



Media Release

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Rep. Shankland: Assembly Takes Overdue Action on Unemployment Insurance

MADISON- Today, the Wisconsin State Assembly convened to pass Special Session Senate Bill 1, legislation addressing the state's unemployment insurance (UI) system. Rep. Katrina Shankland (D-Stevens Point) released the following statement in response:

"Today, the State Assembly took long overdue action on unemployment insurance by passing Special Session Senate Bill 1. This legislation is an important step towards ensuring everyone can get the unemployment insurance benefits they deserve in a timely manner, and I'm glad we were able to pass it today. However, it is not a cure-all. While this bill takes the first step in upgrading the outdated and inefficient technology the state uses to process unemployment insurance claims and waiving the one-week waiting period, there is more that we can and should do immediately. We must work together to speed up the time it takes to process claims and provide the Department of Workforce Development the resources they need to modernize their outdated systems.

"Last April, we took a strong step together by passing 2019 Wisconsin Act 185, our first and only comprehensive and bipartisan action on Covid-19 relief. This temporarily waived the one-week waiting period, which leveraged additional federal money, and granted DWD more resources to respond to the pandemic.

"Last July, my Democratic colleagues and I introduced a legislative package to eliminate barriers and hurdles to accessing unemployment insurance benefits. These were big steps we could have taken immediately to speed up UI benefits for our constituents, but unfortunately, the bills were not scheduled for a vote. That's why we offered them as an amendment today, and while they were rejected, I will continue to advocate for their passage in the state budget and beyond. We can't just upgrade the unemployment insurance benefits system – we also must take a hard look at the laws on the books that are slowing the claims processing down.

"There's no doubt that folks are still struggling and are counting on us to act in the Legislature. While our constituents have waited for the UI benefits they are due, they have faced unbelievable hurdles and uncertainty. We have done what we can to assist on a case by case basis. That's not enough. It is also our responsibility as legislators to put our heads together for their sakes to figure out how we can best use every tool at our disposal to increase efficiency and get people the resources they so urgently need.

"While this bill is a step in the right direction, it's far from the end of the road. I urge my legislative colleagues to work together with the executive branch and both parties in the Legislature, abandon the politicizing of this issue, and let us continue to find common ground and work to improve Wisconsin's UI system."

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