

SENATE OF VIRGINIA

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COMMITTEE ASSIGNMENTS:
LOCAL GOVERNMENT
REHABILITATION AND SOCIAL SERVICES
TRANSPORTATION

November 20, 2020

The Honorable Ralph S. Northam
Governor of Virginia
Patrick Henry Building
1111 East Broad Street
Richmond, VA 23218

Dear Governor Northam:

On a regular basis, you take to the podium and hold press conferences regarding COVID-19 and everything your administration is accomplishing to assist Virginians during this crisis. Governor, there is no single effort you can undertake that will help our citizens more than shoring up the Virginia Employment Commission (VEC). At a time of great need, Virginians are floundering from their inability to receive unemployment benefits. Eviction. Homelessness. Hunger. Lack of medical care. How are families who are suffering supposed to subsist without financial support?

Throughout the pandemic we have heard from thousands of people seeking assistance with matters concerning the VEC. They are often not from our district. We do not distinguish between constituents and other Virginia residents. They are all citizens of the Commonwealth in need and we are here to help. We are fortunate to have a good working relationship with the folks at the VEC and they do their best. But they are limited by staff numbers and what appear to be antiquated computer and phone systems. The VEC needs your help. They need your resources. And with COVID numbers on the rise and extended unemployment benefits ending tomorrow, things will only get worse.

According to a recent Virginia Mercury article, "Virginia's unemployment insurance program now ranks worst in the country...." It is no exaggeration to say people call the VEC over 30 times a day, not only to never get through, but to often be hung up on after waiting for hours. Or they hear the recording, "all customer service agents are busy with other callers, please try back." We are told that appointments via the website show no availability till after 2021. The local VEC offices are closed. And the backlog for adjudications range back to May and June of this year. How can this be acceptable?

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Governor, during this pandemic you have focused your time and resources on the removal of statues, parole board releases, mask protocol, a coronavirus app, and a Health Department postcard targeting teens and sexual health. Your recent budget amendments included \$1 million to fund a study at VMI, a school with substantial endowment. How can taking money from our budget for a study be more important than providing additional funding for an essential agency like the VEC? Again, I submit that there is no single effort your office can undertake that is more important than ensuring our citizens receive the financial assistance they so desperately need. The safety and security of our citizens depend on this.

Your immediate attention to this request is appreciated.

Warm regards,



Bill DeSteph