

April 22, 2021

Susan L. Jones  
Executive Director  
Ocean City Hotel-Motel-Restaurant Association  
5700 Coastal Hwy #302  
Ocean City, MD 21842  
Email: [susanjones@ocvisitor.com](mailto:susanjones@ocvisitor.com)

Dear Ms. Jones,

I am responding to your letter dated April 13, 2021. Thank you for bringing your concerns to our attention. As you are aware, the Maryland Department of Labor (Labor) has been faced with an unprecedented volume of unemployment insurance claims over the past year during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, we have recently been encouraged by the decrease in new unemployment insurance claims being filed every week as it is a sign that the state's economy is recovering and Marylanders are returning to work.

Like other states, Maryland exempted all current and new unemployment insurance benefit recipients from the requirement to actively seek work while Maryland is in a declared State of Emergency and for thirty (30) days after. However, we understand your concerns and are aware that some states have reinstated search for work requirements in some capacity. As a result, please rest assured that the department is having active conversations about reinstating search for work requirements in Maryland.

We also understand your concerns about the eligibility requirements of the federal unemployment insurance programs, which were recently further expanded by the U.S. Department of Labor (USDOL) in February 2021. USDOL added three additional qualifying categories of individuals who may be eligible for Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA): (1) individuals who refuse to return to work that is unsafe or to accept an offer of new work that is unsafe; (2) certain individuals providing services to educational institutions or educational service agencies; and (3) individuals experiencing a reduction of hours or a temporary or permanent layoff. Labor is required to implement the federal unemployment insurance programs according to the guidance received from USDOL and makes careful determinations on a case-by-case basis. These determinations must be made in compliance and conformity with federal and state law.

Please note that by itself, refusing to return to work or quitting work out of a general concern about exposure to COVID-19 is likely not, by itself, sufficient to receive unemployment insurance benefits. As a general matter, individuals are likely to be eligible for PUA due to concerns about exposure to COVID-19 only if they have been advised by a healthcare provider to self-quarantine as a result of these concerns. If an individual meets the federal eligibility requirements for PUA, they will be entitled to benefits under the program for weeks in which they qualify. It is important to note that employers have the right to appeal the decision made regarding the charging of benefits for regular UI. As mandated by the American Rescue Plan Act, the federal unemployment insurance programs are in effect until the week ending September 4, 2021, which the state cannot change.

While the department has been working hard to distribute unemployment insurance benefits to offer a critical financial lifeline to Marylanders during the pandemic, the department's Division of Workforce Development and Adult Learning (DWDAL) has been actively working to support Marylanders in their transition back to work. Our Business Solutions Teams continue to assist businesses recruit the workforce they need by both traditional strategies as well as innovative strategies prompted by the Governor's response to the pandemic.

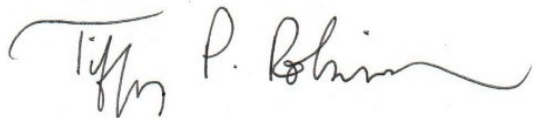
On the traditional side, we have hosted a series of virtual job fairs and recruitment events targeted to specific industries and regions in collaboration with our network of 30 American Job Centers and our workforce system partners. On the innovative side, Labor's Layoff Aversion Fund helped hundreds of businesses in the hospitality industry stay open and retain staff during the hardest of times. Overall, the Layoff Aversion Fund invested over \$31 million in Maryland businesses to cover pandemic related costs and to pivot business models to allow businesses to continue to operate amidst the pandemic restrictions. Labor issued 1,267 grants and saved 21,555 jobs throughout the state.

Finally, Labor, in collaboration with the Maryland Department of Commerce, quickly responded to the pilot proposal for "Connecting Marylanders to Maryland Jobs" proposed by the Ocean City Hotel-Motel-Restaurant Association (OCHMRA). Through a streamlined \$29,000 grant to the Maryland Center for Hospitality Training (MCHT), 100 central Maryland hospitality workers are being recruited, vetted, trained, and ultimately placed in seasonal employment in Ocean City's hospitality industry. This innovative program, in partnership with the participating businesses, included housing as part of the employment offering. Participants receive training, work experience, and an industry recognized credential that can assist them in securing work in the hospitality industry after Labor Day when they return to their home communities, thus continuing to benefit the industry's need for workers year round.

These are just a few of the workforce programs that our Division of Workforce Development and Adult Learning offers to connect job seekers with employment and employers with a steady pipeline of workers. I encourage Marylanders to connect with our department and take advantage of our other successful workforce development programs, including registered apprenticeships, EARN Maryland, etc.

Please do not hesitate to reach out to me via email at [tiffany.robinson@maryland.gov](mailto:tiffany.robinson@maryland.gov) if you have any additional questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tiffany P. Robinson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Tiffany" written in a larger, more prominent script than the last name "Robinson".

Tiffany P. Robinson  
Secretary, Maryland Department of Labor