

Testimony before the Committee on Labor and Workforce Development
Department of Employment Services Performance Oversight Hearing
March 3, 2021
Kymerly Holmes, public witness

Good morning, Chairperson Silverman and members of the Committee. My name is Kymerly Holmes and I am a resident of Ward 8 and relative caregiver to my 7-year-old niece. I also am a proud member of the Community Advisory Board of DC KinCare Alliance, a nonprofit organization that advocates for relative caregivers who are taking care of DC's most at-risk children when their parents cannot. DC KinCare Alliance has helped me in so many ways including helping me to get custody of my niece, to participate in the Relative Caregiver Program, to get a big enough apartment through Rapid Rehousing, to get furniture and food, and to get Pandemic Unemployment benefits when a job offer fell through because of the public health emergency. I was doing OK—I could make good decisions for my niece. We had a safe place to live and enough money to live on.

Then, DOES stopped paying my Pandemic Unemployment Assistance after only 32 weeks. The last time I got benefits was the week of November 7, 2020. All of a sudden, when I logged in to my account in the on-line portal, the system would no longer let me upload my weekly certifications. The message was that there had been a gap in my certifications, even though there had **NOT** been one, and that, as a result, I could no longer upload my weekly certifications. I did everything I could think of to get DOES to correct the problem and on December 22, 2020, DOES sent me a notice saying that I **AM** eligible to receive PUA payments. I have attached a copy of that notice to my written testimony.

Unfortunately, I still have not received any of the back payments that are due to me. I have contacted your office, Chairperson Silverman, and have been in communication with

Charnice Royster, Liz Weiss, Patricia Joseph, and Margaret O'Hara. I have been in communication with DOES, including my caseworker, Tamika Herndon, her supervisor, Elizabeth Ignacio-Fabian, and business analyst, Randy Mills, who got involved after I contacted your office.

DOES has told me that there is an IT problem, a glitch in the software that needs to be fixed. First, they told me it would be fixed in January and then in February but every week is the same. I have been submitting my weekly certifications to DOES via e-mail instead, yet I am still not receiving my PUA benefits.

WHY does it take so long for an IT problem in the on-line portal to be fixed? **WHY** is there no manual override so that my checks can be processed and sent to me while they are trying to fix the on-line portal?

I am the sole supporter and caretaker of my niece. I **REALLY** need my PUA benefits to help me take care of her. I am behind on my portion of the Rapid Rehousing rent. I am behind on my car insurance payments. My phone was cut off for several days last week because I couldn't afford to pay my bills.

This is not about DOES saying that I'm not entitled to the benefits that I am asking for. They **AGREE** that I should be receiving PUA benefits. So why have I not received them for almost three months now? I accept all the work that my current part-time job will give me. I do my job and I want to know why DOES isn't doing theirs!

Thank you for allowing me to testify today. I am happy to answer any questions.