

1
2 COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA
3 HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
4 LABOR AND INDUSTRY COMMITTEE

5 MAIN CAPITOL BUILDING
6 ROOM 140
7 HARRISBURG, PENNSYLVANIA

8 PUBLIC HEARING
9 UNEMPLOYMENT COMPENSATION

10 TUESDAY, OCTOBER 20, 2020
11 9:33 A.M.

12
13 BEFORE:

14 HONORABLE JIM COX, MAJORITY CHAIRMAN
15 HONORABLE CRIS DUSH
16 HONORABLE TORREN ECKER
17 HONORABLE BARBARA GLEIM
18 HONORABLE JAMES GREGORY
19 HONORABLE KATE KLUNK
20 HONORABLE RYAN MACKENZIE
21 HONORABLE DAVID MALONEY
22 HONORABLE LORI MIZGORSKI
23 HONORABLE ERIC NELSON
24 HONORABLE MICHAEL PUSKARIC
25 HONORABLE DAVID ROWE
HONORABLE PATRICK HARKINS, MINORITY CHAIRMAN
HONORABLE MORGAN CEPHAS
HONORABLE MARIA DONATUCCI
HONORABLE LEANNE KRUEGER
HONORABLE JEANNE MCNEILL
HONORABLE DAN MILLER
HONORABLE GERALD MULLERY
HONORABLE ED NEILSON
HONORABLE ADAM RAVENSTAHL
HONORABLE PAM SNYDER

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ALSO PRESENT:

JOHN SCARPATO, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR (R)
JONAS RICCI, RESEARCH ANALYST (R)
MCCLAIN FULTZ, RESEARCH ANALYST (R)
JENNIFER DODGE, LEGISLATIVE ADMINISTRATIVE
ASSISTANT II (R)

BRENDA J. PARDUN, RPR
REPORTER - NOTARY PUBLIC

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P R O C E E D I N G S

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2 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN COX: I'd like to
3 call this meeting to order. Those who are
4 able, please rise and join me in saying the
5 Pledge of Allegiance.

6 (Whereupon, the Pledge of Allegiance
7 was recited.)

8 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN COX: First, I'd
9 like to welcome everyone to this informational
10 meeting of the House Labor and Industry
11 Committee. I would like to remind everyone
12 that this meeting is being recorded, and so
13 I'd ask that all members and guests please
14 silence their cell phones and their electronic
15 devices.

16 I called this hearing today to
17 continue the committee's oversight of the
18 unemployment compensation system during the
19 pandemic. The committee members and all the
20 members of the general assembly have continued
21 to hear from constituents who are having
22 difficulty with UC or PUA claims and many are
23 still waiting on determinations. Others have
24 an issue that they need assistance with,
25 others can't get in touch with the Department,

1 and most people just want some answers.

2 So, today we want to take an update
3 on the service and staffing levels in the UC
4 compensation program as well as the
5 Department's other efforts to work through the
6 backlogs in unemployment compensation.

7 Recently, we also held a hearing on
8 the benefit modernization project, which the
9 Department has decided to delay, and I know
10 committee members would also like an update on
11 the Department's plans on how they're looking
12 to move forward with that particular project.

13 At this time, I have no further
14 comments.

15 Did you have any opening comments,
16 Chairman Harkins?

17 MINORITY CHAIRMAN HARKINS: Thank
18 you, Chairman Cox.

19 I'd like to thank everyone from the
20 Department for taking the time to be here once
21 again. I understand how busy you all are and
22 appreciate how hard you all are working to
23 clear up the major portion of the claims
24 backlogs.

25 That being said, everyone

1 participating in this hearing has heard from
2 people with outstanding claims who have waited
3 months for a determination. We must continue
4 to be vigilant and make sure that no claimant
5 is overlooked.

6 I hope that this will be a productive
7 discussion and that we can continue to work
8 together to get unemployment benefits in the
9 hands of the working families who most
10 desperately need them.

11 Thank you.

12 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN COX: All right.
13 In the interest of giving the most amount of
14 time possible for not only testimony but also
15 for the questions that will follow, we'll
16 dispense with introductions and things of that
17 nature.

18 I would like to welcome, though, the
19 individuals joining us for testimony, and
20 they're from the Department of Labor and
21 Industry. We have Secretary Oleksiak,
22 secretary of Labor and Industry; we have
23 William Trusky, deputy secretary for
24 Unemployment Compensation Programs; and we
25 also have Robert O'Brien, executive deputy

1 secretary, joining us today.

2 So, I thank you all for being here.
3 I appreciate you taking the time out of your
4 day to join us. We have asked for a brief
5 statement from the Department to kind of
6 provide an overview on the issues that I have
7 mentioned in my opening comments. And then
8 we'll have a fair amount of time for questions
9 following that.

10 So, again, thank you for being here.
11 And when you're ready, please go ahead and
12 begin.

13 SECRETARY OLEKSIAK: Thank you and
14 good morning, Chairman Cox, Chairman Harkins,
15 and members of the Labor and Industry
16 Committee.

17 My appearance before you, along with
18 my colleagues, marks the fourth time that
19 we've testified before this committee since
20 March of 2020. And we appreciate the
21 opportunity to provide another update to you
22 on the significant progress that the
23 Department of Labor and Industry has made to
24 provide critical unemployment benefits to
25 Pennsylvanians during this global pandemic.

1 Let me begin with some numbers that
2 reflect both the efforts of our staff and the
3 impact they have had since the beginning of
4 the COVID-19 mitigation efforts in mid March.
5 To date, we have disbursed over 29.5 billion
6 dollars in total unemployment compensation
7 benefits. And that includes our traditional
8 unemployment claims system, our extended
9 benefits, and all of the programs created
10 under the CARES Act. Ninety-seven percent of
11 claimants who filed for regular unemployment
12 compensation between March 15th and September
13 12th were either found eligible and paid or
14 deemed ineligible for benefits. The remaining
15 3 percent, about fifty-three thousand cases,
16 are pending resolution, mostly because of
17 fraud concerns or unresolved eligibility
18 questions.

19 We have nearly two thousand
20 individuals supporting our Unemployment
21 Compensation Service Centers, including from
22 an external call center agency, representing a
23 150 percent increase from March 15, when the
24 staffing level was seven hundred seventy-five.
25 So, it's a growth from seven hundred

1 seventy-five to almost two thousand.

2 Our unemployment compensation staff
3 have worked nearly three hundred sixty
4 thousand hours of overtime, in evenings, on
5 weekends, and straight through holidays. We
6 have answered six hundred twenty-six thousand
7 phone calls, one million two hundred
8 ninety-three thousand e-mails, and one hundred
9 sixty-eight thousand chats from unemployment
10 compensation customers. We have responded to
11 almost forty-four thousand legislative
12 requests throughout the aged claims process.

13 Our staff have completed over three
14 thousand three hundred of about thirteen
15 thousand nine hundred in the latest round of
16 that program.

17 The truth is in those numbers, and
18 they are impressive numbers, but, as I have
19 repeatedly said before this committee and in
20 public, they mean nothing if you are an
21 eligible claimant anxiously awaiting your
22 benefits. We remain committed to making sure
23 every single eligible claimant gets the
24 benefits they deserve. This is why we
25 continue to make improvements to our process,

1 expand our resources and enhance our IT
2 capabilities.

3 Allow me to share some specific
4 examples of adjustments and improvements that
5 are helping L and I meet the sustained high
6 demand for benefits.

7 Historically, staffing shortages have
8 been a chronic issue for UC, even in
9 relatively good times. However, to meet the
10 unprecedented demand of this pandemic, we have
11 taken equally unprecedented action to respond
12 to urgent staffing needs.

13 In seven months, we have increased
14 our UC staffing levels, as I mentioned, to
15 nearly two thousand. For the first time ever,
16 we work with a vendor to provide call center
17 support for our UC phone lines.

18 Additionally, as some of you know,
19 one of the biggest and most persistent
20 bottlenecks in our process stems from the lack
21 of examiners we have on hand to issue
22 determinations. Before examiners can issue
23 determinations, they must gather all the
24 relevant information from employers and
25 claimants, which can be a very laborious

1 process. As such, we recently contracted out
2 much of the information gathering work to an
3 experienced external vendor, who will provide
4 all the necessary documentations so that
5 examiners can focus on quickly reviewing cases
6 and issuing determinations.

7 Allow me to extend our deepest thanks
8 to our labor partners who we engaged with
9 before we pursued this solution and who have
10 been active, committed partners throughout
11 this pandemic.

12 Further, we have been able to
13 accelerate the return of staff to the UC
14 service center offices by installing
15 Plexiglass barriers to enforce better social
16 distancing and enhanced safety measures.

17 Finally, we are reviewing the results
18 of a recently completed independent study to
19 determine appropriate staffing levels in the
20 future and are in regular communication with
21 the governor's budget office about options for
22 expanding staffing levels long term.

23 Secondly, we are making targeted IT
24 investments to improve existing operations and
25 customer service levels. Our partnership with

1 Google AI and training voice and chat bots has
2 streamlined communication between staff and
3 claimants and helped push the most complex and
4 challenging claims to our staff.

5 These bots can answer more than four
6 hundred fifty frequently asked questions we
7 receive from claimants, and we continue to
8 improve their responsiveness. In fact, since
9 the beginning of implementation, our voice and
10 chat bots have achieved a success rate of
11 nearly 95 percent in responding to over four
12 hundred thirty-four thousand six hundred total
13 interactions with claimants.

14 In addition to these software
15 upgrades, we're making critical investments in
16 hardware. Due to the pandemic, many UC
17 Service Center staff were working with
18 personal laptops, using a secure but unstable
19 VDI connection since March. This resulted in
20 persistent IT performance and connection
21 issues. We are deploying nearly five hundred
22 new Commonwealth-issued laptops, monitors, and
23 keyboards to UC Service Center staff, which
24 will dramatically increase the speed with
25 which they are able to process claims. Staff

1 will now be able to work from two screens,
2 instead of one small one, and log into work
3 using a VPN, which will provide a faster, more
4 consistent connection.

