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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-0913

April 8, 2020

The Honorable Ken Lawson, Executive Director
Florida Department of Economic Opportunity
107 East Madison Street
Caldwell Building
Tallahassee, Florida 32399-4120

Dear Mr. Lawson:

Thank you for your work on behalf of the State of Florida and our people during these unprecedented times. To improve the functioning of our state's unemployment application process, I strongly urge you to make additional options available for the people including submitting applications by email and mobile app.

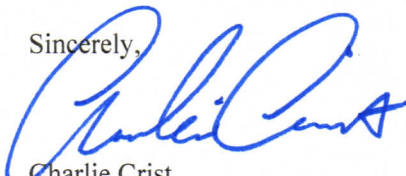
As millions of Americans were laid off or furloughed due to the coronavirus pandemic, states across the country found their unemployment insurance infrastructure overwhelmed by the crush of applicants. While our tourism and service-heavy economy was hit particularly hard, Florida was not unique in having unemployment servers overwhelmed by desperate residents out of work through no fault of their own. Never has our nation experienced such a swift and dramatic economic contraction with millions out of work seemingly overnight. What sets Florida apart, however, is the ongoing inability of every unemployed Floridian to claim their benefits still weeks into this pandemic.

I appreciate your comments taking responsibility for the failures of the Florida "Reemployment Assistance" website, and I am encouraged by the steps you have announced. However, I feel that the Department of Economic Opportunity can be doing more to make the unemployment insurance application process work better for the people.

I have heard from a Clearwater waitress who hasn't taken a table in three weeks and a bartender barely making rent only by the grace of God and the St. Pete Virtual Tip Jar. For them, time – and simplicity – is of the essence. The paper application was a meaningful step for some; however, not all out-of-work Floridians have a printer or postage stamps. I encourage you to work with established software engineers to design a secure, mobile-based application, so Floridians can apply and submit supporting documents via their phone or email. This will meet the people in need where they are at. That is who we serve. The system should work for them.

So many of out-of-work Floridians were not just living paycheck-to-paycheck but rather day-to-day. Now they have nothing until the unemployment application is repaired or revamped. Just as the federal government increased Floridians' maximum benefit from \$275 per week to \$875 per week, I stand ready to fight for any additional federal assistance you need to develop an app-based unemployment application, so the process will work for the people.

Sincerely,



Charlie Crist
UNITED STATES CONGRESSMAN