

Rep. Allen: Statement on Department of Workforce Development

Posted on Thursday, May 7, 2020

>> WisPolitics is now on the State Affairs network. Get custom keyword notifications, bill tracking and all WisPolitics content. [Get the app or access via desktop.](#)

On April 9, my office received our first email asking for assistance in contacting the Department of Workforce Development from Aaron, a 19-year-old Waukesha resident, who was denied unemployment due to a clerical error. This seemingly-isolated event has developed into a consistently devastating trend. This problem affects workers across the state, including the 97th Assembly District.

Many have not been as lucky as Aaron, whose claim issues were resolved in one day. Many people have waited over 7 weeks for their unemployment claims to process.

Time and time again, constituents describe being told during the online application process that they needed to contact the Department of Workforce Development by phone. They call hundreds of times, and the phone is never answered or the call is dropped.

On April 15, Governor Evers signed 2019 Act 185 into law, the State's response to COVID-19.

As requested by the Administration, the Legislature, in a broadly bi-partisan effort, included provisions related to the Department of Workforce Development and unemployment assistance.

The act suspended the one-week waiting period for unemployment insurance.

And Importantly, the Act authorizes the Department of Administration to transfer state employees from one agency to another, and adjust the limitations on the number of hours a limited-term employee may work per year.

In other words, the Legislature gave the Administration the tools it needed to meet the challenges of shutting down the state for an unknown period of time.

Unfortunately, the Evers Administration continues to fail to rise to the challenge. It has been 22 days since Act 185 became law. On Tuesday, I wrote Sec. Frostman to ask whether state employees have actually been moved to the Department of Workforce Development.

I requested a response, and have not heard back.

We need to be demanding more answers from the Department of Workforce Development.

How many unprocessed unemployment claims are there?

Has the Department shifted and trained employees to handle the increased amount of claims?

When will citizens be receiving their unemployment insurance and their federal pandemic unemployment assistance funds? Relief that was promised and has yet to be delivered.

People talk about the Madison “bubble.” It’s the idea that bureaucrats are insulated from real people and don’t feel the consequences of their policy decisions.

It is only fair to my constituents that I give them a voice and acknowledge them while standing here.

Randy, a school bus driver.

Rhonda, who owns a cleaning service.

Jennifer, a teacher's aide.

Leona, who runs a catering service.

Steve, a food service worker.

Stephanie, a daycare worker.

Shannon, a gym owner

Lynell, who works for an airline

Jamie, an interior designer.

Kayleigh, a health care worker

Mistie, a salon esthetician

Anthony, a Lyft driver

Kristi, a bartender

Jim, a health care worker

To my knowledge, their claims are either still pending with DWD after weeks and weeks of waiting, or simple errors have caused their claims to be denied or revoked. They deserve better.

These aren't bigwig corporate CEO's with a golden parachute, who are trying to improve the price of the company stock. These are normal people whose lives and livelihoods are being destroyed. They live in working-class neighborhoods, they are

my neighbors.

It's time for the Evers Administration and Sec. Frostman to do their jobs.

If they won't reopen Wisconsin, they should at least start caring about the people who they're forcing onto the unemployment rolls.

Shifting gears for a moment I want to talk about summer. We all look forward to summer. We look forward to fun outdoor activities.

I learned this morning that the city that I represent, the City of Waukesha, plans to cancel several outdoor events in June & July including Civic Band Concerts, Monday Night Movies in the Park, and Tribute Tuesday Concerts.

It is my understanding that more reports are being released that suggest that it is very difficult to catch the virus outdoors. If that is the case, I would think appropriate measures could be put in place to keep staff and participants safe.

While it is certainly in the city's right to cancel these events, local elected officials who make these decisions should be obligated to conserve taxpayer resources. Taxpayer dollars were appropriated for these outdoor events, including the salaries of those who would organize and facilitate these events.

As such, any city staff who are not working as a result of the Coronavirus shutdown should be transferred to work in another area of city government or be furloughed. And not just the City of Waukesha, the citizens of the entire state deserve to have their tax resources protected during this time of economic contraction.

Furloughed public sector workers can file for unemployment, and their claims should be processed in an expeditious manner.

It is interesting that many private sector workers are asking for things to be opened

up so they can go back to work, while the public sector looks for things it can close down.

We have heard over and over again that we are all in this together. I ask only that public officials live up to the rhetoric they use.

Thank you, and I'm happy to answer any questions you may have at this time.