5 We have also doubled the Internet
6 bandwidth in each of our six UC Service
7 Centers to eliminate platform performance
8 issues during periods of high claim volume.

9 Third, we are introducing an
10 emergency regulation to extend the period
11 during which a claimant can backdate a claim
12 from six to fifty-two weeks because of
13 pandemic-related delays in claims processing.
14 This regulation will get more claimants the
15 money they deserve faster while reducing the
16 time-intensive fact finding required of staff
17 for investigating claims backdated by more
18 than six weeks.

19 Finally, as you all know,
20 Pennsylvania is one of many states fighting a
21 nationwide surge of fraudulent PUA claims --
22 that's Pandemic Unemployment Assistance
23 claims -- filed using stolen identities.
24 Recently, we began working with a federally
25 certified identity verification provider,

1 ID.me, to provide additional identity
2 verification to ensure that PUA payments to
3 legitimate claimants are issued more quickly
4 while at the same time fulfilling our
5 fiduciary responsibility to the public to
6 prevent fraud.

7 We are rolling out ID.me in a phased
8 approach. This supplements the front-end
9 detection program we have implemented with our
10 primary PUA vendor, and we continue to work
11 with state, local, and federal agencies to
12 combat this scourge.

13 These are just a few of the examples
14 of the innovative work that is taking place at
15 L and I today, thanks to our hard-working
16 public servants.

17 I want to take a moment to recognize
18 their incredible sacrifices, hard work, and
19 determination. Without them, their talents,
20 commitment, and can-do attitude, I can say
21 definitively that we would be in much more
22 dire straits. Many of them have not taken a
23 single day off since the beginning of this
24 pandemic outside of a few holidays. They do
25 this work diligently, day in and day out, not

1 for recognition, but because they understand
2 how critical our agency's services are to
3 everyday Pennsylvanians during this pandemic.

4 As their secretary, I could not be
5 more impressed and more proud of their
6 efforts. They have my deepest admiration, and
7 I believe they have yours as well.

8 Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for the
9 opportunity to speak to you today. I, along
10 with Deputy Secretary O'Brien and UC Secretary
11 Trusky, will be happy to take your questions
12 at this time.

13 Thank you.

14 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN COX: Thank you,
15 Mr. Secretary.

16 We're going to jump right into
17 questions at this point. And we'll start off
18 with Rep. Kate Klunk.

19 REPRESENTATIVE KLUNK: Thank you,
20 Mr. Chairman.

21 And thank you to the Department for
22 joining us here today. I truly appreciate how
23 often you have been able to come and the
24 information that you have been able to share
25 with us. It's been very helpful, as we

1 communicate with our constituents on UC issues
2 and better understand where things are at with
3 our UC system.

4 I also want to say thank you to all
5 of the employees at L and I on behalf of my
6 constituents. We have -- we have received a
7 number of calls into our office, and a number
8 of them have expressed thanks and gratitude
9 for the employees at L and I for the work they
10 have provided in making sure that the people
11 back home are getting the benefits that they
12 need.

13 So, on behalf of my constituents and
14 myself, please pass on my deepest thanks.

15 SECRETARY OLEKSIAK: Thank you.

16 REPRESENTATIVE KLUNK: Now, we know
17 that there are unprecedented numbers of
18 claims. We know that your folks are working
19 really, really hard to deliver for the people
20 of Pennsylvania who are currently unemployed.
21 However, in my mind, in the minds of my people
22 back home, I get this all of the time, Kate,
23 Kate, the current UC levels are unacceptable.
24 I can't get through. I can't get through on
25 the phone. I can't get through online.

1 And I have to look at my constituents
2 and say, Yes, current UC levels are
3 unacceptable. It's unacceptable what is
4 happening at the Department of Labor.

5 Mr. Secretary, I know that you've
6 said that all of that work means nothing if
7 you are sitting at home and you don't have
8 that benefits check coming in, if you can't
9 pay your rent, if you can't put food on the
10 table, if you can't, you know, send in that
11 check to make sure that your son or daughter
12 can go to college.

13 Mr. Secretary, simple yes or no, are
14 current UC service levels unacceptable to the
15 people of Pennsylvania who are still waiting
16 on benefits?

17 SECRETARY OLEKSIAK: Of course they
18 are. They're unacceptable to me as well.

19 Let me begin by first thanking you,
20 Representative Klunk, for recognition of our
21 staff. But we are not satisfied. I don't
22 know if I'd use the word "unacceptable." We
23 are certainly not satisfied with the fact that
24 so many of our fellow citizens have not yet
25 received their benefits. That's why we have

1 worked over three hundred sixty thousand
2 hours. That's why we have more than doubled
3 our staff. That's why we have made the
4 upgrades to our system.

5 This is an unprecedented global
6 pandemic. This is not something that L and I
7 was asleep at the switch and missed something.
8 We have responded effectively, quickly, as
9 thoroughly as we possibly can, given the
10 incredible numbers that we faced. I mentioned
11 the 97 percent figure. That figure has been
12 consistent as it has moved forward in the
13 dates. Some of those, that 97 percent, we
14 cannot do anything about, while we are waiting
15 for information from out of state or from
16 employers or further documentation from
17 claimants or awaiting for corrections to be
18 made to claims that have errors on them.

19 Some of the PUA claims we have
20 approved and they have been held up in
21 Treasury or with ReliaCard. The fraud issue
22 continues, a fraud issue not of our making
23 that we continue to battle.

24 So, no, we are not satisfied. And I
25 have said that at every opportunity. None of

1 us want to see anybody have their claims
2 delayed. But this is a complicated system.
3 This is a system that is not ours alone. We
4 work with Treasury, ReliaCard, the
5 department -- U.S. Department of Labor,
6 various agencies that have a piece of this
7 unemployment system.

8 And I can -- speaking for the
9 Department of Labor and Industry, we are doing
10 everything we possible can, as quickly as we
11 can, to make sure that those claimants get
12 their benefits.

13 REPRESENTATIVE KLUNK: Thank you so
14 much, Mr. Secretary, for that.

15 In that vein, in working hand in hand
16 with some of those other departments, my next
17 question goes to the coordination between not
18 only your agency but multiple other agencies
19 throughout state government and under the
20 governor's jurisdiction. I have communicated
21 with the Department and actually asked
22 questions in previous hearings about some of
23 these discussions around COVID-19 and the
24 preparation for COVID-19 and how the entire
25 administration, how state government and the

1 Wolf administration was going to respond on
2 many different levels.

3 My right-to-know request --
4 originally I had actually sent a communication
5 to your office to just get some additional
6 information, because I do truly think that we
7 need to be looking at this big picture,
8 because we don't know where we're going. We
9 don't know if another potential shutdown is
10 going to happen. We don't know if there's
11 going to be a future pandemic. We could get
12 through this, and maybe in five years
13 something else comes up that we have to
14 respond to. So, I really do want to make sure
15 that we're learning from maybe some of the
16 mistakes that we made or maybe some of the
17 things that we got right in this response
18 through the administration.

19 So, you know, I really do hope that,
20 you know, over the coming weeks -- I know that
21 you're working on my right-to-know response to
22 get some additional information.

23 Particularly, one of my right-to-know
24 requests goes to the records and results of
25 the emergency tabletop exercises that you

1 participated in as the Department earlier this
2 year. And I do believe the information that
3 we could gain from those records and results
4 from the Department of Labor could be very
5 instrumental in figuring out how this all, you
6 know, played out. How agencies were working
7 together and maybe weren't working together in
8 creating an early warning signal for not only
9 agencies in state government but businesses
10 throughout Pennsylvania.

11 One of the concerns that I have in
12 kind of going back and looking at our
13 communication and our back and forth from that
14 May hearing and the limited information that
15 we do have about that tabletop exercise is
16 that it seemed that the Department was
17 focusing on a lot of the internal issues and
18 trying to get your staff up and ready to
19 respond to the pandemic and making sure that
20 they had all of the necessary IT
21 infrastructure and computer set-ups to be able
22 to work from home. But one of the concerns
23 that I have is, while the administration was
24 planning to make sure that our state employees
25 could work from home at the end of February

1 and March, that that communication was not
2 given to businesses and nonprofits and
3 employees throughout the state.

4 So, I do believe that the information
5 that we could get from this tabletop exercise
6 about the coordination between the state
7 government agencies and then that information
8 as it came out to the public and even our
9 branch of state government -- I know our own
10 legislative body was not part of that
11 particular tabletop exercise. And I believe
12 that maybe if we were part of that tabletop
13 exercise, maybe we could have worked better
14 hand in hand in communicating with the people
15 of Pennsylvania about how we, as a state, not
16 necessarily just the Wolf administration or
17 Republicans were going to respond or
18 Democrats, but how we, as Pennsylvania, were
19 going to respond.

20 So, I guess, my question to you and
21 my plea to you is, you know, are you willing
22 to provide that information as requested in my
23 right-to-know request, so that we can properly
24 figure out what happened at the beginning of
25 this, so we're not going to repeat those

1 mistakes that have happened or find out what
2 worked, so that we can make sure we replicate
3 it moving forward?

4 Can I get a commitment from you that
5 you will and the Department will provide that
6 information for that tabletop exercise so we
7 can figure out how we can best move forward?

8 SECRETARY OLEKSIAK: Representative,
9 I believe I have answered many of those
10 questions in -- I know I have answered many of
11 those questions in previous testimony. And we
12 certainly have every intention to fully comply
13 with the right-to-know request that you have
14 sent our way with the documents that we have
15 available.

