

Sen. Darling: Statement on audit of Evers administration's handling of unemployment claims

Posted on Wednesday, Dec 16, 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.](#)

Madison – On Wednesday, the non-partisan Legislative Audit Bureau presented a review of the Department of Workforce Development's (DWD) disastrous response to unemployment claims brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. The Senate Co-chair of the Joint Committee on Finance, Senator Alberta Darling, issued the following statement:

"Earlier this week, after voting during the presidential electors meeting, Governor Evers made the statement 'We Made It.' Unfortunately, the governor was referring to his vote and not whether his administration eliminated the backlog of unemployment claims. This audit made it clear making sure people had the money they needed at a time of crisis wasn't a priority for Governor Evers or his administration.

My office continues to receive calls and emails from constituents who haven't heard anything about their claim in weeks. As of October 2020, more than 96-thousand individuals in our state have yet to be paid. The findings in these audits are unacceptable.

With \$2 billion in federal CARES Act money and the flexibility to reassign staff, the governor pointed fingers and shifted the blame instead of finding a solution. This has been a failed effort by the Evers' administration and this can't continue for the hard-working families in Wisconsin.

As the holiday season approaches, many families will continue waiting for a remedy. I urge the governor to use all resources available and be transparent with the Legislature on what more can be done. "

A summary of some of the findings is included below.

- From March 15, 2020, through June 30, 2020, 38.3 million of the 41.1 million total telephone calls (93.3 percent) to the call centers were blocked or

received busy signals and, therefore, did not reach the call centers; 6.2 percent of calls were abandoned by individuals before speaking with the call centers, and 0.5 percent of calls were answered.

- 96,623 individuals with initial claims were still haven't been paid as of October 10, 2020.
- DWD was responsible for 11.0 of the 13.0 weeks (84.6 percent) that it took, on average, to resolve the initial claims in the sample group.
- DWD on average took 5.5 weeks to resolve issues even when it had the information to do so.
- Despite citing technology-related shortcomings for the cause of the backlog, it took DWD seven months to utilize Google Cloud, a well-known and widely used technology that DWD now says will expedite decision-making and allow the department to release payments faster. Illinois was using Google Cloud in April.

Senator Darling represents portions of Milwaukee, Ozaukee, Washington, and Waukesha Counties.