

Sen. Wirch: Options and resources for jobseekers during COVID-19 crisis

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Kenosha/Racine – As reported today, nationwide, 3.3 million people filed first-time unemployment claims last week, a record, as the coronavirus caused mass shutdowns. People are scared, not just of the health implications, but of how they are going to provide for themselves and their families. It can be confusing and overwhelming, so I'd like to offer some tips to people and families in similar situations.

First, if you have lost your job, file for unemployment benefits. The easiest way to do so, if you have internet access, is online at dwd.wisconsin.gov/uiben/apply; you can also reach the state's Unemployment Insurance Division by phone at (844)910-3661. If you aren't sure if you qualify for benefits, your best option is to file a claim and be honest with your answers; you may or may not qualify. If you are having a problem filing a claim or getting through on the phone line, please call me at (608)267-8979.

Second, there are a number of other state-administered benefits that can help ease your financial burden, such as FoodShare, which helps families in need purchase groceries. You can find out if you qualify for any of these programs by visiting access.wisconsin.gov or calling the Wisconsin Kenosha Racine Partnership (WKRP) at 1-888-794-5820. Again, please feel free to call me if you need assistance.

During these trying times, WE Energies and other public utilities are not allowed to disconnect customers or assess late fees for nonpayment. They are also being required to allow deferred payment agreements for those seeking them. If you are struggling to make ends meet and have to choose between food on the table or your electric bill, reach out to your provider and ask for a deferred payment plan, whereby you can pay in installments later on as you get back on your feet. I'm

always happy to help with utility issues.

Finally, at this time, Circuit Courts in Racine and Kenosha Counties are not holding court proceedings on evictions, which means eviction permits are not currently being issued in these two counties. While we all have to live up to our obligations, this should provide a little peace of mind to any families who are dealing with financial uncertainty during the coronavirus outbreak. One valuable resource for low-income individuals and families fearing eviction or homelessness is Legal Action of Wisconsin. They are not offering in-office services at this time but can be reached by phone at (855)947-2529.

I know these are difficult times, but there is help available. Please feel free to use me as a resource in assisting you,