16 So, I can only speak, again, for what
17 Labor and Industry is doing and has done, and
18 we will follow that right-to-know request to
19 the letter of the law.

20 I can tell you that we are working
21 internally as well to do some of the things
22 that you've said. Look at what have we
23 learned, what could we have done better, what
24 could we -- what did we do very well, how
25 could we have responded more quickly, all

1 those things. We are looking at that
2 internally, because we want to make sure that,
3 again, we improve our process, we make our
4 process better.

5 We are responding -- to answer your
6 question, we are fully intending to respond to
7 your right-to-know request.

8 REPRESENTATIVE KLUNK: Thank you,
9 Mr. Secretary. I do really appreciate that.
10 My constituents appreciate it.

11 I think there's answers that every
12 Pennsylvanian has about how this pandemic was
13 responded to by not only your department but
14 the entire administration. I do believe that
15 there was a little bit of heavy handedness on
16 the part of the governor in some of the
17 shutdowns that, unfortunately, I don't
18 think -- and, again, we'll be able to get that
19 information from you from the right-to-know
20 request about, you know, did the right hand
21 know what the left hand was doing, did you
22 properly have the information that you needed
23 to be able to do your job to deliver for those
24 folks at home who were losing their jobs and
25 needed those benefits, you know, from those

1 mandates that were coming down from the
2 Department of Health and the governor's
3 office. You know, was there that coordination
4 so that you knew approximately how many people
5 could potentially get laid off so that you
6 could properly, you know, make sure that you
7 had staffing levels and the IT ready to go?

8 So, I really do look forward to that
9 response so that we can dig into that,
10 because, at the end of the day, we need to
11 make sure, you know, if this happens again,
12 that we are ready to go and can deliver for
13 the people of Pennsylvania.

14 So, thank you, Mr. Secretary. I
15 appreciate it.

16 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN COX: All right.
17 At this time, Representative Krueger has a
18 question.

19 REPRESENTATIVE KRUEGER: Thank you,
20 Mr. Chairman.

21 Thank you, Secretary, for joining us
22 yet again today. I know that this time has
23 been incredibly challenging for you, for your
24 staff, and for all of us who serve
25 constituents.

1 I've got questions today about
2 response time and communication between folks
3 on your end at L and I who are processing
4 appeals and on the back end of the system that
5 we use as legislators to flag challenges that
6 folks are having on the ground and also
7 questions about response time.

8 We -- in my office, like so many, we
9 serve thousands of people, literally, who call
10 with questions and challenges with their UC
11 and with their PUA claims. And we still have
12 people whose claims are unanswered and not
13 received payments.

14 Yesterday, we got a call from someone
15 who we've been trying to help since July, who
16 became out of work in March, and he never
17 received a payment. He called PUA, the number
18 that's been given to us to give to
19 constituents, sixty-seven times yesterday and
20 could not get through on one of those phone
21 calls. We've already flagged his case twice
22 in the systems that we've been given to
23 identify challenges that our constituents are
24 having, and we've gotten no response on the
25 status of this case. So, that's one.

1 Yesterday we had to help him with
2 emergency food and housing.

3 Second case yesterday, we've got
4 someone who filed for UC, never got a single
5 payment, but also didn't get a denial. We've
6 also flagged her case twice eight weeks ago,
7 never got a response.

8 And third, we've got a gentleman
9 whose family we've been helping, he was
10 denied -- he filed for regular UC in June, was
11 denied, filed an appeal, and was told at the
12 time to also apply for PUA. He has no --
13 we've gotten no updates on the status of his
14 case, and he's now homeless. And he and his
15 wife and his thirteen-year-old son were on the
16 verge of sleeping in their car before we got
17 them a hotel reservation for the weekend.

18 So, these are three of the most
19 urgent cases that we're facing right now, but
20 I know so many others are out.

21 Can you tell us, you know -- the
22 critical challenge I think right now is we've
23 got no way to know if, when we, you know, flag
24 a case that we're hearing about on the ground
25 if the information we are sending over is even

1 being reviewed or read once we send the form.
2 So, who can we talk to to get updates on our
3 most pending and urgent cases?

4 And then second, what's an
5 appropriate response time to claims flagged
6 through our office? Because, again, we've got
7 ones that we've been waiting for months, and
8 we've gotten no answers. And, Secretary,
9 folks are increasingly desperate, again,
10 facing homelessness, facing real food
11 insecurity, and we're fielding these calls
12 every day.

13 SECRETARY OLEKSIAK: Thank you,
14 Representative. These stories are
15 heartbreaking. We hear them, and we feel
16 them, and it's -- it's part of that
17 frustration that we all feel in looking to
18 make sure that people get the benefits they
19 deserve.

20 I know that our legislative office
21 has been working closely with the legislature
22 to resolve some of these older and the more
23 extreme claims. Some of them are unresolved.
24 It's -- I know that there are also times where
25 we have issued determinations and approved

1 payments, and there are delays either with
2 ReliaCard or with Treasury. We found that
3 some -- there's just holdups there, and we
4 can't make that happen any faster, other than,
5 you know, working with them to explain why
6 we've approved some of these things and
7 they're still held up. So, we are working
8 closely with them.

9 I would encourage you to continue to
10 work with our legislative office. Flag those.
11 I know you have. But we will make sure that
12 our legislative office reaches out to you,
13 particularly for the extreme cases that you
14 have highlighted.

15 This is not something that we want to
16 see. This is not what we want -- want to be.
17 This is not how we want to be responding
18 during this pandemic. We want to make sure
19 the people that you are highlighting do get
20 the benefits they deserve. And we will
21 work -- we will continue to work with you,
22 with other legislators, with ReliaCard,
23 Treasury to make sure that those payments
24 are -- are released.

25 REPRESENTATIVE KRUEGER: So,

1 Mr. Secretary, respectfully, earlier on in the
2 system, you know, our staff at the Labor and
3 Industry Committee was able to get some
4 information for us, and then we -- you know,
5 the need was way too great. Now we've got
6 links that we submit, and we are not hearing
7 back. And it's been over eight weeks, and
8 we've submitted them multiple times.

9 The system we have right now is not
10 working. So, when you say reach out to our
11 legislative office, who can I call and who can
12 I send their information to?

13 SECRETARY OLEKSIAK: I will have our
14 legislative director reach out to you to
15 answer these questions off line, and we will
16 do what we need to do.

17 REPRESENTATIVE KRUEGER: Okay. I
18 appreciate that. And I know that you have
19 told us that the majority of the claims have
20 been paid. But all of us are serving folks
21 who are literally facing homelessness right
22 now, and we just -- we need a better system,
23 because telling them repeatedly, "I'm sorry,
24 we don't have any updates for you," we're at a
25 point where we can't do that anymore.

1 SECRETARY OLEKSIAK: Thank you. We
2 understand. And we -- we certainly feel what
3 you're saying. And I said before, we have
4 family and friends who -- throughout the
5 agency who have -- those of us who work for
6 the agency have family and friends that are in
7 difficult situations, maybe not as extreme as
8 what you've laid out, and we don't want to see
9 this. We don't want to see this happen, We
10 want to be responsive.

11 And I will make sure that our office
12 reaches out to you directly.

13 REPRESENTATIVE KRUEGER: Okay. Thank
14 you, Mr. Secretary.

15 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

16 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN COX: Thank you.
17 And at this point, we have a question from
18 Representative Barb Gleim.

19 REPRESENTATIVE GLEIM: Thank you for
20 being here today.

21 And I also just want to follow up on
22 Rep. Krueger's point that she was making about
23 -- especially about PUA. I'm experiencing the
24 same thing in my district office.

25 And I do want to thank the

1 legislative liaison that I have been working
2 with, because not getting paid now,
3 Mr. Secretary, is creating mental health
4 issues, of which, you know, a lot of us are
5 not necessarily prepared to address. And when
6 we get to that point where there is a mental
7 health crisis because people are losing their
8 homes, you know, we're going to need maybe to
9 pivot here and get some -- an extra plan in
10 place for all those people who cannot get paid
11 with their PUA. That's just a statement that
12 I want to say.

13 But I did get -- receive help for
14 this one individual. I have several others as
15 well that we would love to have some type of
16 an e-mail or a phone number that we could call
17 when we have that type of situation.

18 My question here today, since March,
19 this committee was told that the benefit
20 modernization was on time and going live.
21 Then, at the last meeting we had, on September
22 17th, you testified that there was no current
23 target date for a new go-live date for the
24 benefit modernization.

25 Since then, the Department has held

1 internal discussions and consulted with the
2 advisory committee earlier this month. And we
3 need to be able to prepare stakeholders and
4 the public for this switchover. We can't
5 handle the communication in the same way that
6 the administration handled the closing down of
7 businesses last March.

8 So, my question is, what is the plan
9 at this point? Can you give us an update?
10 And is there a new target date to go live?

11 SECRETARY OLEKSIAK: As you
12 indicated, Representative, we have been
13 working internally. We have been working with
14 the vendor. We have been working with the
15 advisory committee. No new go-live date has
16 yet been determined.

17 As far as the plan, I know Deputy
18 Trusky is on the line.

19 Bill, can you expand on that a little
20 bit, please?

21 DEPUTY SECRETARY TRUSKY: Sure.

22 As we approach go-live -- and as the
23 secretary said, we have not come up with a new
24 date. We've had a discussion a couple weeks
25 ago with the advisory committee and they're in

1 agreement that we should not come up with a
2 new date until our claims load settles, we're
3 able to get out our determinations, et cetera.

4 We have weekly meetings internally
5 about how we're going to reach out to
6 stakeholders. We plan to reach out to the
7 business community, the claimant community, as
8 well as the legislative community. I mean,
9 we'll start with the four executive directors
10 of the respective committees. We plan to
11 train legislative staff, et cetera.

