

HB 955 SUPPORT

Unemployment Insurance- Procedures for Recovery of Overpayment of Benefits- Alterations

Economic Matter Committee

March 1st, 2022

Dear Chair Wilson, Vice Chair Crosby, and Members of the Economic Matters Committee:

My name is Cassandra Kemp. I retired at the end of 2018 from Corporate America. I have a son, three grandchildren, and I am the primary caretaker for my 101 year old mother that suffered a stroke in 2019.

I worked at the HalfNote Lounge from 2015 until it closed in February 29, 2020. I retired to work at HalfNote (second career) as the General Manager. Once COVID started to rise, the owner decided to close. I stayed on to help liquidate everything. My Official last day was March 12, 2020. The owner told all of us to apply for unemployment. I filed but did not think I would get approved. I had never filed, so I did not know how the process worked. I submitted all the paperwork and created an account on Beacon.

In or around June 2020, I received a debit card and was instructed to set up an account. I set it up and eventually got a message from Beacon, that there was something I needed to respond to.

I received payments starting in June 2020-November 2020. Once the payments stopped, I assumed that I had received all that I was entitled to receive. Until I received a call from Shanda from the unemployment office, indicating that there was a problem with my unemployment classification and the Beacon. She asked for very specific information about my employer, name, contact information. She wanted to give him a call to clarify my eligibility. She called three times: December 14th, 15th, and 16th. The final call back was to let me know that I was eligible to receive benefits and that the error was in my classification (PUA vs UI), and to ignore the overpayment message (\$2,300) that appears in the Beacon. She said it would take a couple of weeks to fix. I asked, "if it is not fixed, what should I do?" She said to call back. Since it was Christmas time, I decided to wait until January 1st.

I logged in on January 1st and discovered that the overpayment amount had increased from \$2,300 in December to \$23,000. I went on the website to try to find someone to communicate with. I found NOTHING. I went to Google and found about six numbers to call. I started calling- each line was busy.

I had taken advantage of the forbearance on my mortgage and my car, but both were coming to an end soon so I needed to get this situation resolved.

I logged back into the Beacon. None of the links in the system worked. So, I found an appeal button at the top of the screen. It was not very interactive, but it appeared that it allowed me to submit an appeal request. In a few days, a confirmation number appeared that included a date and time for the appeal. No phone number anywhere. I waited for a call; no call came. A few days later, I clicked on that appeal button and it indicated that that appeal had been cancelled. I kept calling.

Finally, in April people started to answer the phones. I spoke to Pat 4/13/21; Mike 4/20/21; Maya 5/11/21; and Carolyn 5/25/21. Each person gave me a different excuse as to why the overpayment appeared and each indicated that they would contact the lower appeal or upper appeal group. All said that it was a problem with my Beacon. Finally, Carolyn on May 25th told me that I was wasting my time and that I needed to figure out how to pay the money back. Oh, she said let me fix your Beacon.

Once she fixed my Beacon, I found ALL the correspondence that I had missed. I found a letter from Judy G Smylie, Esq., Director/Chief Hearing Examiner. I decided to write a letter to her. I waited two weeks. Then I called the phone number that was listed on her stationary. I spoke to Kelly on 6/8/21 who worked in her office. She told me to STOP wasting my time. All the people that I had spoken to were Temps hired by the unemployment office to tell us anything to get us off the phone. She suggested I try to submit a letter to the Board of Appeals. They denied the appeal because I did not call in for the original appeal.

The System is definitely BROKEN, I logged in today and the overpayment amount is still there in the amount of \$23,000.

For these reasons, I respectfully request a favorable report for House Bill 955.