



COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA
DEPARTMENT OF LABOR AND INDUSTRY
HARRISBURG, PENNSYLVANIA 17120

THE SECRETARY

October 22, 2012

Dear Legislator,

It has come to my attention that many of you are receiving complaints from Unemployment Compensation (UC) claimants who are experiencing difficulty getting through to the UC service centers (UCSC) on the telephone lines. The Department of Labor & Industry (L&I) understands the stressful situation claimants face when they lose their jobs and know the last thing they want to deal with is a busy signal at a government office. The purpose of this letter is to inform you of the steps we are taking to address the issue.

First, it is important to understand that funding for the administration of UC programs comes from the federal government based on Pennsylvania's unemployment rate, initial claims and continued claims. In January 2011, the number of Pennsylvania's initial claims was three times higher and the number of continued claims was almost four times higher than the respective numbers in September 2012. This downward trend means that Pennsylvania is eligible for \$30 million fewer federal dollars to administer UC programs in Federal Fiscal Year 2013.

During the recession, the Rendell administration adopted a 'no busy signal' policy and substantial financial and human resources were devoted almost exclusively to this strategy, with less than satisfactory results. Busy signals have plagued the system for years. Moreover, this policy perpetuated a reliance on telephone services rather than encouraging other means such as the Internet to apply for benefits and seek answers to basic questions. The consequences of this 'no busy signal' policy are one reason we are experiencing the high call volumes today.

While telephone services will continue, our current fiscal situation demands we look at more cost effective and efficient means of communicating with claimants. We are providing three avenues for UC claimants to contact L&I: (1) through the Internet; (2) through a dedicated fax line; and (3) through the telephone.

1. **Enhanced Internet services:** The Internet is the fastest and best way for claimants to seek answers to questions and file a claim. In an effort to make the Internet more user-friendly and attractive, we are in the process of a comprehensive overhaul of the UC website. We simplified the claims filing process, included more information regarding the status of a claim, and have added more online capabilities. We will continue to work on the website. The goal is to make filing online the fastest method for a claimant to receive benefits and the easiest means to find basic information. I encourage you to direct constituents to the UC website at www.uc.pa.gov. By encouraging claimants to use the Internet, we can ensure the telephone lines are open for claimants that truly need the assistance of UCSC staff.

2. **Dedicated fax line:** We are in the process of setting up a central fax line dedicated solely for UC claimants to submit questions about their UC claim. This will be separate and an addition to the UCSC fax lines that many of you currently utilize. Upon receiving the fax, UCSC staff will call the claimant to resolve his/her issue in a timely manner.
3. **Upgraded phone system:** We are installing a new UCSC phone system this month. Among the system's many features is the capability of automated routing which will provide faster distribution of inquiries resulting in quicker response time.

In addition to the efforts described above, over the past two weeks we have brought back to work over one hundred Intermittent Intake Interviewers (III's) to ease the call volume. While greatly constrained financially, the use of our additional III's will allow L&I to keep up with the important needs of claimants at this time.

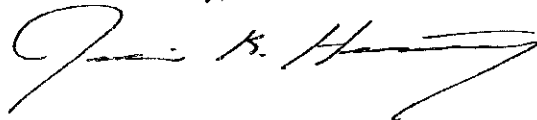
L&I's Office of Legislative Affairs will continue to assist you and your staff. This partnership has worked well because your staff has been judicious in its use by calling the liaisons only when your constituents have questions that cannot be easily answered by other methods. Again, we ask for your help in directing claimants to the Internet or fax options before calling the UCSC.

Also, please encourage your constituents to refer to the "UC Handbook" that is provided to each claimant. Our experience suggests that a significant portion of inquiries can be resolved by reference to the handbook, which is also on our website. We need your assistance in mitigating the effects of the reduced federal funding and ask that you direct your constituents to use these other options so that the phone lines are available for those citizens that truly need human involvement.

Lastly, in the coming weeks your office can expect another communication from L&I that will include a quick reference instruction sheet on the methods in which claimants can get answers to their questions. We will also include with the instruction sheet the number of the newly created claimant fax line.

We will continue to monitor the situation with the goal of providing a consistent level of quality service with the resources available. Thank you for your understanding and cooperation in this matter. If you should have any further questions or concerns, please feel free to contact L&I's Office of Legislative Affairs at (717) 787-5087.

Sincerely,



Julia K. Hearthway
Secretary