12 So, we do have a plan in place,
13 Representative. And as we get closer to
14 go-live and we make a determination of when
15 that will be, we will execute that plan.

16 REPRESENTATIVE GLEIM: Can you share
17 the benchmarks that you're using when you say
18 that when the claims subside? Is that when
19 all of the claims -- or, like, is there a
20 benchmark, reduce the PUA from fifty-three
21 thousand to ten thousand? Like, can you share
22 those benchmarks that you're looking at?

23 DEPUTY SECRETARY TRUSKY: Well, from
24 a PUA standpoint, the program is supposed to
25 end the end of December. So, you know, as far

1 as educating people on PUA, that's something
2 we shouldn't have to do to external
3 stakeholders.

4 No, we have not talked about specific
5 benchmarks. The lines of communication with
6 the advisory committee are open. We have a --
7 another meeting in a couple weeks, and we plan
8 on meeting more regularly and communicating
9 through them, Representative.

10 REPRESENTATIVE GLEIM: Okay. As soon
11 as you have a plan in place, I would really
12 appreciate you sharing that or any type of
13 benchmarks that you have that -- so we can
14 prepare the communication of this, going
15 forward, with our --

16 DEPUTY SECRETARY TRUSKY: We will --
17 we'll be happy to you work with you.

18 And as I said, the legislature's a
19 big part of our plan moving forward. You
20 know, we understand the importance of
21 educating your staff, et cetera. So, yeah,
22 we'll be more than happy to share that plan.

23 REPRESENTATIVE GLEIM: Thank you.

24 DEPUTY SECRETARY TRUSKY: You're
25 welcome.

1 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN COX: Thank you,
2 Representative Gleim.

3 At this point, we have a question
4 from Representative Dan Miller.

5 REPRESENTATIVE MILLER: Thank you,
6 Mr. Chairman.

7 You know, good to see you,
8 Mr. Secretary.

9 You know, I have been fourteen years
10 as a firefighter. I've been deployed many
11 times. The most substantial service was for a
12 sixty-day period, roughly, for a thirty-foot
13 flood wave that hit a valley area. My point
14 is that I know there's some earlier comment
15 about evaluations and reevaluations.

16 Emergency responses are typically challenging.
17 There's no doubt about it. No matter how much
18 advanced planning you do, there's always going
19 to be problems. It is right at different
20 stages to evaluate that process and to learn
21 from it.

22 And it is a necessity, definitely at
23 the end of it -- for my fire department, for
24 example, every time we come back from a call,
25 from a fire, nobody leaves until we do roughly

1 about a sixty-point evaluation of the incident
2 before we go home.

3 So, I think it is right to do those
4 things. And -- so, while I definitely -- and
5 I know that the state, I believe, is in
6 different phases of that, depending on which
7 department we're talk about, but I would also
8 note that, in that line of thought, with all
9 respect, I do think it would be important for
10 this body, our legislature, to consider how it
11 has responded as well. And my hope is, in
12 that process, if we are to go down it, that we
13 would find ways to better craft legislation to
14 evaluate things together.

15 That's our house. That's what we
16 have to do.

17 In these emergencies -- I could tell
18 you that I never asked somebody, when they
19 were getting the door for me, when they're
20 holding the hose, getting my back for it,
21 never asked them what party they were, never
22 asked them who they voted for. We handle the
23 emergency, and that's how it was. I do hope
24 that, in the evaluations that come, that that
25 would be the process or that would be the

1 spirit to which they could be conducted.

2 That being said, I do have a question
3 in relation to a particular area of response.
4 I know, Mr. Secretary, you're aware of my
5 interest in relation to Pennsylvanians with
6 disabilities, or mental issues in particular.
7 In relation to disabilities, when it comes --
8 when it comes to your department, when -- do
9 you guys track an unemployment compensation
10 claim from a person who is disabled? Would
11 that be something that you would somehow note
12 in the claim?

13 SECRETARY OLEKSIAK: The answer is
14 no. I don't think we're even allowed to ask
15 that question, but I'm going to ask Bill to
16 jump in.

17 DEPUTY SECRETARY TRUSKY:
18 Representative Miller, that's something we may
19 be able to get from our Center for Workforce
20 Information and Analysis, if folks are willing
21 to give that information. It's something I'd
22 be happy to check on for you.

23 REPRESENTATIVE MILLER: If you could.
24 The key question why I'm asking about it --
25 and, obviously, I would agree that I don't

1 believe anything is compelled to be
2 disclosed -- but when those incidents perhaps
3 are disclosed, one of the things that we are
4 bumping into is an ongoing issue -- not just
5 L and I, not just the state, but counties,
6 local governments as well -- is the
7 accessibility for some people with
8 disabilities in relation to services,
9 government services, generally speaking.
10 While we have continued to build out capacity
11 into the virtual reality for much of those
12 services, some websites, some components of
13 the application process is -- may not be as
14 accessible for some people with disabilities
15 as they should. I know, for example, the
16 state department has done some advancements in
17 relation to some issues for people who are
18 deaf/blind when it comes to even voting
19 applications.

20 So, if you could -- and it's okay,
21 for now, I'll gladly wait for the response --
22 if you could just kind of take a look and
23 perhaps get back to me as to how accessibility
24 issues either have been raised or what your
25 thoughts are or where the problems may be,

1 because as one of my good colleagues has
2 mentioned, we're not just talking about
3 addressing the issues now of COVID-19, but
4 preparing, God forbid, for the COVID-21 or
5 COVID-25, and we've just got to make sure that
6 we can all learn from these things, like I
7 said before, and make sure that people can --
8 all Pennsylvanians can access any government
9 services as easy as anyone else.

10 So, thank you for your time.

11 And I thank you, Mr. Chairman, for
12 the moment.

13 SECRETARY OLEKSIAK: Thank you. And
14 if I could comment a little further. We
15 have -- our office, ODHH, Office of Deaf and
16 Hard of Hearing, has been working closely with
17 PEMA, with the governor's office, to do what
18 we need to do to make things as accessible as
19 possible, and we are learning as we go along.

20 So, we will definitely get that
21 information together for you, Representative
22 Miller.

23 And one other thing I'd like to
24 mention, I know I said that we, you know -- we
25 will be reviewing what we've done right, what

1 we haven't, where we could do better. We are
2 in that process weekly. And, you know, I want
3 to stress that, that we have weekly calls with
4 our unemployment compensation staff and with
5 the secretary. We have weekly calls with our
6 executive leadership team. We have a weekly
7 call with the governor's office. We have
8 many, many calls in between those scheduled
9 calls with those folks about issues that we
10 need to resolve.

11 So, this is something that we are --
12 are absolutely committed to, is getting it
13 right now, but also what are we learning that
14 we can -- we can apply now and then in the
15 future.

16 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN COX: Thank you.

17 And our next question comes from
18 Representative Torren Ecker.

19 REPRESENTATIVE ECKER: Thank you,
20 Mr. Chairman.

21 And thank you, Secretary, for being
22 here today.

23 My question's going to -- is going to
24 take a little different topic that we haven't
25 gotten to yet. We're still hearing from --

1 from some of our businesses and companies that
2 folks are still refusing to come back to work.
3 In the past, I think the Department has
4 testified that when an employer reports to --
5 or reports this to UC for a claimant refusing
6 to go back to work, you kind of decide these
7 on an individual case-by-case basis.

8 So, kind of going through that
9 procedure, when a report is received from an
10 employer, are benefits paused for the claimant
11 while the Department makes the determination?
12 Or how's that process work?

13 SECRETARY OLEKSIAK: I'm going to
14 turn this over to Mr. Trusky as well. But I
15 do want to mention that the -- it's only
16 related to COVID-19 where it's an individual
17 basis. Generally speaking, when a -- in a
18 traditional unemployment compensation
19 situation, when work is available, if that
20 person refuses work, then they are not able to
21 collect benefits. But the CARES Act and other
22 family relief act -- can't remember the exact
23 title of it that was passed before the CARES
24 Act -- put some qualifiers in that. So,
25 that -- that individual basis piece is

1 directly related to COVID.

2 But I'm going to turn it over to Bill
3 to answer that question.

4 Bill.

5 DEPUTY SECRETARY TRUSKY: No, the
6 benefits are not suspended, Representative.
7 If benefits are granted initially, they will
8 continue until a determination is made.

9 With that, you know, as the secretary
10 mentioned, we have brought out -- brought on
11 an outside vendor to help with our fact
12 findings. This should help those cases move
13 along a lot quicker. We -- they started last
14 week. We continue to bring them up to speed.
15 And we think that will be very, very helpful
16 in making determinations quicker, getting them
17 to our examiners, and deciding a case one way
18 or the other if benefits should be continued
19 or stopped.

20 REPRESENTATIVE ECKER: Mr. Trusky,
21 just on that point, what is the backlog right
22 now? I mean, how large is the backlog of
23 these type of claims or reports?

24 DEPUTY SECRETARY TRUSKY: Right now,
25 I would say that we have about seventy

1 thousand claims that are waiting for -- for
2 determinations.

3 REPRESENTATIVE ECKER: And that's the
4 refusal -- or the refusal -- or reports that
5 employers make that this person doesn't
6 qualify for unemployment?

7 DEPUTY SECRETARY TRUSKY: That's --
8 that's everything, Representative. That's --
9 that's, you know, all -- you know, all areas
10 of determinations that need to be made, not
11 just refusal to return to work.

12 REPRESENTATIVE ECKER: Okay.

13 DEPUTY SECRETARY TRUSKY: So, yeah.
14 But, hopefully, with this outside vendor, the
15 goal is to bring that number down and either
16 get people paid, if they're deserving of
17 benefits, or, you know, if not, terminate
18 their benefits.

