



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA
Virginia Employment Commission

Demetrios J. Melis
Commissioner

Post Office Box 26441
Richmond, VA 23261-6441

May 15, 2024

TO: The Honorable Glenn Youngkin
Governor, Commonwealth of Virginia
P.O. Box 1475
Richmond, Virginia 23218

The Honorable R. Creigh Deeds
Chair, Senate Commerce and Labor
Senate of Virginia
P.O. Box 396
Richmond, Virginia 23218

The Honorable Jeion A. Ward
Chair, House Labor and Commerce
Virginia House of Delegates
P.O. Box 7310
Hampton, Virginia 23666

The Honorable Adam Ebbin
Chair, Commission on Unemployment Compensation
Senate of Virginia
P.O. Box 396
Richmond, Virginia 23218

FROM: Demetrios J. Melis, Commissioner

RE: Update on the Office of the Unemployment Compensation Ombudsman

Dear Governor, Chairmen, and Madam Chair:

Per the 2023-2024 Budget of the Commonwealth of Virginia, the Virginia Employment Commission is required to provide a quarterly report to update the General Assembly, Governor, House Labor and Commerce Committee, Senate Commerce and Labor Committee, and the Commission on Unemployment Compensation regarding the Unemployment Compensation Ombudsman hereinafter referred to as 'Chief Customer Advocate.' This letter serves to meet that requirement.

With nearly two years of activity completed and with significant transformations and business process improvements undertaken at the VEC, we found it a prudent time to reassess the Chief Customer Advocate's office and explore strategies to expand our customer base and enhance our impact. The Chief Customer Advocate will now have a larger programmatic policy advisory

role as well as outreach and stakeholder engagement responsibilities. Additionally, the Chief Customer Advocate's office will expand collaboration with the newly created Director of Communications role as well as our Plain Language Project team to promote and improve the public's knowledge of Virginia's unemployment insurance program, the appeals process, and obtaining timely and accurate escalated assistance when needed.

The Customer Advocate team will now fall under the VEC Customer Contact Center serving as a specialized team with advanced expertise and higher-level decision-making authority. This approach will ensure more expeditious service in addition to improving first-contact resolution. We anticipate this reorganization to be complete by July 1, at which point Customer Advisory Council (CAC) meetings will resume.

During this transition, Customer Advocates have continued to serve as the referral point for members of the General Assembly, in addition to their focus of working with customers. VEC has seen a significant decline in the number of inquiries due in large part to the improved online portal login, improvements to our website, and educational outreach efforts. Customer Advocates typically receive 100 - 120 inquiries per month from Legislators, the Governor's Office, and the Commissioner's Office, all of which are promptly processed with no current backlog. Additionally, Customer Advocates receive approximately five requests per month to assist customers facing barriers to receiving assistance.

Over the past several months, the VEC has been actively engaged in education and outreach efforts. We have created physical educational materials providing helpful foundational knowledge about Virginia's Unemployment Insurance program as well as guidance on how to register online. These materials have been distributed through the network of Virginia Works Offices across the Commonwealth, at community events the VEC has participated, and through partnerships with other entities such as local libraries, public social service organizations, and community groups. To compliment this effort, the VEC is now actively posting educational and informational materials to multiple social media platforms.

I am very pleased with the momentum we are seeing in our service improvements, education and outreach efforts, and the positive and collaborative partnerships we have with other interested stakeholders. I look forward to providing updates on our future progress. Please do not hesitate to contact me at demetrios.melis@vec.virginia.gov or 804-786-3001 with any questions or feedback.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Demetrios J. Melis". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Demetrios J. Melis
Commissioner