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May 6, 2020

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

Dear Governor Cuomo:

Since the implementation of New York State on PAUSE, my office has been contacted by hundreds of residents who are still struggling to access their unemployment benefits. Too many of these individuals have been unable to do so for as many as six, seven and even eight weeks. This wait time far exceeds an “annoying delay” and is absolutely unacceptable. I urge you to take the steps necessary to cut through the red tape and release the benefits owed to these New Yorkers immediately.

Every day, my team and I are fielding calls and emails from residents who are truly desperate for help with what feels like a never-ending process. It is worth noting that these individuals are hard-working New Yorkers who are unemployed through no fault of their own, but due solely to government action. These are real people, with real families to support, who are being pushed to their financial breaking points as a result of bureaucratic dysfunction. By staying home, they are doing their part to promote public health, and now the state needs to do its part and deliver the support that was promised to them.

The coronavirus pandemic put over 1 million New Yorkers out of work with little notice. I understand that the Department of Labor has been completely overwhelmed with this quick and dramatic influx of claims, and I commend them for their work and for the significant steps they have taken to address the backlog. However, while New York is far ahead of most states in processing claims, that fact is of little consolation to those on fixed incomes, single parents, caretakers, students, sole proprietors, small business owners and others who do not know how they will afford basic necessities in the coming days. Much more needs to be done, and needs to be done without delay.

It is my understanding that many issues New Yorkers are experiencing that result in them having to call the Department of Labor to complete their claims are due in part to various federal requirements. I urge you to consider seeking a temporary waiver for any federal requirements that would help streamline the process and cut down on the volume of interactions New Yorkers are attempting to have with the Department of Labor. I know that is easier said than done, but we are in extraordinary times and we owe it to New Yorkers to do all that we can to provide them with the critical relief they deserve.

Importantly, one of the biggest sources of frustration I hear from residents is a lack of communication from the state regarding any progress on their claims. Your daily press briefings have played an integral role in keeping New Yorkers informed throughout this trying time. However, each day, it seems that questions

regarding unemployment delays are relegated to the end of the briefings and are rarely given the in-depth attention they deserve.

I encourage you to dedicate a portion of your briefings to this important issue so that New Yorkers without regular access to email or social media have a reliable source to turn too. This should be done daily until the backlog has been fully cleared and all New Yorkers who lost their jobs solely due to the state's COVID-19 response are able to access their benefits without issue.

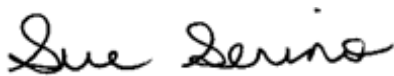
Your briefings have also included regular additions of area experts when it comes to addressing pressing issues of the day. I encourage you to invite the Department of Labor's Commissioner, or a representative of the Department, to participate in your public briefings to provide timely updates and answers to ever-evolving questions.

In addition to these steps, we should be temporarily moving even more state staff to the Department of Labor to help clear the backlog. Together, these measures would play a significant role in providing necessary relief to countless New Yorkers during this time.

While public health must always be our top priority, we cannot leave behind those who have been impacted so significantly by COVID-19-related state policies. I urge you to do all that you can to process and pay these claims immediately.

I thank you for your time and consideration. Please know, my team and I stand ready to assist you in this effort. If you have additional questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Sue Serino".

Sue Serino
New York State Senator
41st District