



WISCONSIN LEGISLATURE

P.O. BOX 8952 • MADISON, WI 53708

May 18, 2021

[DELIVERED ELECTRONICALLY]

Dear Speaker Vos, Senator Marklein, and members of legislative leadership:

Throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, our constituents have faced unprecedented and often deeply distressing challenges as they have tried to protect their health and safety while providing for themselves and their families. We are writing to implore you not to act prematurely to end Wisconsin's access to the enhanced unemployment benefits offered by the federal government under the American Rescue Plan Act or to reinstate work search requirements for unemployment benefits in our state.

We are encouraged that Wisconsin now leads the Midwest in vaccination rates, that our state unemployment rate has declined, and that the CDC has recently updated their guidance on safe activities for individuals who have received the Covid-19 vaccine. We also understand that employers across multiple sectors have expressed an urgent need for workers to fill job openings as they work to resume pre-pandemic operations. However, we are concerned that acting too soon to revoke access to federal benefits and to reinstate work search requirements will do more harm than good.

Many industries are still struggling to recover, and many of our would-be workers remain unable to find childcare, health and safety guarantees, or positions that match their skillsets or training in order to return to work. Furthermore, research from the Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago earlier in the pandemic indicated that folks who are collecting enhanced unemployment benefits actually put more effort into searching for jobs than those who have exhausted their benefits. When people know that they can count on receiving the funds they need to pay their bills and put food on their table, they logically have more mental and emotional capacity to search for employment. Also, as you know, under current state law, workers who turn down a "good" job offer, even if it doesn't fit their circumstances, stand to lose the benefits they may be otherwise depending on. Workers are already motivated to find a job and don't need additional hurdles as they struggle to get through the other side of this pandemic.

We owe it to our constituents to ensure that we are building towards a strong economic recovery while still supporting those who need assistance as they try to get back on their feet. Removing access to enhanced unemployment insurance benefits and reinstating work search requirements is not the response they need from us. We encourage you to speak directly to struggling constituents and listen to their stories and hope you will reconsider the legislation you introduced to end federal unemployment benefits and reinstate the work search requirements.

Thank you for your attention to this pressing matter. We welcome your response and would appreciate the opportunity to discuss this further. We believe we should work together to support workers, families, and a strong economic recovery.

Sincerely,

Tod Ohnstad
State Representative, 65th Assembly District
Ranking member, Committee on Jobs & the Economy

Christine Sinicki
State Representative, 20th Assembly District
Ranking member, Committee on Labor

Katrina Shankland
State Representative, 71st Assembly District
Ranking member, Committee on Workforce Development

Janis Ringhand
State Senator, 15th Senate District
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