

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

April 7, 2020

The Honorable Ron DeSantis
Governor
Office of Governor Ron DeSantis
400 S. Monroe Street
Tallahassee, Florida 32399

Dear Governor DeSantis:

As you are aware, unemployment in Florida is skyrocketing, through no fault of workers who are being laid off and told to stay home. Last week over 237,000 Floridians applied for unemployment insurance benefits, with thousands more unable to use the Florida Department of Economic Opportunity's (DEO's) broken website. Sadly, these figures will continue to multiply in the coming weeks.

This letter focuses on the inadequacy of Florida's unemployment insurance benefits, especially as compared to other states with similar costs of living, and provides recommendations on how to improve. We have five requests that we expand upon below:

1. Extend the length of Florida's unemployment benefits from 12 weeks to 26 weeks;
2. Significantly increase the maximum benefit from \$275 per week to be comparable to states with similar costs of living;
3. Utilize available federal funding under the *CARES Act* that provides thirteen additional weeks of state benefits; and
4. Make benefits payments retroactive to when an individual became unemployed;
5. Take all necessary action to make the claims process quick and efficient.

The amount and duration of Florida's unemployment insurance benefits are severely inadequate and out of step with the rest of the country (Attachment 1). Florida provides only twelve weeks of unemployment insurance and caps the benefit at \$275 per week. This combination of low pay and shortened eligibility is among the least supportive benefits program in the country, despite Florida's relatively high cost of living. Florida is one of only nine states that does not offer at least 26 weeks of unemployment benefits. Florida's current unemployment benefit is far lower than the minimum wage, and hundreds less than the average weekly earnings of workers in Florida. States with similar costs of living, offer nearly twice the amount of unemployment compensation (Attachment 2). For example, Utah provides an unemployment benefit of \$543 per week, and North Dakota provides \$595 per week. We are requesting that you take either emergency executive action, call the Florida legislature into session to take action, or take other appropriate steps to increase the amount and duration of the benefits.

Additionally, under the *CARES Act*, Florida is eligible for federal funding to provide an additional thirteen weeks of state unemployment benefits beyond what is provided for by the state. If you have not already done so, we ask that you contact the Department of Labor and take any necessary steps for Florida to take advantage of this expanded eligibility.

As you are aware, Florida's unemployment benefits only begin at the time that an individual's application is processed. And, there have been significant issues with the DEO's website and application portal, which compounds the challenges Floridians are facing. Congressional offices are being flooded with complaints from constituents who are unable to use the web page to process their claims. Given the delay to make a claim, through no fault of the applicant, we request that unemployment benefits begin retroactively to when the individual lost their job, rather than when their application is processed.

Last but not least, we urge you to hire more workers, repair the deficiencies, and update the web page to reflect current federal and state law, in languages sensitive to our population. The digital and paper claim forms are requiring claimants to answer questions that are irrelevant and confusing during this pandemic. Please make it clear that those who are self-employed are also now eligible to apply.

In summary, we are requesting that through executive action, with legislative support, or through any other appropriate means, you make the necessary changes to Florida's unemployment compensation program: to increase the amount and duration of benefits, take advantage of new available federal support, make benefits retroactive to loss of employment, and fix the confusing dysfunctional claim process.

We appreciate your full and fair consideration of our request and your attention to this important matter.

