, please address the following questions:

1. What steps will you and the agency take to increase the number of applications that can be processed by the end of September?
2. How will the agency update Californians on the progress of their applications in a timely and transparent manner?
3. What can be done to prevent disasters like this in the future and modernize EDD's approach to unemployment insurance?

Thank you for your time and effort, and I look forward to your prompt response.

Sincerely,



Josh Harder

U.S. Representative (CA-10)

⁴**Los Angeles Times**, [California unemployment agency workers say internal problems are stalling claims process](#)
August 3, 2020