



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

James L. Seward

Seward Joins Bipartisan Call for Investigation of Unemployment Nightmare

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ONEONTA, 05/06/20 -- State Senator James L. Seward (R/C/I – Oneonta) today joined Senator Joseph A. Griffo (R/C/I – Rome), and Assembly Members Marianne Buttenschon (D/I – Utica), and Mark Walczyk (R/C/I – Watertown) in calling for an audit by the State Comptroller and a State Legislative Joint Committee investigation into the state Department of Labor's handling of unemployment benefit applications in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic.

People are hurting and the help they so urgently require, and are awaiting patiently for despite facing devastating financial hardship, has not arrived. While some of the millions of the state's unemployed have begun receiving benefits, millions more have not only not received benefits but can't get through to the Department of Labor by phone or email. The state's vaunted enhancements of its systems and increase of staff have not only done nothing to improve the situation but may have exasperated the circumstances.

Senator James L. Seward said, "At a time when individuals and families need the state to come through for them they are instead left hurting and in the dark. The Department of Labor has come up short in multiple ways and a security failure is one more issue to add to the list of serious violations. Many people have been waiting weeks, even months, for essential unemployment benefits to feed their families and maintain some semblance of a normal life. I join with my fellow senators and assembly members calling for immediate help for those in need, and long-term solutions to repair what is clearly a broken system."

Senator Joseph A. Griffo said, "These are individuals, who through no fault of their own, are dependent on the state to provide the help that they are entitled to, but who have instead gotten indefinite and intolerable waits. Our offices have also been informed that the sensitive personal information of New Yorkers may have been released, which has been corroborated by various news reports, and seems to be more widespread than has been revealed."

Assemblywoman Marianne Buttenschon said, "The investigation by the Comptroller's Office is essential to ensure accountability as well as to eliminate those bottlenecks in the system that are preventing people from having their claims approved and their benefits started. I have heard from hundreds of constituents who are on the verge of giving up hope not

because of the virus but because the system that is supposed to help them is repeatedly failing."

The findings of the Comptroller and the joint legislative committees need to be made public to ensure that not only has the issue been addressed, but that the state can put in place the necessary procedures to resolve those issues so that moving forward such missteps can be avoided. It is imperative that given the dire warnings that another wave of COVID-19 infections is a real possibility that we are prepared in the future.

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Attached are letters to comptroller and committee chairmen.