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Director Kay Erickson Statement on Processing Claims in Oregon

Oregon is facing unprecedented unemployment and hundreds of thousands of Oregon families are counting on unemployment benefits to pay for their basic needs. While the Oregon Employment Department has paid a record number of Oregonians within two to three weeks, for too many Oregonians, their claims are in a backlog. We know how frustrating it has been for those who are trying to reach us about the status of their claims and have been unable to get through. That is why we are launching Project Focus 100.

The goal is straightforward: to process 100 percent of the 38,000 claim backlog as quickly as possible and get Oregonians the relief they need. We will use four successful strategies:

1. **Continue surge hiring.** The department has made good progress getting the staff we need to process claims quickly, increasing by six times the number of people processing claims than were in place before COVID-19 closures began. We continue hiring and training new employees to ensure every Oregonian gets the benefits they're owed in a timely fashion.
2. **Further focus our experienced professionals on the oldest and most complex claims.** For two weeks, from May 29 to June 12, we will increase our outbound calls to resolve claims for those that have been waiting the longest. To do this, our most experienced employees will take time away from answering the phones. We will also temporarily reassign job center employees to take incoming calls to help resolve questions, in all languages, relating to:
 - Address/Phone number changes
 - Looking up customer ID (CID) numbers
 - Re-setting PIN numbers
 - Issues with claiming a week of benefits online, including taking weekly certifications
 - Filing a new claim or processing an internet initial claim (except those with military, federal, or out-of-state wages)
 - Re-starting a claim
 - Checking the status of a claim (if unable to use the online claim system)
3. **Increase proactive contact and communication.** We're piloting new ways of contacting Oregonians to let them know where their claims are in the system and to solve problems. We now have pre-recorded phone messages and emails will confirm that we've received your PUA claim. We're also working to add a customer service chat bot to our website.
4. **Use technology to close gaps and improve service.** We have identified strategies that move claims out of processing traps that can hang them up. That has already moved thousands of claims through processing. We will continue using these strategies to speed up processing and get Oregonians whose claims have been stuck the benefits they're owed.

We continue to add new metrics to our online dashboard so that Oregonians can watch our progress. We'll continue to be transparent about where we are and our progress toward our goals. Navigating this crisis is a collective effort, and Oregonians know how to work together to overcome hard challenges. We'll get through this together.

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