

June 04, 2020

Governor Mike DeWine
77 S. High Street, 30th Floor
Columbus, OH 43215
Governorsoffice@governor.ohio.gov

Dear Governor DeWine:

Everyone, no matter where they live or what they look like, needs stability and security. The COVID-19 crisis has upended the lives of all Ohioans and slowed down our economy. As we all work together to flatten the COVID-19 curve, we ask you to do everything you can to help stabilize residents' lives who are in crisis now. That is why it's critical that your administration makes sure that everyone who applies for Unemployment Compensation is also aware of other programs that can help them and their families make ends meet.

Ohioans Need Relief.

More than 20% of Ohio's working people were laid off during the shutdown. Ohio's unemployment rate was 16.8% in April up from 4.1% in February. Across the country and here in Ohio, more people than ever don't know where their next meal will come from. A recent national survey by the Hamilton Project found that by the end of April, more than one in five households say their children are not getting enough to eat. Food banks across the state are providing emergency food assistance to a record number of people across the state.

According to ODJFS, over 1.2 million Ohioans have filed unemployment claims since the middle of March. That's more than the last three years combined. Over 90,000 Ohioans still have claims pending and hundreds of thousands of Ohioans who filed for unemployment have been denied. Over 161,000 Ohioans have applied for Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA), which extends Unemployment Compensation (UC) to people who are paid low-wage or who are self-employed. Tens of thousands of Ohioans are still waiting for PUA support. These Ohioans have lost their jobs and their income. Many have been out of work for nearly three months and are struggling to put food on the table, pay the rent, and afford the basics to support their families.

Yet, many of these Ohioans are unaware of existing public programs that would provide much needed support until their first UC check arrives. SNAP, Medicaid, Ohio Works First (OWF), Prevention, Retention, and Contingency (PRC), and Publicly Funded Child Care exist to help struggling Ohioans pay for food, healthcare, child care, and other basic necessities. We ask that these benefit programs be fully integrated so that those who apply for unemployment are also aware of other programs that provide stability for people and their families. These programs give Ohioans more purchasing power to spend on basic needs which can help stimulate our local economies.

Ohio Can Do More to Help Stabilize Children and Families

Many Ohioans who have been laid off are now eligible for healthcare through Medicaid, food assistance through SNAP, cash assistance through OWF, rent, mortgage and utility assistance

through PRC, and support for child care through Ohio's Publicly Funded Child Care program, at least until they begin receiving UC benefits. Ohioans visiting unemployment.ohio.gov, however, are likely not aware that these resources are available or that they may be eligible for these kinds of support.

The average Ohioan may not realize that they could have to wait several weeks to receive UC benefits. Currently, people are not guided to consider applying for public assistance when they apply for UC benefits. Moreover, when Ohioans are denied regular Unemployment Compensation due to being paid too little or working as an independent contractor, the state of Ohio doesn't make them aware of other resources that could support them. Ohio must do more to support the basic health, food security, safety, security and dignity of children, families and communities across the state during this difficult time.

We ask you and the involved state agencies guide laid-off Ohioans to apply for SNAP, Medicaid, OWF, PRC, and Publicly Funded Child Care. State agencies can do more to ensure Ohioans know about all available public resources. The Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS) has several opportunities to educate and direct Ohioans to these resources, including:

1. when people apply for unemployment benefits;
2. When people are denied unemployment benefits; and
3. people who have already applied for UI but are not yet receiving benefits.

We welcome the opportunity to work with ODJFS to share ideas for how to communicate proactively through the unemployment.ohio.gov online experience, through emails and letters to claimants, and through your social media communications to Ohioans. For example, after applying for UC, claimants could be redirected to a page that says, "You may be eligible for temporary or ongoing food, child care, and healthcare assistance," along with links to appropriate application information. We urge more direct outreach and communication with this information to Ohioans who have lost their income and livelihood.

Ohio has implemented an integrated benefits system to more efficiently determine eligibility and enroll people in SNAP, Medicaid, and the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP). We ask that Unemployment Compensation be included in Ohio's integrated benefits system.

You Can Make a Real Difference in the Lives of Thousands of Ohioans.

We appreciate all your leadership to support Ohioans who have fallen on tough times. ODJFS has distributed over \$3.1 billion to over 644,000 newly unemployed Ohioans and nearly \$647 million to 109,000 PUA claimants. ODE and ODJFS are working to get \$254.5 million in food assistance to 850,000 children who had been getting free and reduced-price meals at school through Pandemic EBT. ODJFS has also helped 480,000 Ohio SNAP households with an average additional \$167 in SNAP benefits each month over the last three months. All of these efforts are making a concrete difference in the lives of children, adults, and families across the state. Thank you for taking important steps to flatten the curve of economic insecurity. Together, we can do even more to support our friends and neighbors.

SNAP benefits will help Ohio families stay fed and relieve their hardship in these difficult times. Medicaid will allow Ohioans to get the healthcare they need during this public health

crisis. One month of OWF benefits could help families with children make it through a moment of crisis. Broader use of SNAP and Medicaid will mean millions more in federal funds coming to Ohio at a time when spending on basic needs is critical to our economy.

Thank you for considering this request. We stand ready to work with you to provide thought leadership on implementation. Feel free to call on any of us if we can be of assistance.

Sincerely,

Tracy Najera, Executive Director, Children's Defense Fund of Ohio
Steven Wagner, MPH, JD, Executive Director, Universal Health Care Action Network of Ohio
Hannah Halbert, Executive Director, Policy Matters Ohio
Lisa Hamler-Fugitt, Executive Director, Ohio Association of Foodbanks
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Kelsey Bergfeld, Coalition Manager, Advocates for Ohio's Future
Teresa Lampl, CEO, The Ohio Council of Behavioral Health & Family Service Providers
Melissa Cropper, President, Ohio Federation of Teachers
Beth Kowalczyk, Chief Policy Officer, Ohio Association of Area Agencies on Aging
Vince Brancaccio, President, Ohio Alliance of Information and Referral Systems (Ohio AIRS)
Elizabeth Brown, Executive Director, Ohio Women's Public Policy Network
Deborah Kline, Director, Cleveland Jobs with Justice
Diana King, Chair, Northern Ohioans for Budget Legislation Equality
Urvi Patel, Director of Strategic Communications, The Women's Fund of Central Ohio
Nicole Burt and Colleen Walsh, Co-Chairs, Cleveland-Cuyahoga County Food Policy Coalition Steering Committee
Jeannette Curtis, Executive Director, Information and Referral Services of Fairfield County
Sherita Mullins, Director of Social Enterprises, Burten, Bell, Carr Development, Inc.
Bethany Studenic, Leadership Committee Member, Northeast Ohio Worker Center

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