



Hi Friend,

In recent months, unemployment assistance has unexpectedly become a critical need for many of my constituents. The continued effects of COVID-19 on Colorado's job market has put unprecedented strain on our unemployment system. This issue is pivotal to the well-being of our state and it's staggering how many of you have reached out to my office for help navigating through the log-jam of the unemployment process.

Like many of you, I've grown increasingly angry watching the partisanship of the GOP-led US Senate. Politicians in Washington have shown that they are willing to gamble with people's livelihoods and unable to work for sustainable solutions. Instead of helping people to make ends meet, they are letting critically-needed unemployment assistance expire.

This newsletter includes a brief run-down of updates to our unemployment insurance system on the state level. Keep reading for more information on the tireless work of the Department of Labor adjusting to the massive need and for recent legislative efforts to expand unemployment eligibility.

As always, if you're struggling with unemployment, reach out to my office and we will do everything we can to get you help.

All the best,

Unemployment Insurance Updates

Last week, the Colorado Department of Labor and Employment (CDLE) launched Virtual Agent, a 24/7 system to answer unemployment questions. The Virtual Agent helps guide users through common scenarios, such as how to reopen a file, report weekly earnings, or get help with work-search requirements. In August, the Virtual Agent will be able to access a user's individual claim for more specific questions.

This technology will transition the unemployment line from an inbound call center to an outbound call center. If the customer needs more in-depth assistance, the Virtual Agent will schedule a callback with a customer service representative. As so many of you have told me, you could call

over 100 times a week and never reach anyone. Under this new system, no one has to wait on hold and folks with more complicated situations will be guaranteed a callback time with a real person.

Check out Tamara Chuang's Colorado Sun [article](#) for more about the landscape of unemployment in Colorado and a helpful list of frequently used links for claimants.

Expanding Unemployment Insurance

We passed two bills this session with the aim of expanding unemployment insurance eligibility. Especially in the midst of a pandemic, we can't afford to let Coloradans slip through the cracks due to formalities or extenuating circumstances. These bills, [SB20-170](#) and [SB20-207](#), loosen restrictions on who can apply for unemployment benefits in an effort to support more of our residents through financial hardship.

For example, previous law required domestic violence survivors to provide documentation of abuse in order to qualify. SB20-170 eliminates this requirement because someone who needs to leave work to escape an abuser should not have to jump through any extra hoops.

SB20-207 directs the division of unemployment insurance to consider a number of factors when determining eligibility, including;

- whether the employee's workplace is in compliance with state and federal safety guidelines;
- whether the employee is the primary care-taker of a child unable to attend school due to a public health emergency;
- whether the employee is in a household where someone is quarantining due to illness during a public health emergency;
- and whether the employee is immunocompromised or at heightened risk of illness during a public health emergency.

We know there is more work to do to improve our social support systems. Our unemployment structure can't be one-size-fits-all. These bills go a long way in better protecting Coloradans and ensuring we adapt in moments of crisis. Thank you to the bill sponsors - Rep. Jackson, Rep. Duran, Rep. Tom Sullivan and Rep. Matt Gray - for listening to the needs of Colorado residents and responding with thoughtful legislation.

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