

Testimony of Vontanell Tillman
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 Vontanell Tillman, and I am here today because I would like to share my story about applying for Unemployment Insurance.

I first applied for unemployment insurance on May 2020 following reduction of my hours due to the pandemic.

After I applied for unemployment insurance, I was approved, but I never received benefits. When I tried to address this, I had a very hard time trying to get in contact with Department of Employment Services. It would take weeks for the department get back to me. When I called the Department of Employment Services, it would take a very long time to get into touch with any representatives. Once, I waited 5 hours to speak with a representative. And when I finally did in get in touch with a representative, I was told someone else would need to call me back. Other times, I was given another phone number, and when I called that number, no one would answer, and I would not be able to be able to leave a voicemail because the inbox was full. The issues were only addressed when I contacted outside resources.

My experience with the Department of Employment Services has impacted me in the following ways: The whole situation was extremely overwhelming for me. The long response times and not having answers created a lot of stress and frustration. My situation could have been resolved sooner. In my opinion, the Department failed to meet the needs of the community

The Department of Employment Services can improve its services to workers, like me, by shortening response times and making claimant examiners more available to applicants. The current response times are too long to wait for workers who are living paycheck to paycheck,

with rent due at the start of the month. As an applicant, difficulty reaching claimant examiners showed a lack of empathy for us trying to get assistance. I understand there are lots of people applying, but the Department should still be working with us and respecting individual struggles. It's not the applicants' fault, but it felt like they were penalizing us.

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