

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

April 14, 2020

Tiffany P. Robinson
Secretary
Maryland Department of Labor
500 North Calvert St.
Baltimore, MD 21202-3651

Dear Secretary Robinson,

We are writing to offer our full support and assistance as you implement the unprecedented expansions of unemployment benefits recently enacted by Congress. We have heard from many constituents having difficulty accessing unemployment benefits and we understand you are facing massive new demand under these unique and challenging circumstances. We stand ready to work with you to ensure that these benefits reach struggling workers as soon as possible.

The Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act significantly expanded eligibility for unemployment compensation, increased benefits by \$600 per week through July 31, and extended the duration that workers can claim benefits from 26 weeks to 39 weeks. Self-employed workers, part-time workers, employees without paid sick leave, and other workers with insufficient work history to qualify for regular Unemployment Insurance (UI) can qualify for Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA) if COVID-19 causes them to become unemployed. PUA also provides up to 39 weeks of benefits and includes the \$600 weekly benefit increase. All of these benefit expansions are fully federally funded.

Prior to passage of the CARES Act, the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA) provided \$1 billion to state UI programs to help cover their increased administrative burden, and we are pleased to see that Maryland has already received its \$16.8 million share of this funding. FFCRA also provides interest-free loans to help state UI trust funds pay regular UI benefits. The CARES Act fully reimburses administrative costs related to the law's expansions of benefits.

Maryland's Work Sharing program also receives significant support under the CARES Act, making this a good option for the state, employers, and workers alike. Employers who participate in Work Sharing reduce the hours of their employees, rather than laying them off completely, and their employees receive a UI benefit to help compensate them for the lost wages. These Work Sharing benefits are also increased by \$600 per week. The CARES Act provides full federal funding for all benefits paid by state Work Sharing programs, which would provide significant relief for Maryland's UI trust fund if employers adopt Work Sharing on a widespread basis. Furthermore, the CARES Act provides \$100 million in administrative funding for states to improve their Work Sharing programs.

The U.S. Department of Labor is a vital partner for Maryland’s unemployment insurance system, and we are committed to ensuring that Maryland has all of the support it needs. We stand ready to assist if you have any unmet requirements from the U.S. Department of Labor for funding, technical assistance, or guidance. If federal systems are hampering delivery of Maryland benefits – as was recently reported with the Interstate Connection Network (ICON) database – please let us know.¹ Additionally, we deeply value feedback on the unemployment legislation enacted so far by Congress, and especially suggestions for further changes that we should adopt in future legislation.

We would like to schedule a time for the Maryland Department of Labor to brief our staff on these subjects, with a focus on how we can best assist you and how our offices can best assist unemployed workers in Maryland. Caseworkers in our offices have been helping an unprecedented number of Marylanders seeking to claim unemployment benefits. Having the latest information to share with constituents and guidance on how to help Marylanders navigate the system to claim their benefits will greatly assist this casework.

Thank you for all of your hard work to help Marylanders losing their jobs during the COVID-19 crisis. We look forward to continuing to work with you.

Sincerely,

/s/ Chris Van Hollen
United States Senator

/s/ Benjamin L. Cardin
United States Senator

/s/ Andy Harris, M.D.
Member of Congress

/s/ C.A. Dutch Ruppersberger
Member of Congress

/s/ John P. Sarbanes
Member of Congress

/s/ Anthony G. Brown
Member of Congress

/s/ Steny H. Hoyer
Member of Congress

/s/ David Trone
Member of Congress

/s/ Jamie Raskin
Member of Congress

¹ Maryland Matters, “Unemployment Fund in Danger of Being Depleted, Lawmakers Are Warned,” April 1, 2020.