



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA
Virginia Employment Commission

Demetrios J. Melis
Commissioner

Post Office Box 26441
Richmond, VA 23261-6441

July 26, 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 2024-2025 Budget of the Commonwealth of Virginia, the Virginia Employment Commission is required to provide a quarterly report to update the General Assembly on the Unemployment Compensation Ombudsman, to the Governor, House Labor and Commerce Committee, the Senate Commerce and Labor Committee, and the Commission on Unemployment Compensation. This letter serves to meet that requirement.

With VEC's efforts to always improve and provide better service to our customers, which includes both claimants and employers, the re-imagined Customer Escalation Team is now in place. The agency has created two new paths of referral for customer inquiries to streamline the methods of referral and communication with the VEC. The first path is for escalated claims coming from legislators, executive branch employees, and stakeholders. VEC has provided a link

to an online contact form to these groups. The contact form will be completed by the referring party and the matter will be assigned directly to Escalation Specialists. The second path is for customers, which includes both claimants and employers. [A link](#) to a separate online contact form is now on the VEC website and can be provided to customers upon request. The website contact form will provide an easier way for customers to connect with us and receive effective assistance. All requests will be reviewed and assigned for response in the order that they are received. With this centralized approach to inquiries, we aim to ensure all inquiries are promptly assigned to a member of our escalation team which will facilitate a faster and more streamlined approach to resolution. Information regarding these two new paths of contact has been communicated to all Virginia legislators and they have been provided a link to directly access the legislative contact form.

With the reorganization of the Customer Advocates into a Specialized Escalation Team fifteen advocates and two supervisors have been selected to undergo a seven-week training program. The training kicked off at the VEC Customer Contact Center in Vansant, VA during the week of July 15. This specialized team, equipped with advanced expertise and higher-level decision-making authority, will be cross-trained to provide first-call assistance, leverage technology effectively, and promptly resolve constituent inquiries. They will have the ability to be more responsive to customers facing barriers and to assist during periods of high claim volumes. By expanding team knowledge and skills and utilizing our technology to centralize all escalations, we will be able to deliver more consistent and efficient outcomes.

Effective July 10, a long-time VEC employee has assumed the role of Chief Customer Advocate. He has significant unemployment insurance experience, serving approximately 20 years as a UI Deputy, a local office manager, and as the main point of contact for stakeholders and labor unions. His wealth of knowledge will be highly beneficial in providing assistance regarding all areas of unemployment compensation. As the Chief Customer Advocate, he understands the necessity to remaining impartial, not providing legal advice, educating claimants, employers, Unions, Legal Aid, and Legislators to ensure due process is afforded to all.

The Chief Customer Advocate will work to ensure all efforts keep the customer as the focus and foundation of communications from the Virginia Employment Commission. Additionally, the Chief Customer Advocate will collaborate with the Director of Communications and the Plain Language Project team to continue to enhance public knowledge of Virginia's unemployment insurance program, the appeals process, and in providing timely escalated assistance. The VEC continues to be actively engaged in education and outreach efforts, having distributed educational materials in both English and Spanish that provide foundational knowledge about Virginia's Unemployment Insurance program and comprehensive instructions for filing claims online. These materials are available through the Virginia Works Offices, at community events, and through partnerships with local libraries, social services, and community groups. Complementing this effort, the VEC is continued to actively share educational and informational materials on its multiple social media platforms. We believe these changes have and will continue to significantly enhance our customers' experience and ensure Virginians receive the support they need.

Please do not hesitate to contact me at demetrios.melis@vec.virginia.gov or 804-786-3001 with any questions.

Sincerely,

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

Demetrios J. Melis
Commissioner