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SENATOR
ANDREW S. GOUNARDES
22ND SENATORIAL DISTRICT
STATE OF NEW YORK

ALBANY OFFICE:
ROOM 902
LEGISLATIVE OFFICE BUILDING
ALBANY, NY 12247
OFFICE: 518-455-3270

DISTRICT OFFICE:
8018 5TH AVE.
BROOKLYN, NY 11209
OFFICE: (718) 238-6044

e-mail:
gounardes@nysenate.gov

March 25, 2020

The Honorable Andrew M. Cuomo
Governor of New York State
NYS State Capitol Building
Albany, NY 12224

Commissioner Roberta Reardon
NYS Department of Labor
Building 12
W.A. Harriman Campus
Albany, NY 12240

Dear Governor Cuomo and Commissioner Reardon:

Thank you for all that you are doing to ensure New Yorkers who have lost their jobs due to the novel coronavirus can stay afloat. We are well aware that the Department of Labor is seeking to meet a huge demand, and we hope that you will consider two reforms to ensure New Yorkers have access to these vital benefits.

First, we ask that you temporarily waive the work search requirement for unemployment benefits. Under normal economic conditions, the requirement for claimants to actively pursue new work and document their work search activities is a practical policy that ensures people are receiving temporary economic relief while doing all they can to re-enter the workforce. At a time of a global pandemic and total shutdown of all non-essential events and services, a work search requirement is nothing but a mandate to seek out jobs that do not exist, and more importantly, engage in activity that dangerously spreads the pandemic by encouraging unnecessary social interaction.

Second, we request that you waive the requirement that claimants filing online speak to a representative. Under normal circumstances, this requirement makes sense - but in a situation where the system is overwhelmed, too many New Yorkers are stuck desperately trying to get through to someone after completing most of their application online. So that New Yorkers can access their benefits more quickly and receive the peace of mind they need in this difficult time, we urge you to allow those filing online to finish the process online.

We are encouraged by early efforts to expedite benefits to the people who felt the earliest impacts of this pandemic: waiving the waiting period and streamlining the over-crowded application and intake process has already helped thousands of our neighbors. Allowing New Yorkers to complete their claims online and clarifying that claimants can temporarily forgo the mandatory worksearch requirements will make it easier for New Yorkers to get and retain the funds they so desperately need.

In these incredibly difficult circumstances, we must do all we can to make it easier for New Yorkers to both retain and keep the unemployment benefits which are serving as a lifeline to so many, and for all agencies to encourage New Yorkers to stay home and “flatten the curve” of this pandemic.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Andrew S. Gounardes". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent loop at the end.

Andrew S. Gounardes
Member of Senate