19 REPRESENTATIVE ECKER: What legal
20 guidance is the Department providing UC staff
21 or even this third-party vendor, now that
22 you've mentioned them, to make -- for making
23 determinations?

24 DEPUTY SECRETARY TRUSKY: We're
25 following the letter of the law. So, you

1 know, we're making our determination based on
2 the -- the Commonwealth's Unemployment
3 Compensation Law.

4 So, fortunately, the vendor we
5 brought in has a lot of UC experience. We
6 could have went another route and brought in
7 folks inexperienced, however, we didn't think
8 that was fair to the claimants, the employers
9 waiting for determinations. So, the vendor we
10 did bring on board has a -- a load of
11 unemployment experience.

12 REPRESENTATIVE ECKER: And just --
13 and you -- I think you touched on this before,
14 but what exactly is that vendor doing for the
15 Department?

16 DEPUTY SECRETARY TRUSKY: They are --
17 they are gathering facts. They're doing our
18 fact finding, which will allow -- which will
19 provide information to our examiners that will
20 allow our examiners to write more
21 determinations. So, they're doing the legwork
22 for our examiners.

23 REPRESENTATIVE ECKER: But the
24 examiners are still making the final
25 determination.

1 DEPUTY SECRETARY TRUSKY: Yes. They
2 have to. There's -- we cannot allow an
3 outside group to make those determinations.
4 That's -- that's clear in the Department of
5 Labor guidance.

6 REPRESENTATIVE ECKER: So, getting
7 back to just this refusal to return to work,
8 what is -- you know, what is considered good
9 cause? Is there kind of a -- is there a
10 bright-line test there? You know, how's that
11 generally determined as it relates to COVID?

12 DEPUTY SECRETARY TRUSKY: You know,
13 everything's a case-by-case basis. There's --
14 there's nothing that a -- you know, a magical
15 answer that will make that determination for
16 us. I mean, there's -- there's many, many
17 factors that go into making that determination
18 you know, whether, you know, appropriate
19 measures were put into place at the workforce.
20 Just a large number of factors,
21 Representative.

22 It's no -- you know, we're not
23 looking at five questions and checking off the
24 box, and it's as easy as that. It does
25 require some legwork, some talking to the

1 employer, some talking to the claimant, in
2 order to make a fair determination.

3 REPRESENTATIVE ECKER: And --

4 DEPUTY SECRETARY TRUSKY:

5 Unfortunately, as the secretary said, it's a
6 complicated system. It's not just -- it's not
7 easy. It's not yes or no.

8 So -- but, again, I'd be remiss, too,
9 if I don't echo the secretary's thanks to our
10 staff. I mean, we could not be doing what
11 we're doing without staff, without the amount
12 of overtime they are working, without our
13 supervisors going above and beyond. So, I'd
14 like to publicly thank our staff.

15 REPRESENTATIVE ECKER: I guess, just
16 one last thing. As it deals, again, just with
17 this -- these determinations, because, really,
18 there were no guidelines. We've talked at
19 length. Obviously, no one prepared for this.
20 How does the Department come about, you know,
21 making kind of a -- I get that they're
22 case-by-case determinations. We're talking
23 about COVID. But I would think there's got to
24 be some type of guidelines, some type of, you
25 know -- you know, rules you have to follow, or

1 guidance in making those claims.

2 Is that -- does that exist? Or is it
3 really --

4 DEPUTY SECRETARY TRUSKY: Yeah.

5 There is some -- there is some federal
6 guidance that we are following. That would
7 be -- you know, that's where we start. So,
8 yeah, there is some -- some federal guidance
9 that, when we begin the fact finding, that's
10 what we look at. But that's -- that's the
11 basis of the start of our -- our
12 investigation.

13 SECRETARY OLEKSIAK: If I could add
14 some examples of that -- and, Bill, correct me
15 if I'm wrong here -- but some examples of
16 things in the federal guidelines: Does -- was
17 the claimant exposed to COVID? Do they have
18 COVID? Does someone in their family have
19 COVID? Do they -- do they have preexisting
20 conditions that could put them at higher risk?
21 Are there child care issues involved that may
22 impact their ability to return to work related
23 to COVID?

24 So, there's -- there's a series of
25 things that we have to look at to -- that our

1 examiners and others look at to determine if
2 that person should or should not be going back
3 to work.

4 And then, there's always the appeals
5 process if either side is not happy with the
6 decision that's been made.

7 REPRESENTATIVE ECKER: Thanks,
8 Mr. Secretary.

9 And could you -- this may have been
10 provided already, but since you guys clearly
11 have it at your fingertips, could you provide
12 any of this guidance for us to -- just so we
13 could see it?

14 SECRETARY OLEKSIAK: Sure. We will
15 get that to you.

16 REPRESENTATIVE ECKER: Great. I
17 appreciate that.

18 Thank you for your time,
19 Mr. Secretary.

20 SECRETARY OLEKSIAK: Sure.

21 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN COX: Thank you,
22 Representative Ecker.

23 At this time, we have a question from
24 Representative Pam Snyder.

25 REPRESENTATIVE SNYDER: Thank you,

1 Mr. Secretary.

2 I don't mean to be redundant, but I
3 have to go back to Representative Krueger's
4 conversation. You know, she listed three
5 extreme cases in her district, and I have
6 probably a dozen that I could stand here and
7 talk about. People that haven't heard
8 anything since June, April, May, pick a month.
9 People that have had their cars repossessed.
10 You know, I have had constituents from -- you
11 know, threatening to harm themselves, to just
12 a whole array of issues.

13 And my staff is just on overload, as
14 I know yours is, too. But when Representative
15 Krueger asked you who can we call, because
16 there's nothing more frustrating, as a state
17 representative, than to have my staff come to
18 me and say, This persons's at the end of their
19 rope. We've done everything we can do. We
20 still can't get an answer. Help.

21 And I've got nowhere to turn even to
22 get that help. It is extremely frustrating.
23 And you said you would call her. That's
24 great. But I don't think that's sufficient.

25 I think there has got to be someone

1 that we, as representatives, can reach out to.

2 I was so frustrated two weeks ago,
3 where I reached out to my leadership. They
4 asked me to send the list of the really
5 serious ones. I did. I have yet to hear
6 anything back.

7 So, I'm saying to you, what can I do,
8 as a legislator, when I have a consistent in a
9 dire situation, who am I supposed to turn to
10 to try to get this resolved for them?

11 SECRETARY OLEKSIAK: Representative,
12 we have worked closely with the executive
13 directors of all four caucuses of the Labor
14 and Industry Committees to create a system
15 that we have adapted several times to help to
16 respond to the very situations that you are
17 discussing. If we need to sit down again with
18 our legislative office, with the executive
19 directors, to review that system, to refine
20 that system yet again, we will do that.

21 We have made progress. And, again, I
22 know that doesn't help when you get those
23 calls. We get them. We are frustrated as
24 well. Some of the issues are outside -- as I
25 said, are outside of what we can do to impact

1 them. And I don't know what else to tell you.
2 That frustration you're feeling, we are
3 feeling. But we will set up another meeting
4 with the executive directors to review the
5 process that's in place; if it's not working,
6 how can we make it better?

7 We want to -- we want to respond. I
8 want to be as clear as possible about that.
9 We want to do what we can, what we have the
10 capability to do to respond to these
11 situations that -- that you are describing,
12 that Representative Krueger described. We
13 don't want this to be happening. And we want
14 to do what we can, working with you, working
15 with the executive directors, to create a
16 system that will work for you.

17 So, I will commit that we will -- we
18 will meet again with the executive directors,
19 to see what do we need to do to improve the
20 situation that -- that you're all facing, that
21 we're facing.

22 REPRESENTATIVE SNYDER: And I
23 appreciate that, Mr. Secretary. And I
24 believe -- and I believe that. I know this is
25 as frustrating for all of you as it is for us.

1 But might I just throw out a
2 recommendation that as you're putting this
3 plan forward, you know, whether you break it
4 up by regions or whatever, there should be one
5 person that a legislator can reach out to in a
6 dire situation and be able to get some kind of
7 a resolution, instead of just having to wait.
8 There's got to be a way that we can set it up
9 so that, you know, like -- I really did. I
10 had a constituent who was threatening to kill
11 himself because he hadn't had any money since
12 March, you know. And I -- we did get that
13 resolved through the Department within
14 twenty-four hours, once I was able to escalate
15 it to the right people.

16 But, you know, we need -- we need a
17 plan for we, as legislators, when there is a
18 dire situation like that.

19 So, thank you. And I hope we can
20 continue to make this process better. Thank
21 you.

22 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN COX: Thank you,
23 Representative Snyder.

24 I'd like to insert a comment/request
25 at this point regarding that staffing.

1 We've -- my recollection is there's somewhere
2 around fifty to sixty individuals working on
3 the legislative requests. I would ask that
4 you refocus a fair number of your people and
5 bump that up, because the people who call our
6 office have -- have kind of reached that
7 breaking point many times. We've heard a
8 couple of stories here. My office has
9 received them, and I can imagine most of the
10 members on this committee and around the
11 general assembly have received similar calls.
12 So, I don't think it's a matter of finding a
13 different spreadsheet to put it in or a
14 different e-mail to send it to. I think it's
15 a matter of manpower, and it's a matter of
16 getting and taking those legislative requests
17 that have already -- they should be considered
18 the escalated requests. You know, we're
19 getting numerous calls from the same
20 individuals, so those types of calls from
21 legislative offices should be given the
22 priority because it's already escalated.

23 So, if you've got sixty people, maybe
24 you need to put a hundred on it or a hundred
25 twenty. To me, it's not a matter of a

1 different spreadsheet or sending it to a
2 different location or whatever. It's a matter
3 of just putting the manpower behind it. So,
4 that's my two cents on the issue.

