

County of Monroe

The Florida Keys



BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

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April 20, 2020

The Honorable Governor DeSantis
State of Florida
400 S Monroe St
Tallahassee, FL 32399

Dear Governor DeSantis,

Thank you for your leadership during these challenging times. COVID-19 has handed all of us an unprecedented combined public health and economic crisis.

On behalf of the Monroe County Board of County Commissioners, I am writing to you today to thank you for your continuing efforts to improve/expand/update the State of Florida's Reemployment Program. We urge you and Secretary Satter to continue to do all that you can to expedite the processing of unemployment claims applications, filings and payments through the State system, including the vital new benefits provided through the CARES Act.

The Florida Keys like much of Florida is a thriving tourist/service sector economy, fueled by thousands of small businesses like restaurants, hotels, bars, and recreational activities such as charter fishing and diving. Our small Florida Keys community generates over \$200M in sales tax revenue annually for the State.

Monroe County greatly appreciates the State's partnership in all that we do to grow our economy and protect our special environment. The State has been an especially strong supporter of the Florida Keys efforts to protect the quality of our pristine waters, which is the lifeblood of the Keys' economic engine.

We support the actions the State has taken to safeguard the public and mitigate the spread of the virus, and the State's support of our own local actions to do the same. The result of our collective actions however is having an unprecedented impact on our economies.

The majority of our businesses have been required to shutter their operations, and, consequently, and through no fault of their own, their workers have been laid off, furloughed, partially furloughed or are otherwise unemployed.

Much of our workforce has lost their jobs, and with that, their incomes. The majority of our workers earn service sector and tip wages. They already struggle with the Keys' high cost of living.

Now, their struggle has deepened. For many, it has now been several weeks of disrupted unemployment, without income, and without payments of unemployment benefits. We are seeing the painful consequences of long lines at food pantries and churches. The moratoria on evictions is helping with housing security, but this is temporary. Workers' economic status is fragile.

It is therefore critical that our unemployed workers and their families receive the benefits available to them through the State's unemployment insurance program, and the new CARES Act federal benefits, as soon as is possible. These benefits will keep our workers and their families whole and will help avoid the cascading social impacts of housing, hunger and family disruption.

It is also very important that these benefits be made retroactive to the date of job loss, not date of application, as the former system delayed the filing of claims applications.

For all concerned -- our small businesses, our workforce and their families, we must do all that we can, as expediently as we can. We liken the current state of our economy and what is required to support it to a patient in a medically-induced coma. The patient, while in this condition, must be carefully tended to, fed, and hydrated, so that upon waking, the patient is in relatively good health. Our businesses and our workforce require that same careful attention. We want and need them to be strong and ready for a successful reopening.

The Monroe County Board of County Commissioners recognizes and supports the efforts that you have taken to date to improve the functionality of the State's unemployment system. We urge you to continue and to use all the powers of your office to expedite the processing and payment of state and federal benefits, and to maximize all flexibility within your discretion with regard to accessibility and eligibility.

Monroe County stands ready to provide you and your team any assistance it might need in its continuing efforts to serve and support the citizens of our great State.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Heather Carruthers", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Heather Carruthers
Monroe County Mayor

cc: Monroe County Board of County Commissioners
Roman Gastesi, Monroe County Administrator