April 23, 2020

Kurt Westby, Commissioner
Connecticut Department of Labor
200 Folly Brook Boulevard
Wethersfield, CT 06109

Dear Commissioner Westby:

We are writing to ask you to develop a way for Connecticut residents who do not have computers, smart phones or internet access to apply for unemployment insurance benefits (UI). Federal law requires states to offer at least two of these application routes to UI applicants in order to receive Emergency Administrative Grants: in-person, phone, or online. UIPL No. 13-20, Part 4. A. ii (3/22/2020). At this time of great need, Connecticut allows only online applications.

We have heard from social service providers and unemployed individuals who desperately need to apply for UI but have no way to do so. Their usual portals to access online communication are closed—primarily public libraries and social service offices. They cannot borrow smart phones from friends or family because of social distancing. The American Job Centers, where applicants could get in-person assistance with applications, are closed.

The Department has done an extraordinary job of recruiting additional staff and modifying its computer systems to process the claims of the huge number of workers who have lost their jobs in this pandemic. But it is crucial that it provide immediate access to low-wage workers who do not have the technology currently required to apply for UI.

We ask that you use your resourcefulness to remedy this shortcoming in the state’s application process so that the Department can meet the access requirements of federal law. Options could include reactivating the phone application system or allowing claimants to call to ask the Department to mail a paper application to them. Please get back to us to let us know what your plans are to create another avenue of access and when we can expect that alternate route to be operational.

Sincerely,

/s/
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