

The Honorable Ron DeSantis
Governor
Office of Governor Ron DeSantis
400 S. Monroe Street
Tallahassee, Florida 32399

Dear Governor DeSantis,

As members of the Clearwater City Council we are writing to urge you to address Florida's inadequate unemployment benefits program and make significant improvements to both the application process and the administration of earned benefits.

Tourism makes up a significant part of Clearwater's economic base. Because of this and COVID19, we are now experiencing record unemployment. As Councilmembers, we are speaking on behalf of over 25% of our residents who work in our food/ hospitality and retail establishments.

As you know, Florida has one of the weakest nominal unemployment compensation programs in the country. Florida ranks 47th nationally, allocating a mere \$275 per week allowance in (taxed) benefits. Just as concerning is Florida's 12-week cap on benefits matching that of North Carolina's as the lowest number of weeks of eligibility in the nation.

Additionally, we continue to hear from constituents that the website where all applications must be completed continues to malfunction making it extremely difficult for individuals to even file a claim for unemployment benefits.

Just yesterday the Tampa Bay Times reported that "...of the more than 1.7 million claims that have been filed so far, only 478,666 had been paid as of Sunday [May 3]." Over a million Floridians are still waiting for their unemployment – and that means the 600.00 per week from the Federal stimulus program as well.

We realize that the COVID19 pandemic is a colossal challenge. We know we are all in this together, working to provide necessary services to our residents, as well as do all we can to restart our economy. However, it is imperative that change happen at the state level. We urge you to:

1. Increase the maximum amount for payments and duration of unemployment benefits;
2. Update the formula to determine eligibility and consider a worker's most recent quarter of earnings to calculate the benefit;
3. Investigate and mitigate challenges with the website; and
4. Provide additional ways for individuals to apply for unemployment insurance.

We appreciate your prompt attention to this matter. The physical, mental and economic health of our residents is at stake.

Respectfully,

Clearwater City Council