



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA
Virginia Employment Commission

Demetrios J. Melis
Commissioner

Post Office Box 26441
Richmond, VA 23261-6441

January 1, 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 on the plan to update on the Unemployment Compensation Ombudsman to the Governor, House Commerce and Energy Committee, the Senate Commerce and Labor Committee, and the Commission on Unemployment Compensation. This letter serves to meet that requirement.

Ombudsman (Chief Customer Advocate) Project

The Chief Customer Advocate position was created in 2022 to support individuals and groups who are underserved or disadvantaged and address the availability of and access to UI

programs and services. The position is supported by Customer Advocates who work throughout the Commonwealth.

Customer Advocates continue to serve as the referral point for members of the General Assembly within the regions they serve, in addition to their focus of working with customers who have barriers to UI programs and services. On average, Customer Advocates are receiving 200-250 referrals per month from Legislators and other internal and external sources and 13 requests per month to assist customers due to barriers. Intellectual disabilities, vision and hearing impairment, literacy, homelessness, and limited English proficiency are some of the barriers that Customer Advocates have identified while helping customers.

Customer Advocates continue to attend community outreach events and meetings in their regions. From July to December 2023, Customer Advocates participated in 47 partner events and meetings where they introduced the Customer Advocate Program and provided unemployment insurance education and assistance.

Customer Advisory Council (CAC) meetings will resume this quarter. The first quarter meeting will satisfy the 1-year commitment requested from the initial group of CAC participants. New representatives from local and state organizations will be invited to participate in CAC meetings beginning in the second quarter of 2024.

The Chief Customer Advocate continues to provide educational information and assistance to persons seeking assistance in appeals and other matters related to unemployment compensation. In addition, the Chief Customer Advocate works with the Plain Language Project team to ensure all efforts keep the customer as the focus and foundation of communications from the Virginia Employment Commission.

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 long horizontal stroke at the end.

Demetrios J. Melis
Commissioner