

Testimony of Tilahun Hailemeskel
Before the Committee on Labor and Workforce Development
Council of the District of Columbia
Public Hearing Regarding:
Oversight of the Department of Employment Services
September 16, 2020

Good morning/afternoon. My name is Tilahun Hailemeskel, and I am here today because I would like to share my story about applying for PUA.

I first applied for both unemployment insurance and PUA in April. I had been driving for Uber, but stopped on March 16 because of the coronavirus. I was scared that if I continued driving, I would hurt my children by bringing the disease to them. Additionally, my children needed me at home because their school was closed.

Although the unemployment and PUA applications aren't in Amharic, I was able to fill them out without difficulty. Even though I provided information about my job with Uber, and how I was no longer able to drive, DOES relied on old information about a different job I'd previously had and would not approve my applications. It took four months for the unemployment office to finally approve my PUA application. Even though my application was approved and I began receiving money, DOES is still relying on wrong information. They have asked me to provide medical records showing that my wife contracted the coronavirus. My wife never contracted the coronavirus and I don't know why DOES thinks she did.

I felt bad that it took DOES four months to approve my application. I have three children, and those four months were a difficult time for my family. During those four months, I worried I wouldn't be able to settle my bills or pay my rent. I was scared my family would be evicted, and was forced to borrow money so I could pay my rent.

The Department of Employment Services can improve its services to workers, like me, by properly and carefully reading applications in the future. If they had actually considered the information I had provided, instead of relying on outdated information, I believe I would have received unemployment much faster than I did. I am grateful that DOES ultimately approved my application.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony about my experience with the Department of Employment Services.