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March 3, 2021

The Honorable Laura Kelly  
Governor of Kansas  
300 SW 10th Ave.  
Ste. 241S  
Topeka, KS 66612-1590

Dear Governor Kelly,

I first want to thank you for your continued leadership during this incredibly difficult chapter in Kansas' history. We are facing an unprecedented pandemic coupled with a devastating economic crisis, and Kansans are relying on their elected officials for thoughtful guidance during these challenging times.

I write to you regarding ongoing problems at the Kansas Department of Labor (KDOL). Unemployment benefits have been a lifeline to hardworking Kansans who have lost their jobs or are working reduced hours due to the COVID-19 pandemic. But I've heard from thousands of constituents over the past year who have faced difficulty accessing the unemployment benefits owed to them. Many have been unable to file their weekly claims or even speak with a KDOL representative on the phone. To make matters worse, numerous cases of fraudulent claims have been filed under the names of innocent Kansans – taking away vital resources from our already overburdened unemployment system.

Kansans are relying on this relief to pay their bills, cover their rent, and put food on the table for their families. They shouldn't have to jump through hoops, spend hours on hold, or wait for weeks to access the aid that they need and deserve.

I recognize that many of the challenges facing KDOL stem from its outdated IT system and years of neglect from Governor Sam Brownback, whose massive budget cuts decimated state agencies. I also recognize the efforts that your administration has made to begin addressing these issues. Fast-tracking modernization at KDOL is a worthy goal and necessary step. However, it has been nearly a year since this pandemic began and much more needs to be done to get Kansans the unemployment assistance they need right now. We need immediate action to address the problems plaguing KDOL and to get relief into the pockets of Kansans.

Last week, the U.S. House of Representatives passed the American Rescue Plan, a critical relief package that would bring an estimated \$1.6 billion to the state of Kansas and millions more in federal dollars to our cities. I urge you to use this funding, as well as additional federal relief that Kansas has received, to make much needed updates to the Kansas Department of Labor. These include hiring more workers to address call volume, dedicating staff to attend to true hardship cases, providing increased security to avoid fraudulent claims, and modernizing its unemployment benefits system so we are prepared for future crises.

Thank you for your consideration of these issues. I look forward to working with you to improve this program and provide as much support as possible for Kansas workers.

My warmest regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'S. Davids', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Sharice L. Davids  
Member of Congress