5 And I know I speak for a lot of my
6 colleagues when I say that we've all heard
7 calls of people at that breaking point. And
8 it is heartbreaking. But we all feel helpless
9 to do something about it. On your end,
10 increasing the staffing focused on the
11 legislative requests, it's not special
12 treatment. These people have reached the
13 point of not knowing what else to do, and the
14 desperation is very clear.

15 So, at this time, our next question
16 will come from Representative Ryan Mackenzie.

17 REPRESENTATIVE MACKENZIE: Thank you,
18 Mr. Chairman.

19 And thank you to the secretaries.

20 We'll -- I'll stay on this topic just
21 briefly, because it's an issue that I've
22 raised with the secretary previously, the dire
23 cases that our office has faced. The
24 individuals that we've helped along the way
25 have been numerous. And, you know, we

1 appreciate all the work that the staff, that
2 the Department has done. But there are still,
3 as you point out, fifty-three thousand cases
4 pending. And as you can see, I think, from
5 the testimony of members, these are spread out
6 all across the Commonwealth. And I think the
7 frustration that has been shared by
8 Representative Krueger, Snyder, Cox, myself is
9 shared amongst all two hundred fifty-three
10 members. We all have these cases that are
11 months old that we have come to the Department
12 numerous times.

13 I just talked to my staff the other
14 day that -- about a case that -- the person
15 contacted us again. They've been on our list
16 that we've sent to the Department twice and --
17 over a series of weeks and months that they've
18 been waiting, but we've been working on the
19 case for weeks with no answer. And so, this
20 is something that's playing out. And, again,
21 I, you know, would defer to Chairman Cox
22 maybe.

23 The system isn't the problem. It's
24 just the -- there aren't enough resources
25 being committed to it or enough attention

1 being paid to these cases, because they just
2 simply aren't getting resolved.

3 So, on that point, I guess I'll just
4 ask one question. I mean, with fifty-three
5 thousand cases outstanding, two thousand
6 individuals supporting the UC Service Centers,
7 I mean, just back-of-the-envelope math, if
8 each individual handled one of these
9 outstanding cases an hour, you could be done
10 in three or four days.

11 So, what is the time frame and why
12 would we not dedicate as many resources as
13 possible to handling these outstanding claims
14 that -- again, if you're -- if you're not
15 receiving payment for months, you're situation
16 is very dire at this point. And, you know,
17 why would we not kind of move these to the
18 front of the line? I know there are obviously
19 new cases coming in every day, et cetera, you
20 know, but those are new cases. These are
21 ones, again, that -- just personally I know,
22 that have been outstanding for four or five
23 months that people haven't been paid.

24 So, what are your thoughts on
25 reprioritizing and really, you know, doing a

1 blitz on these fifty-three thousand to try to
2 get those handled as quickly as possible? It
3 could be in a couple days, again,
4 back-of-the-envelope math that I shared with
5 you.

6 So, love to hear your thoughts on
7 trying to resolve those first.

8 SECRETARY OLEKSIAK: Sure. I can
9 tell you, Representative, that it's not as
10 simple as, you know, dividing two thousand
11 into fifty-three thousand. I'm going to ask
12 Representative Trusky to speak in more detail,
13 but the fifty-three thousand are traditional
14 unemployment claims. So, it -- they have --
15 there's various reasons why -- we listed some
16 of them before, that once we do all we can,
17 there are things that we are waiting for from
18 others. And, you know, we can push them and
19 we can prod them, but we can't make them give
20 us what we need. By "others," I mean
21 out-of-state wages, employer reports, a whole
22 range of different things, and Bill could talk
23 about that in more detail.

24 Related to PUA, it's the fraud piece.
25 We are doing all we can to fight the fraud

1 with our partners and to be very cognizant of
2 our -- the new shared responsibility. But we
3 know we have to get benefits to people. And
4 there are decisions that we make that will
5 allow those benefits to be released. And then
6 there are others in the system that can slow
7 that down.

8 Bill, can you speak to that in more
9 detail?

10 DEPUTY SECRETARY TRUSKY: Sure, a
11 little bit, Secretary.

12 I mean, as far as, you know -- I
13 mean, I guess we could shut down the service
14 centers and focus on those sixty thousand
15 claims, and then, unfortunately, nobody gets
16 through. Like last week -- or last Tuesday
17 alone, combination both the PUA call center
18 and the unemployment call center, we handled
19 forty thousand calls of folks. It's a matter,
20 Representative, of prioritizing the work,
21 and -- and providing customer service at the
22 same time. You know, those cases that we talk
23 about are prioritized in the way they come in.

24 So, you know, again -- and even with
25 putting staff, additional staff, on

1 legislative requests, we're just shifting
2 work. That means somebody else isn't going to
3 get served. So, you know, we're happy to sit
4 down with the -- the executive directors, as
5 the secretary said, the four chairs, to see if
6 there's a better way to handle the legislative
7 requests. However, again, you take people
8 away from certain types of work, those are
9 other folks not getting served. And they were
10 probably going to eventually come your way.

11 So, you know, it's not just as simple
12 as -- as, you know, one hour a claim. You
13 know, half of the folks doing that work are
14 brand new, too. You know, the quality is --
15 is slowly, slowly getting better. So, you
16 know, there are a lot of factors in play.
17 Hopefully, that adds to the secretary's
18 answer.

19 REPRESENTATIVE MACKENZIE: Sure. So,
20 I'll just -- you know, my brief comment in
21 response is that I think that it is, at least,
22 considering and worth looking at a
23 reprioritization of the claims that are coming
24 in. Because, again, we've heard the stories,
25 and I've shared the stories. I mean, these

1 claims -- the outstanding claims are months
2 old. And somebody who is not received pay for
3 four or five months is in a much more dire
4 situation than somebody who is reaching out
5 for the first time. Obviously, both are
6 exceedingly important, and we want to handle
7 them as quickly as possible. But, again, the
8 life situations that those individuals are in
9 without months of pay are, again, very
10 different.

11 And so, I would just think that
12 shifting resources there would be beneficial.
13 And, from my personal experience, I know that
14 you might not be able to resolve the claim. I
15 think the secretary gave the example that, you
16 know, maybe it's out-of-state wages or
17 something like that that we're waiting on, but
18 my personal experience in helping individual
19 with these cases is that if we can at least
20 get that information -- which we can't, right
21 now we aren't even getting that, that's the
22 hangup or the problem in the claim -- if we
23 can get -- at least get that information, then
24 we can go to the constituent and say, "Hey,
25 here's the problem."

1 And they can maybe even start working
2 on their behalf. They can be reaching out to
3 the employer and saying, "Hey, I need my
4 benefits, and this is the information they're
5 waiting on right now." And they can start,
6 you know, helping in that process or at least
7 understand the roadblock. If there is
8 something to be done, maybe they can help move
9 that along.

10 And so, again, we aren't even getting
11 that information. So -- and that's even more
12 frustrating when people are just left in the
13 dark, and that's all that we can say is,
14 "We've reached out again, we've reached out
15 again, we haven't heard."

16 If we got an answer that there's a
17 roadblock and here's why, you know, it may not
18 help free up the flow of money, but maybe they
19 can do something else or, if nothing else, it
20 at least provides some understanding and
21 context to the holdup.

22 So, I'll wrap up on that topic.

23 And I did want to touch on, just very
24 briefly, you had mentioned fraud, which is
25 obviously a very important topic as well.

1 I've seen reports that the amount of fraud
2 paid out was in the billion-dollar ballpark.
3 Is that accurate? Or do we have an accounting
4 of how much fraud and fraudulent payments have
5 been made at this point?

6 DEPUTY SECRETARY TRUSKY: We don't,
7 Representative. I don't -- I haven't heard
8 the billion-dollar number. We continue to
9 work with Treasury, work with law enforcement.
10 You know, we're not focused on the number as
11 much as we are on -- on stopping the fraud.

12 You know, this -- as I've mentioned
13 in previous hearings, this isn't a
14 Pennsylvania alone problem. This is a
15 systemic problem within the PUA system
16 nationwide. You know, we were on the call
17 with our counterparts from California
18 yesterday, who are -- who, unfortunately, had
19 to shut down their system for two weeks to
20 deal with the fraud issues. We're on numerous
21 calls weekly with other states regarding the
22 issue.

23 However, we have not quantified.
24 There'll be a time for that. We're just
25 focused on stopping the fraud.

1 REPRESENTATIVE MACKENZIE: And what
2 is the -- I know, I'm sure it depends on the
3 situation, but are there recourses to recover
4 this fraud? Or would the federal government
5 be in a position to compensate the state in
6 certain cases? Or is it just going after
7 garnishment of wages for those individuals, or
8 if they come to reapply for benefits in the
9 future? What are the different options and
10 recourses we have to recover fraud money?

11 DEPUTY SECRETARY TRUSKY: Same as in
12 the regular unemployment system,
13 Representative. It would be, you know,
14 righting an overpayment, whether it be fault
15 or nonfault, going after fault overpayments
16 aggressively.

17 One thing about PUA, all the money is
18 federal dollars. Nothing's coming from --
19 from employer/employee contributions, et
20 cetera. So, that's why the -- the Department
21 of Labor has been all about integrity in
22 stopping the fraud, because it is their money.
23 So, we would -- we would go after folks who we
24 found committed fraud similar to the way we do
25 in traditional unemployment.

1 Now, I think where we've been
2 relatively successful is stopping the fraud
3 before it goes out the door. You know, it
4 took us some time to put provisions in place,
5 to work with law enforcement and to notice the
6 patterns. But we would -- I think we've been
7 fairly successful at doing that. As the
8 secretary said, we've put in some measures in
9 the PUA system that will help true claimants
10 who are caught up in this get their benefits.

