

Evers urges lawmakers to take action modernizing UI system

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Gov. Tony Evers urged lawmakers to take immediate, bipartisan action on his proposal to modernize the state's unemployment insurance system.

On Jan. 13, the gov signed an executive order calling a special session for the Legislature to consider the fix. Evers' plan to modernize the state's unemployment system would give the Department of Workforce Development more than \$5.3 million to immediately begin work on the task. Overall, the administration projects it would cost \$90 million over 10 years to modernize the system.

The GOP-run Legislature has yet to act, saying Evers could start the project with existing funds. But the gov argues that funding for the project over multiple state budgets is dependent on the Legislature's approval.

"My proposal to update our antiquated system to date has been met with the same continued inaction Wisconsinites have seen for years during previous administrations and more than a decades' worth of state legislators that knew this system was outdated and failed to fix it," Evers wrote. "I don't care who gets the credit, I just want to get it done."

The proposal uses the master lease program, which operates functionally similar to a home mortgage — allowing the state to begin upgrading the UI system while reducing up-front costs and committing funding through the upgrade to completion.

Evers also noted in his letter that the state is projected to collect \$1.2 billion more in revenue over the next three years than previously estimated allowing an immediate start to the modernization process.

The UI Advisory Council was briefed on the modernization in its January meeting, said employer representative Scott Manley of Wisconsin Manufacturers & Commerce. Manley, the chamber's senior vice president of government relations, said while the council's role will probably be minor in this endeavor, modernization is something everyone can get behind.

"Everybody who is part of the unemployment system, and that includes the employers who pay into it and pay for the benefits and the employees who collect the benefits, all want a system that works well and works efficiently and works timely," he said. "I think that what we have right now is unacceptable. I think everyone would agree that it's unacceptable — that people are waiting weeks if not months to get an unemployment benefit check."

Manley added that a variety of factors are responsible for the unacceptable delay, but the computer system is part of it.

"To the extent that we can make some headway on that problem by modernizing the computer system, then that's something we probably ought to do," he said.

See a recent WisBusiness.com article on the dated UI system and last year's influx of claims:

<https://www.wisbusiness.com/2021/dwd-claims-staff-walk-through-outdated-ui-system/>

-By Stephanie Hoff



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