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January 11, 2019

The Honorable Alexander Acosta  
U.S. Department of Labor  
200 Constitution Ave NW  
Washington, DC 20210

Dear Secretary Acosta,

The government shutdown that the President forced upon this country has caused needless turmoil and financial uncertainty for hundreds of thousands of federal workers and their families. Given your responsibility for federal administration of the unemployment insurance (UI) system, it is critical you do everything within your power to ensure state UI programs are responding to the needs of furloughed workers.

More than half of Americans have less than \$1,000 in savings, so the loss of just one paycheck puts workers at risk of homelessness, food insecurity, and an inability to get needed health care. When workers experience job loss through no fault of their own, the unemployment insurance system is meant to help ease their financial burden to prevent these dire consequences. Calls and emails to my office indicate that many federal workers are being denied unemployment insurance benefits to which they are entitled. Accordingly, I am writing to ask that your Department issue guidance to ensure states are providing these workers with these critical benefits.

When workers apply for benefits, the State UI agency determines the documentation needed to demonstrate employment history and earnings and benefit levels. Because workers are often unable to access their offices, computers, and work email accounts due to the shutdown, they may be unable to find and verify the documents that state agencies are requiring. It is my understanding that some state agencies are requiring furloughed workers to present an SF-8, which is the form provided to federal employees explaining their potential eligibility for unemployment benefits. According to the Unemployment Compensation for Federal Employees handbook for states, the state agency should be responsible for requesting information from the federal agency for employees who do not have, or cannot access an SF-8. It is important that state agencies know this information, and also are aware of the fact that they can use alternative means to verify wages through mechanisms, such as W-2s, pay stubs, direct bank deposits, or affidavits.

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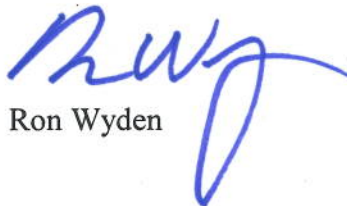
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It is critical that states and the federal government work together to ensure workers and their families can access their benefits so they can pay their bills and support their families as this shutdown drags on. Accordingly, I ask that you immediately issue guidance to states to ensure the smooth processing of unemployment benefits.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'RWY', with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.

Ron Wyden