11 So -- but back to your original
12 question, it's -- collecting fraudulent
13 overpayments is no different in PUA than it
14 would be in traditional UC.

15 SECRETARY OLEKSIAK: If I could add
16 as well, Bill, this is a criminal
17 investigation that's going on. These folks
18 are committing crimes. So, some of them have
19 been arrested already. There -- we anticipate
20 more. And how they are -- what justice is
21 meted out will be determined by the system,
22 depending on where those arrests have been
23 made. So, there's -- there's a lot going on
24 with this.

25 REPRESENTATIVE MACKENZIE: Thank you.

1 And I would just ask, you know, as
2 you move through this process, please, you
3 know, share whatever information you have with
4 the Department and with legislators, because,
5 same thing like we've been talking about, this
6 flow of information is very helpful in the
7 sense that, you know, when we're trying to
8 help individuals, obviously we want to help
9 those that are truly eligible and in need, but
10 sometimes, as a legislator, you get a claim
11 and something doesn't seem right with it. And
12 so, if we have information about the types of
13 fraud, the types of scams that you're seeing,
14 et cetera, and that information is being
15 shared with us, it can kind of raise flags for
16 our district office staff. And if they sense
17 something is not right about a claim, they
18 could share that information with the
19 Department instead of, you know, just passing
20 it along without any kind of commentary or
21 update.

22 So, again, any information you have
23 would be helpful on the types of fraud that
24 have been committed. And I know some, I've
25 seen some, and you've shared some. But

1 whatever other information you have, please
2 let us know. And then, again, the dollar
3 amount, once you get to that point, we would
4 like to see that and understand where and what
5 types of fraud led to those overpayments and
6 the absolute amount that was paid out.

7 So, with that, I'll conclude. But
8 thank you, again, to the Department for being
9 here today.

10 And thank you, Mr. Chairman.

11 SECRETARY OLEKSIAK: Thank you.

12 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN COX: Thank you,
13 Representative Mackenzie.

14 Next we have a question from
15 Representative Eric Nelson.

16 REPRESENTATIVE NELSON: Thank you,
17 Mr. Chairman.

18 And thank you for your time and the
19 staff, you know, that they have on the call
20 today.

21 I, you know, have two parts to the
22 moving-forward piece, you know, as we're all
23 trying to move forward as best as possible.
24 Within our office, such significant
25 frustration over the amount of time, you know,

1 within that backlog, and it was -- you know,
2 it is encouraging to hear that there's a
3 willingness to maybe sit down again and try to
4 revise this process that -- I know within our
5 office, this last round six of names that were
6 submitted where we had over thirty-five people
7 that were submitted, it was over a month
8 before there was even an e-mail feedback, not
9 resolution for those individuals but even an
10 acknowledgement about a person that was on
11 that thirty-five list.

12 And so, my, you know, respectful
13 request would be to include a feedback option
14 that, when these citizens' names are going
15 into a queue, even the Department
16 acknowledging that their situation has been
17 received would be just a glimmer of hope,
18 because the issue of self hurting, of
19 desperation, of really despair, and there is
20 not even an acknowledgement that their claim
21 is being under review.

22 So, I would -- I would ask, if what
23 could be included in this procedure would be,
24 you know, just a notification, a phone call,
25 an e-mail, something to the person so that

1 they know that there is potentially help on
2 the way.

3 Is that something that could be
4 considered to be included?

5 SECRETARY OLEKSIAK: Can certainly be
6 considered. But, as far as the specifics, I
7 would leave that up to the executive directors
8 and the legislative office.

9 I do know that, you know, that kind
10 of response may slow down some of the
11 resolutions but, again, I'm going to leave
12 that up to our legislative office and the
13 executive directors, with the input,
14 obviously, of the committees to work out the
15 specifics of what they want to do and what
16 will be the most effective way to get people
17 the benefits they are entitled to.

18 REPRESENTATIVE NELSON: And my next
19 question on the moving-forward side is, it's
20 specifically dealing in restaurants and
21 taverns. You know, unfortunately, with the
22 governor's veto of that restaurant bill, just
23 driving out here to Harrisburg, a number of
24 restaurants were feeling right around
25 fifty-five, fifty-eight degrees. They're

1 going to have to shut down their outdoor
2 operations. And their employees will not be
3 able to qualify yet, I think, until into
4 January, just because of the way that the
5 unemployment timeline is going.

6 And -- and so. The request, a
7 separate issue we have -- are going to have
8 thousands of workers that their restaurants
9 are going to be closing just because they're
10 not going to be able to sustain coming
11 forward. And I think the concern for their
12 employees is that they, even if they are
13 successful in navigating this system, they're
14 not going to be eligible, because of the
15 timeline of how these things are working.

16 I don't know if the Department has
17 started looking forward to what may be
18 happening in the next couple of weeks, but a
19 consideration for, you know, how these
20 restaurant employees are going to bridge the
21 gap, because I think, right now, their --
22 their timeline in the calendar just isn't --
23 it's not going to work out in the current
24 system.

25 DEPUTY SECRETARY TRUSKY:

1 Representative Nelson, I'm curious as to why
2 you think that's the case. You know, it would
3 obviously depend on how many weeks an
4 individual has drawn down. You know, there's
5 extended benefits both on the federal and
6 state level. So -- so, I'm curious as to why
7 you think they would not be eligible.

8 If it's a simple lack-of-work reason
9 for them being off, from -- you know, if
10 that's what it is, they'd certainly be
11 eligible. What would matter is the number of
12 weeks they've collected their quarters, et
13 cetera, but I don't think it's correct to make
14 a blanket statement that they wouldn't be
15 eligible. I -- you know, I'm -- that's the
16 first time I've heard that. And it kind of
17 surprises me as well.

18 REPRESENTATIVE NELSON: We can
19 absolutely follow up with, you know, we're in
20 pretty consistent communication with a number
21 of restaurant owners. And they don't have --

22 DEPUTY SECRETARY TRUSKY: Please do,
23 yeah. I'd like to know myself, like, where
24 that comes from and, you know, educate our
25 staff and see if we can, you know, cut off a

1 problem before it happens.

2 REPRESENTATIVE NELSON: Because I
3 think it is about the timeline, because of the
4 delay in a lot of people coming back to work
5 within that industry, and then, with losing
6 the outside tent capability, they're
7 anticipating that they may be buttoning up for
8 the winter. And -- but I'll follow up
9 directly with you afterwards and maybe we can
10 even have a meeting with some of these
11 business owners. They're very concerned about
12 their employees not being able to bridge that
13 gap of what they were explaining to me would
14 be about two months, two and a half months,
15 but I'll follow up directly with you.

16 Thank you.

17 DEPUTY SECRETARY TRUSKY: Yeah,
18 please do. That discussion's welcome.

19 REPRESENTATIVE NELSON: Thank you,
20 Mr. Chair.

21 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN COX: Thank you,
22 Representative Nelson.

23 I'm going to just reach out and see
24 if there's anyone joining us virtually who has
25 questions. We've not received any

1 notification from one any at this point, but
2 I'll just ask before I move to Chairman
3 Harkins.

4 Anyone online joining us who has
5 questions?

6 All right. Hearing none, I'm going
7 to ask Chairman Harkins for any questions or
8 comments you'd like to make.

9 MINORITY CHAIRMAN HARKINS: Thank
10 you, Chairman Cox.

11 And thank you to the Department.
12 This was a great discussion. I feel like
13 we're family. Every Friday -- Thursday or
14 Friday morning, we all get together and we
15 have our hour of conversation, sometimes we're
16 lucky and it's not that long.

17 But I don't want to lose sight of all
18 the hard work and effort that's gone into all
19 of this. And I think we are preparing
20 ourselves for down the road. And we're
21 finding the common ground and the things that
22 did work. There are a lot of kinks, but like
23 you pointed out, other states are going
24 through much worse than we are, and we're very
25 fortunate for that.

1 That's no solace to the people who
2 are going through hell, who haven't been paid
3 yet.

4 I have a comment from one of my
5 office people. Her name's Chris Rush. And
6 she's a saint. Many of you there know her.
7 Neil Cashman, I think -- I was going to accuse
8 him and her of having something going on over
9 the phone, but she assured me, Neil assured me
10 that's not so. In all seriousness, though,
11 Chris is the person in my office who has been
12 handling the thirteen, fourteen, twenty-five,
13 thirty claims that are listed from Democrat
14 and Republican members. We both have fielded
15 calls from around the county of people who
16 have worked in Pennsylvania up until March
17 17th and moved to Nebraska, moved to Colorado,
18 move here and there, but they don't have a
19 representative that can answer their calls, so
20 who do they call? District 1, Pat Harkins.
21 We're not turning anybody away. We're dealing
22 with all their calls.

23 Chris is a shining star. I have
24 people on third shift that she will get up and
25 call while they're at work to straighten out

1 their situation, their issues. Many Democrat
2 and Republican members know Chris. They call
3 me and text me and appreciate all that she's
4 done for them.

5 In the last two weeks, I've tried to
6 back off from giving her a lot of the heavy
7 lists, because I know she's getting burned
8 out. We can't even get her a phone. She's
9 using her own personal phone. And she's got
10 two lines coming into that.

11 Saturday, I had my home Internet and
12 wireless system updated from Spectrum and
13 Verizon. My neighbors can't even believe the
14 things that are coming in and out of my house.
15 The people that stop me when I'm out walking
16 the dog, everyone's frustrated. But, again,
17 thank you for all that you're doing.

18 But this one is from Chris, and she
19 says this morning: "In process," what does
20 that mean? Can a few weeks of payment be
21 released? People have had no payments for up
22 to twenty weeks and do not qualify for food
23 stamps due to income. We have to release
24 something. And we are catching hell about it
25 in the office.

