

ADRIENNE A. JONES
SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE

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The Maryland House of Delegates

ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401-1991

July 9, 2021

The Honorable Lawrence J. Hogan
State House
Annapolis, MD 21401

Dear Governor Hogan,

In the spirit of bipartisanship and in the best interest of our collective constituents, we are writing to ask that you immediately:

- 1) Remove Tiffany Robinson as Labor Secretary based on the ongoing failures of her leadership to rectify the catastrophic unemployment benefit delivery during the COVID-19 pandemic; and
- 2) Cease your defense against lawsuits filed to terminate federally available enhanced unemployment benefits.

This has been the most challenging time in recent history. We appreciate your efforts to keep Marylanders safe and our economy afloat over the last 16 months. Many of us cheered when you urged our constituents to “wear the damn mask.” We were happy to work with you to pass the bipartisan RELIEF Act. However, your decision to turn your back on unemployed Marylanders during this recovery by rejecting funds that provide a crucial stimulus to our economy to ensure a full recovery, is short-sighted and ill-advised.

Although jobs are returning, the recovery is uneven and slow. First, some jobs are taking longer to return and may not return in a post-pandemic economy. People in those fields are still looking for work or having to pivot to a new sector. Second, the improving statewide job numbers don’t tell the whole story. The newly available jobs might be on the other side of the state from the unemployed workers who need them. Third, Marylanders are struggling with childcare and elder care. Even before the pandemic, there was a shortage of affordable childcare and, for many parents, it will be easier to return to the workforce in September when children can return to in-person school.

Withdrawing unemployment too soon will have devastating consequences for many Marylanders and the State’s economy, with cascading effects, including eviction, car repossession, and slower

economic recovery. The \$1.5 billion available from the federal government is specifically designed to boost economic recovery and buoy small businesses.

1) Terminate Tiffany Robinson from her position as Secretary of Labor

Tiffany Robinson's tenure as Labor Secretary has failed too many struggling Marylanders. We recognize that the massive influx of unemployment claims would have been a challenge for any leader. But throughout the pandemic, Maryland has been inexcusably slow in dispensing unemployment benefits. Countless Marylanders have waited for months for their benefits. Desperate and afraid, many of them spent day after day trying to reach the agency to resolve their claims.

The Department has demonstrated ongoing poor communication with claimants, conflicting and inaccurate advice to unemployed Marylanders, and slow adoption of General Assembly mandated reforms.

On Tuesday, in yet another sign of mismanagement, the media reported that a Labor Department claims agent, unaware of your administration's numerous court defeats, told an unemployed Marylander that benefits "expired as of the 7/3 [sic]" and that any news of the court's restraining order "has not been reflected on the MDOL website at this time." This misinformation to struggling Marylanders is inexcusable.

2) Cease Your Defense

We urge you to cease your expensive, failing legal defense to terminate enhanced federal unemployment benefits. The Circuit Court judge concluded that the plaintiffs have shown a likelihood they will prevail on the underlying merits of their claims in an order that was then upheld by both of the state's appellate courts.

During the 2021 session, we passed HB1002/SB893 which is now the law of the State. It requires the Maryland Department of Labor to "identify all changes in federal regulations and guidance that would expand access to unemployment benefits or reduce bureaucratic hurdles to prompt approval of unemployment benefits" and "revise State unemployment insurance rules and practices to encompass any changes in federal regulations and guidance." The purpose of this law is to ensure that the Maryland Department of Labor maximizes Marylanders' access to all available federal unemployment benefits.

This new law builds on Title 8 of the Labor and Employment Article which states, the "Secretary [of Labor] shall cooperate with the United States Secretary of Labor to the fullest extent that this title allows."

Rather than adding to the taxpayer-funded law firm bills, we implore you to focus on solutions that will help both businesses and struggling workers as they transition back to the workforce.

We know that you share the goal of ensuring Maryland is well-positioned to come out of the pandemic with a strong economy and a strong workforce. Let's work together to achieve those goals. The first best steps are to end the lawsuit and find new leadership at the Department of Labor.

Sincerely,

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