



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Contact:

Oregon Employment Department
OED_Communications@oregon.gov

Oregon Law Center
benlander@oregonlawcenter.org

**Oregon Employment Department and Oregon Law Center Submit
Proposed Settlement for Class Action Lawsuit**

*Both parties agree to work together to improve the Department's timeliness
in serving unemployed Oregonians*

Feb. 3, 2021 (Salem, OR)--Today the Oregon Employment Department and the Oregon Law Center announced they have submitted a proposed settlement in a class action lawsuit. The suit, filed by fourteen Oregonians who waited weeks or months for unemployment benefits, sought to resolve issues related to timeliness challenges and language barriers faced by Oregonians filing for unemployment benefits through the Employment Department.

Both parties wish to avoid unnecessary litigation and instead work together to improve the Employment Department's timeliness in serving unemployed Oregonians.

"I am pleased that we are one step closer to finalizing this settlement," said Oregon Employment Department Acting Director David Gerstenfeld. "Our priority has always been to serve Oregonians in need, and to pay everyone the benefits they are eligible for as quickly as we can. We have made significant headway since the onset of the pandemic, improving our communication with claimants, offering more services and resources in languages other than English, processing claims more quickly, and closing in on our backlog. We are committed to doing right by the Oregonians relying on us, reaching the goals set forth in the proposed settlement, and being transparent about our progress along the way."

Lisa Exterovich, a single mother who lost work because of the pandemic, is one of the named petitioners. "After I lost my job, I applied for unemployment. I waited months for benefits to begin without knowing what was happening -- I couldn't pay rent, and I really worried about how it would affect my daughter and I. I decided to join the lawsuit to be an advocate for myself and other people with similar stories." Ms. Exterovich supports the settlement because "the Employment Department is committing to paying people benefits more quickly, working to improve communications with those seeking benefits, and providing assistance to people who don't speak English."

As part of the settlement, the Employment Department has committed to meeting certain timeliness targets and providing services to Oregonians with limited English proficiency (LEP). In addition to increasing staffing and training so as to process UI, PUA, and other claims more quickly, and expanding service options for LEP individuals, the Employment Department has agreed to:

- Meet federal timeliness targets for paying benefits, by March 1, 2021, and for adjudicating claims, by April 1, 2021;
- Completely work through all claims in adjudication as of mid-January, by March 1, 2021;
- Address long wait times for people who have had to restart their claims;
- Improve phone access and access to benefit applications for LEP individuals, and;
- Allow eligible LEP individual who were unable to apply for unemployment benefits due to language barriers to backdate their claims to the extent the law allows and create an action plan to address this issue.

In addition, the agreement makes allowances for more time in certain circumstances (for example, when there are issues verifying a claimant's identity).

The full text of the proposed settlement and answers to Frequently Asked Questions can be found at oregonlawcenter.org/oed-class-action-lawsuit/.

For more information about unemployment benefits, visit unemployment.oregon.gov.

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