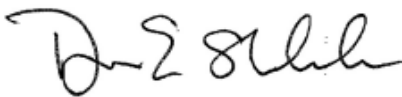
Sincerely,



LOIS FRANKEL
Member of Congress



ALCEE L. HASTINGS
Member of Congress



DONNA SHALALA
Member of Congress



STEPHANIE MURPHY
Member of Congress

/s/

KATHY CASTOR
Member of Congress

CHARLIE CRIST
Member of Congress

VAL DEMINGS
Member of Congress

TED DEUTCH
Member of Congress

AL LAWSON, JR.
Member of Congress

DEBBIE MUCARSEL-POWELL
Member of Congress

DARREN SOTO
Member of Congress

DEBBIE WASSERMAN SCHULTZ
Member of Congress

FREDERICA S. WILSON
Member of Congress

LORI BERMAN (FL-21)
Florida Senate

JANET CRUZ (FL-18)
Florida Senate

BOBBY DUBOSE (FL-94)
Florida House of Representatives

MARGARET GOOD (FL-72)
Florida House of Representatives

MICHAEL GOTTLIEB (FL-98)
Florida House of Representatives

MICHAEL GRIECO (FL-113)
Florida House of Representatives

CARLOS GUILLERMO SMITH (FL-49)
Florida House of Representatives

DIANNE HART (FL-61)
Florida House of Representatives

EVAN JENNE (FL-99)
Florida House of Representatives

JOSE JAVIER RODRIGUEZ (FL-37)
Florida Senate

AMY MERCADO (FL-48)
Florida House of Representatives

TINA POLSKY (FL-81)
Florida House of Representatives

DAVID SILVERS (FL-87)
Florida House of Representatives

SUSAN L. VALDES (FL-62)
Florida House of Representatives

CC: DEO Director, Ken Lawson
Senate President, Bill Galvano
Senate Minority Leader, Audrey Gibson
Speaker of the House, Jose R. Oliva
House Minority Leader, Kionne McGhee

Attachments:

1. Comparison of Unemployment Benefits by State
2. Comparison of Cost of Living by State

ATTACHMENT 1: UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS COMPARISON

Source: <https://fileunemployment.org/unemployment-benefits/unemployment-benefits-comparison-by-state/>

State	Unemp Rate	Max Weeks of Benefits	Max. Weekly Benefits	Max. DA Allowance	Total Weekly Benefits
Alaska	7.1	26	\$370	\$72	\$442
Alabama	4.1	26	\$265	—	\$265
Arkansas	3.8	20	\$451	—	\$451
Arizona	4.7	26	\$240	—	\$240
California	4.2	26	\$450	—	\$450
Colorado	2.7	26	\$597	—	\$597
Connecticut	4.4	26	\$631	\$75	\$706
D.C.	5.6	26	\$425	—	\$425
Delaware	3.9	26	\$330	—	\$330
Florida	3.8	12	\$275	—	\$275
Georgia	4.1	14	\$330	—	\$330
Hawaii	2.1	26	\$630	—	\$630
Iowa	2.7	26	\$573	\$104	\$677
Idaho	2.9	21	\$405	—	\$405
Illinois	4.3	26	\$648	\$170	\$1495
Indiana	3.3	26	\$390	—	\$390
Kansas	3.4	16	\$474	—	\$474
Kentucky	4.2	26	\$502	—	\$502
Louisiana	4.7	26	\$247	—	\$247
Massachusetts	3.5	30	\$795	\$384	\$1179
Maryland	4.3	26	\$430	—	\$430
Maine	2.9	26	\$646	\$209	\$855
Michigan	4.5	20	\$362	—	\$362
Minnesota	3.1	26	\$717	—	\$717
Missouri	3.5	13	\$320	—	\$320
Mississippi	4.7	26	\$235	—	\$235
Montana	3.8	28	\$487	—	\$487
North Carolina	4.2	12	\$350	—	\$350
North Dakota	2.6	26	\$595	—	\$595
Nebraska	2.7	26	\$426	—	\$426
New Hampshire	2.7	26	\$427	—	\$427
New Jersey	4.9	26	\$696	—	\$696
New Mexico	4.9	26	\$442	\$50	\$492
Nevada	4.7	26	\$407	—	\$407
New York	4.5	26	\$435	—	\$435
Ohio	4.5	26	\$598	\$155	\$753

Oklahoma	3.9	26	\$520	—	\$520
Oregon	4	26	\$538	—	\$538
Pennsylvania	4.3	26	\$561	\$8	\$569
Rhode Island	4.3	26	\$566	\$141	\$707
South Carolina	3.8	20	\$326	—	\$326
South Dakota	3.2	26	\$352	—	\$352
Tennessee	3.5	26	\$275	—	\$275
Texas	4	26	\$507	—	\$507
Utah	3	26	\$543	—	\$543
Virginia	3.2	26	\$387	—	\$387
Vermont	2.8	26	\$466	—	\$466
Washington	4.7	26	\$749	—	\$749
Wisconsin	2.9	26	\$363	—	\$363
West Virginia	5.3	26	\$424	—	\$424
Wyoming	3.7	26	\$489	—	\$489

ATTACHMENT 2: COST OF LIVING COMPARISON

Source: <https://worldpopulationreview.com/states/states-with-lowest-cost-of-living/>

