**Employment Security Advisory Committee**

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| **Meeting details** |
| **Date:** Monday, June 15, 2020  **Time:** 1:00 to 4:00 p.m.  **Location:** By Webex   |  |  | | --- | --- | | **Committee members in attendance:**   * Bob Battles * Mike Gempler * Mark Johnson * Joe Kendo * Chelsea Mason * Mark Riker * John Tirpak * Rod Van Alyne |  | |
| **Summary** |
| **Commissioner’s Update**  ESD Commissioner Suzi LeVine welcomed the committee members and audience participants, then provided a high-level overview of ESD’s COVID-related work over the past several months.  **Unemployment Trust Fund Solvency**  Dan Zeitlin (Director of Policy, Data, Performance, and Integrity) and Steven Ross (Director of Labor Market Information) reported on the state of ESD’s Unemployment Insurance Trust Fund.  Compared to many other states, ESD’s Trust Fund is doing very well. Immediately prior to the pandemic, Washington was ninth in the nation for trust fund solidity. Since the pandemic began, nine other states have had to borrow money from the federal government to pay unemployment claims, but Washington hasn’t had to do that.  From February through April of this year, Washington state lost 552,400 [non-farming] jobs; more than the amount of jobs that the state lost in the last recession. The highest number of job losses were in the leisure and hospitality sector, which lost 152,600 jobs since this time last year. As of this April, the statewide unemployment rate was at 15.8%.    **Unemployment Insurance Update**  Julie Lord (Unemployment Insurance Customer Support Director) said that 1.1 million claimants filed initial unemployment insurance claims since March 8th, and ESD has paid claims to 826,000 people since that time.  Julie gave an overview of ESD’s Operation 100%, which describes ESD’s efforts to finish processing claims received since early March for which claimants have not yet received any payment.  To meet the dramatic increase in claim volume, ESD’s Claims Center has hired more staff, increasing from 203 on 3/31/20 to 1,050 on 6/1/20 and anticipated to grow to 1,219 by 7/4/20. Staff across the agency have been assisting with processing claims, and members of the National Guard will soon assist in this effort as well.  Julie explained that training for new Claims Center staff isn’t once-and-done. Instead, ESD is continiuing to train Claims Center staff as new issues and questions arise.  Scott Michael (Legal Services Coordination Manager) explained that ESD has passed several emergency rules to address the COVID-19 crisis and is now considering making some of those rules permanent. ESD is currently soliciting input from external stakeholders regarding whether to do this. People can weigh in during ESAC meetings or during the rulemaking process, which provides several notice and opportunities to comment.  Dan Zeitlin said that the Governor waived the unemployment insurance job search requirement on March 25th and the Legislature has extended it several times since then.  Staff who are normally monitoring job search compliance are currently processing claims, so when we reinstate job search reqs, they’ll have to move to that again. In addition, this population isn’t familiar with UI, so ESD will need to do a lot of education before shifting its focus to compliance efforts.  Joy Adams (Unemployment Insurance Quality Assurance Manager) said that ESD is expanding the list of activities that count towards the job search requirement to include activities such as setting up a WorkSourceWa.com account and using it to look for job openings or participating in an online WorkSource workshop.  Dan explained that when job search requirements go back into effect, ESD will do a gradual ramp-up to ensure that claimants are complying; the agency won’t do this all at once. ESD will let claimants know that we have reinstated the requirements and will explain what that means to them (i.e., that they need to start meeting those requirements.  Committee member Joe Kendo, who represents the Washington State Labor Council, asked ESD to hold off on reinstating the job search requirements because right now there aren’t many opportunities for UI claimants to apply for jobs.  Committee member Bob Battles of the Association of Washington Business said that, as the economy continues to reopen, ESD needs to start requiring UI claimants to do work searches again. However, he pointed out that ESD needs to consider when WorkSources will reopen, because claimants who don’t have Internet connectivity often conduct online work search activities at WorkSource offices.  Joe and Bob suggested reinstating job search requirements in some parts of the states, but not statewide. Dan explained that the state laws that apply to jobsearch requirements apply statewide; they don’t give ESD the necessary authority to reinstate job search requirements only in specific counties.  Committee member Mark Riker, who represents the Washington State Building and Construction Trades Council, said that for his stakeholders it wouldn’t make sense to have different job search requirements in different counties because many construction workers don’t even work in their home county.  **Reopening the Economy**  Kelly Lindseth (Director of Employment Connections) said that in March ESD and WorkSource moved 98% of staff out of the office and into working from home in one week, which was a massive undertaking. WorkSource staff are now providing virtual service delivery, which is working so well that ESD is looking to expand on this model.  Many WorkSource staff have been assisting with work that ESD’s Claims Center normally handles, such as answering general questions about unemployment insurance through one of the ESD hotlines, verifying unemployment insurance claimants’ wages and identity documentation, as well as other tasks.  Kelly explained that ESD is working with the Washington Workforce Association to build a redeployment plan. Under the proposed plan, ESD will shift staff back to working on reemployment issues in waves – about 25% will redeploy towards that in the next few weeks, then we’ll gradually continue doing this.  Dan explained that for the last several months ESD has been in crisis mode, but the agency hopes to soon be able to shift to focus on obtaining stakeholder input.  **Legislative update**  Nick Demerice gave an update on recent legislative-related activities and mentioned that Nick Streuli (ESD’s former Legislative Director) recently moved to the Governor’s Office.  **Wrap-up**  Suzi and Nick thanked the participants for attending, and Suzi thanked the committee members for the support that they provided to the agency over the past several tumultuous months. |
| **Remaining 2020 meetings** |

The remaining Employment Security Advisory Committee meetings in 2020 will be on August 17th and October 26th and will both begin at 1:00 p.m.