



May 12, 2020

Governor Kate Brown
900 Court Street, Suite 254
Salem, OR 97301-4047

Dear Governor Brown:

The economic hardship Oregon families are experiencing in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic calls for Oregon to use all available tools to help them through this crisis. Many laid-off Oregonians are not receiving Unemployment Insurance benefits in a timely way. They are in crisis, unable to meet their basic needs. Yet, many are unaware that existing public assistance could help tide them over until their first Unemployment Insurance check arrives.

Given this situation, we ask you to launch a campaign urging laid-off workers seeking Unemployment Insurance (UI) benefits to simultaneously apply for public assistance they may be eligible for, particularly Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits.

UI is not delivering for many desperate laid-off workers

Many workers applying for UI are not receiving benefits in time to forestall economic hardship. OED's data through May 2 shows 62,000 workers who have applied for UI are waiting for their benefits to arrive. Of this group, 60 percent have been waiting more than 3 weeks. And this is not the complete picture, as the data does not include an unknown number of claimants filing under the new Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA) program, which extends Unemployment Insurance to self-employed and other categories of workers. Circumstances for PUA-eligible workers may now be dire, as many have languished for as long as six weeks before being able to apply.

The OED figures also do not include workers who have tried to apply for benefits but were unsuccessful — likely a common experience. A [recent Marketplace-Edison poll](#) of American households corroborates [reports](#) of Oregonians having trouble filing for UI benefits. The poll [found](#) more than a third of people who tried to apply were unsuccessful.

[Expanding lines at Oregon's food pantries](#) reveal the deep strain many households are experiencing. [A recent survey](#) finds that food insecurity in the U.S. spiked in April, with the [largest jump occurring among children](#). The study observes that never in modern times has food insecurity been higher than now.

Oregon should promote SNAP and other assistance as short-term support

Many Oregonians recently laid off from work will qualify for SNAP benefits, at least until they begin receiving UI benefits. Some of their children will be eligible for school meals, and some households will be eligible for TANF. And many losing job-based health insurance will be eligible for the Oregon Health Plan.

Oregonians visiting the UI site these days, however, are likely not aware of the assistance or understand that they may be temporarily eligible. They may not realize they could be waiting many weeks to receive UI benefits. And currently, people are not prompted to consider applying for public assistance when they apply for UI benefits. For the sake of our children, families, workers, and communities in this difficult time, Oregon must take every reasonable action to connect desperate households with available public assistance.

We ask you to encourage laid-off Oregonians to apply for SNAP and other public assistance at the time they apply for unemployment benefits. For those who have already applied for UI but are not yet receiving benefits, we ask you to immediately communicate about potential eligibility for public assistance.

Proactive measures could include posting on OED's webpage for applying for UI messages such as, "You may be eligible for temporary or ongoing SNAP food assistance and other supports, even if you apply for unemployment benefits," along with links to appropriate application information. Letters, emails or other direct outreach with this message to those with pending applications is called for by the current situation.

We also urge you to launch a public information campaign.

Temporary SNAP benefits will help Oregon families stay fed and relieve their anxiety in these difficult times. Having SNAP will make it easier for families to stay safely at home, since relying on food pantries can mean more trips, having less control over the quantity and type of food obtained. Broader use of SNAP would also mean millions more in federal funds coming to Oregon at a time when spending on basic needs is critical to our economy. One month of TANF benefits could also help some families with children make it through a moment of crisis. And the importance of access to health services that the Oregon Health Plan enables cannot be overstated in this time of pandemic.

Thank you for considering this request. We are ready to provide our best thinking about implementation issues. Feel free to call on any of us if we can be of assistance.

Sincerely,

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