1 And I go back to last Wednesday, in
2 Erie, at the Bethany Outreach, they did --
3 Price Rite came in, a national company, and
4 gave away everything from food to water to
5 books in support for people who need it. As I
6 drove down there that day, I was in a hurry,
7 but I went six blocks down, and I saw up to
8 eight hundred cars, people waiting.

9 It was impressive, but it was
10 heartbreaking to realize there's people there
11 that I saw, that honked at me and waived at
12 me, that I knew from my UPS days, who are
13 good, solid people, but they're out of work,
14 and they don't have anywhere to turn. Many of
15 them stopped me and they said what their
16 plights were, what their situations were, from
17 health issues not even COVID related, but all
18 this just compounds on them.

19 Oftentimes I go home and I don't know
20 where to turn. It's heartbreaking, brings
21 tears to my eyes.

22 But I'm just asking if we could
23 clarify things a little bit more easily for
24 people and if we could get back to people a
25 little more quickly. It would really go a

1 long way with helping us all out, especially
2 as we're coming into the holiday season.

3 Thank you.

4 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN COX: Thank you,
5 Chairman Harkins.

6 I have a couple questions here. In
7 your testimony, you provided information about
8 increased staffing levels, going from seven
9 hundred seventy-five up to nearly two
10 thousand. You spoke of over three hundred
11 sixty thousand hours of overtime. You talked
12 about a -- an independent study that you've
13 contracted for regarding your UC staffing
14 levels. You talked about contracting out
15 information gathering work to an external
16 vendor, Plexiglass barriers and other safety
17 measures being put in place in -- in the
18 offices so that individuals, employees can
19 return to work. You talked about IT
20 investments with communications and otherwise,
21 with the bots and Google AI and all of that.

22 On top of that, you talked about the
23 Commonwealth-issued laptops, over five hundred
24 being issued, along with monitors and
25 keyboards. You mentioned bandwidth increases,

1 Internet service improvements, et cetera.

2 I have a lot of questions revolving
3 around the efficiency of that. Some of them
4 include -- and I'm not going to ask all these
5 questions, but I'll ask them rhetorically at
6 this point and follow up with perhaps an
7 e-mail on this, but if employees are using
8 their cell phones or their home phones, are
9 they being reimbursed piecemeal? Have you
10 contracted with, you know, one of the big
11 carriers to say, we have X number of people
12 out there using phones? Are they using phones
13 that were already distributed to them?

14 And, again, these are somewhat
15 rhetorical questions, because my larger
16 question is, with all of these costs, all of
17 these outlays that I'm hearing about, I'm
18 seeing two things. I'm seeing, number one, an
19 attempt to try to resolve the problems ahead
20 of us, and -- and get people the service that
21 they deserve and get their problems solved,
22 but I'm also seeing the other side of that,
23 which is a tremendous cost.

24 Where are all -- where is all that
25 funding coming from for all of these

1 improvements and staffing increases and the
2 overtime, et cetera?

3 SECRETARY OLEKSIAK: Yeah, I'm going
4 to ask Bill to speak to that. Those are
5 federal dollars, I believe.

6 Bill.

7 DEPUTY SECRETARY TRUSKY: Correct.
8 They are all federal dollars at the moment.

9 Representative, we've been -- you
10 know, we work with the Department of Labor
11 quarterly. We draw down what is referred to
12 as above-based funding. And our funding
13 levels for those quarters or our additional
14 funding that we've been receiving have been
15 able to pay for the -- the extra items that
16 we've been putting in place.

17 I mean, you know, damned if we do,
18 damned if we don't, so to speak. I mean, we
19 want to provide the best customer service and
20 resolve as many cases as quickly as possible,
21 so we've been -- you know, we've been on
22 national calls weekly, listening to best
23 practices, what other states are doing, and,
24 you know, we are -- are trying to put this
25 system in the best possible position to

1 succeed as we can.

2 And as you know, we're more than
3 willing to sit down in the future and discuss
4 what you'd like to see from a customer service
5 standpoint, et cetera.

6 You know, as I continue to say,
7 these -- these systems nationally are
8 understaffed, underfunded, and if it's even a
9 word, undertechnologized. I mean, we have
10 been trying to change that and set our state
11 on a different path. And I -- you know, based
12 on what we've seen across the country, I think
13 we've responded quite well.

14 You know, obviously, we don't want to
15 overspend. We want to be good stewards of
16 federal dollars, but we also want to make sure
17 that both the employers and the employees of
18 this Commonwealth get the service they
19 deserve.

20 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN COX: Okay. And
21 kind of a follow-up on that, I had thought
22 that was the case, and I wanted to make sure
23 that, you know, federal dollars were still
24 funding these things and that we weren't
25 incurring costs that would land at the

1 taxpayers of Pennsylvania's feet. I know it's
2 going to, you know, come from the larger --
3 the larger pot of money that's funded by
4 taxpayers on the federal level, so I'm not
5 saying that it's not all taxpayer dollars.
6 Don't -- don't take me wrong that way.

7 So, a number of employees -- how
8 many -- if I can ask this, how many of the two
9 thousand or so employees are working from an
10 office within the Commonwealth-funded
11 buildings, et cetera, or -- versus how many
12 are working from home?

13 DEPUTY SECRETARY TRUSKY: We're
14 currently at 50 percent operating capacity in
15 our service centers.

16 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN COX: So, of the
17 two thousand, how many of the two thousand --

18 DEPUTY SECRETARY TRUSKY: I'd have to
19 break that down because, you know, we have
20 vendors, outside -- outside agency staff. But
21 I -- I could get you that number,
22 Representative, to tell you exactly, based on
23 our staff, the number of folks working in the
24 six service centers. Be happy to do that.

25 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN COX: Okay.

1 SECRETARY OLEKSIAK: Excuse me.

2 Mr. Chairman, I'm sorry. I was cut off for
3 the last couple minutes. I apologize for
4 that. But I'm back.

5 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN COX: Okay. If you
6 want to add anything, just join in, Secretary.

7 The -- so the question regarding them
8 being back in the offices or how many are back
9 in the offices, when anyone calls a -- an
10 office nowadays, they typically hear something
11 to the effect of, you know, "This call is
12 being recorded for quality control," et
13 cetera. Are calls made by these individuals
14 from home to claimants and so forth, are
15 they -- are they recorded? Is there a quality
16 control -- are there quality control measures
17 in place?

18 DEPUTY SECRETARY TRUSKY: Yes.

19 They're all recorded. I mean, we have the
20 technology in place that records both the
21 incoming and outgoing calls.

22 And that's -- that's another thing
23 I'm not sure the secretary mentioned. We
24 responded months ago, when a member of the
25 legislature, you know, historically we'd call

1 out, wouldn't leave a call-back number. You
2 know, we implemented -- we gave all our
3 examiners extensions. So, you know, we have
4 responded and we continue to respond. And
5 we'll do so as we move forward in working with
6 you. But both incoming and outgoing calls,
7 Mr. Chairman, are recorded.

8 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN COX: Okay. We've
9 had a few within my office, and I suspect
10 there are others, where individuals,
11 claimants, have not been treated
12 professionally. And so, I will have those
13 forwarded to you to check those out to see.
14 Sometimes inappropriate questions or comments
15 are made.

16 I had one young lady call and just
17 tell us that she felt very insecure about some
18 comments made by an individual who called.
19 She sent a photo of a document as it was
20 requested, and then the individual on the
21 other end of the phone line says, "Oh, I got
22 it." And then says -- made comment about, you
23 know, "Oh, that's a nice deck," or, you know,
24 just -- you know, I can't recall the exact
25 phrasing, but it made this young lady feel

1 very, very uncomfortable and --

2 DEPUTY SECRETARY TRUSKY: Yeah, we'd
3 be happy to look into that call. I will say,
4 we've had numerous calls or numerous, quote,
5 complaints that we have looked at, and, you
6 know, I'm going to defend our staff here. You
7 know, we don't always get the -- get it right,
8 however, by far, the more -- majority of the
9 time, our staff are completely professional.

10 But, you know, any of those, Chairman
11 Cox, we'd be happy to look at, because they're
12 a learning experience and educational for us
13 as well, as we attempt to improve on customer
14 service. So, yeah, we're happy to look at
15 those calls, because they are recorded.

16 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN COX: Okay. And
17 I'll send you a few other questions in an
18 e-mail. We're closing on the 11 o'clock hour.
19 And so we need to get to the House floor.

20 But I do want to just stress the --
21 the importance of maintaining the privacy when
22 documents are sent. They're -- if -- I'm not
23 saying it's not being done, but if there's a
24 way you can convey that to the claimants, to
25 provide them with that feeling of security, if

1 that makes sense -- again, so, I'm not
2 questioning the actual security so much as how
3 they are feeling on the other end when they're
4 asked to send a document in in one way or
5 another.

6 So, part of it, as you know, being in
7 the world of politics, is perception and what
8 it looks like to individuals in the public.
9 So, we, in the legislature, have an interest
10 in making sure that the Department and what is
11 happening there is done in the best way
12 possible.

13 At this point, I would like to thank
14 all three of you for joining us again. We
15 appreciate the updates. We appreciate the
16 regular communications we receive. And we
17 hope that we will continue to see
18 improvements. And we stand here, ready to
19 help and in any way we can.

20 So, please feel free to reach out to
21 us as well in the future with any needs,
22 questions, concerns, or upcoming issues that
23 you see coming down the line.

24 At this point, we're going to
25 conclude this hearing. And we thank you all

1 again. We are now adjourned.

2 (Whereupon, the hearing adjourned at
3 11:02 a.m.)

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REPORTER'S CERTIFICATE

I HEREBY CERTIFY that the foregoing
is a true and accurate transcript, to the best
of my ability, produced from audio on the said
proceedings.

BRENDA J. PARDUN, RPR
Court Reporter
Notary Public