

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

July 27, 2020

The Honorable Eugene Scalia
Secretary
U.S. Department of Labor
200 Constitution Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20210

Dear Secretary Scalia:

Over 26 million workers across the United States currently rely on supplemental federal unemployment benefits authorized in the CARES Act to pay for basic necessities like food, shelter, and utilities. But millions of other workers are still waiting for their benefit applications to be processed or paid, while bills pile up and their families become more desperate for help. Every day of waiting puts workers closer to hunger and homelessness. This also has a crippling impact on local businesses—when workers can’t buy goods and services, businesses can’t retain, hire, and pay their workers.

Today Senator McConnell announced a new proposal to cut benefits immediately and also require states to implement a complicated new application and benefit calculation. Both changes would require states to shift trained staff away from working on the backlog of applications in order to make changes in computer systems, application forms, and payment systems.

We are writing to ask your Department for two pieces of information needed to understand the impact of Senator McConnell’s proposal.

First, please provide data on the unemployment benefit processing backlogs, nationally and by state, so that we can assess how many workers are still waiting due to lack of capacity in state unemployment offices, and what capacity those offices and their staff might have to take on new and complicated processes.

Second, in May, the Department provided technical assistance that said that states would find it “exceedingly difficult, if not impossible” to implement a plan like the one proposed by Senator McConnell. Please provide to us any analysis you have done to assess the effect that the McConnell plan would have on wait times for unemployment benefits, payment errors, and other key administrative functions, both nationally and in each state, and any data you have gathered that would change your May assessment. If DOL has not conducted such analysis or gathered new information, please let us know whether Senator McConnell or the White House requested analysis, and if so, when you expect to complete it.

Given that Senator McConnell is proposing to make this drastic policy change when the benefits expire this Friday, July 31st, we request a response to our letter by close of business on Thursday, July 30th.

Sincerely,



Richard E. Neal
Chairman
Committee on Ways and Means



Ron Wyden
Ranking Member
Senate Finance Committee