

Dear Business Association, Organization and Business leaders,

Could October really be later this week? That seems inconceivable, but, alas – the calendar is correct! With the accordion of time, it feels like so much has happened in so little time, but it also feels like it has been a very long journey.

With that in mind, this week's email includes:

- [An update on the Lost Wages Assistance \(LWA\) program rollout](#) – including the amount we sent out in benefits last week
- [Excellent recognition of our national leadership at the annual conference for the National Association of State Workforce Agencies \(NASWA\)](#)
- [The actual announcement of Washington state's award as best community for military spouses from the Hiring Our Heroes event](#)
- ICYMI - Videos from the state legislative work sessions in which we participated in September:
  - [Here's the video from the House Labor & Workplace Standards Committee](#) meeting (ESD's presentation is from about 48:00 to about 1:47). Many thanks to Chair Sells and Ranking Member Mosbrucker for the opportunity!
  - And here's [the video from an update we gave to the Senate Labor & Commerce committee](#) last week (ESD's presentation is from about 3:30 to 58:00). Many thanks to Chair Keiser and Ranking Member King for the opportunity!
- [A data update on our benefits paid and the number of people waiting for resolution](#)
- [A quick update on appeals and our throughput with that part of the claims cycle](#)
- [Thoughts on preparing for this week's UI Trust Fund projections release](#)

Please let me and [our constituent response team](#) know if you have any questions!

Thank you and have a great week,

Suzi LeVine

Commissioner, the Employment Security Department

Please follow me @ESDCommish

(pronouns: she/her/hers)

## **Lost Wages Assistance**

As you know, we have rolled out many new products, services and features over these past 8 months – learning a lot through those processes. We applied those key learnings to the launch of this new and temporary program. Phase one went out within 4.5 weeks and then phase 2 within 6.5 weeks. While that is a lightening pace for a whole new program, the team was still able to apply ample care and consideration to the process and, more importantly, to the customer experience! [As our news release said](#), we paid over \$625 million to more than 400,000 eligible claimants this week.

As a reminder, here are the key elements of LWA:

Washington was approved for the maximum granted by FEMA, 6 weeks

Eligible claimants could get \$300 per week for up to 6 weeks (weeks ending 8/1-9/5)

The means, someone could get a onetime payment of up to \$1,800

We will continue to pay eligible claimants from those 6 specific weeks (the weeks ending Aug 1 through Sept 5) each week until the federal funds run out. If you get questions from customers, the best place to send them is to [esd.wa.gov/lwa](#). All the information is there.

## **NASWA news**

The [National Association of State Workforce Agencies](#) is made of ESDs across the country, and Washington has long been an active member. Last week was NASWA's annual Summit, where leaders across the country collaborate and share best practices. We met virtually this year, of course.

The Summit includes elections for leadership positions, and I have some great news! [I was elected by my peers to be the new Chair-Elect!](#) That means I will observe and learn from the current Chair for a year before becoming Chair myself for the 2021-

22 association year. I see my selection for this position as a testament to the great work AND national sharing of our efforts that we consistently do – whether it’s about our Paid Family and Medical Leave program, our Military Spouse efforts, or our COVID-19 responses.

NASWA members participate in a variety of [committees](#), and I’m proud to say that Washington will take the help of both the technology committee (congratulations to our CIO, Nick Stowe) and the veterans affairs committee (congratulations to Sam Mitchell, administrator of WorkSource Joint Base Lewis-McChord).

Many other ESD staff are members of various committees, sharing their expertise with colleagues across the nation.

## **Military Spouses and Hiring our Heroes**

[Here is the announcement we just released](#) for the community leader award I shared with you last week.

Specifically, Washington state was recognized for its excellent support for military spouses. They especially cited the employment empowerment zones, the [listening tour and subsequent report that ESD led in partnership w/WDVA](#), and [Governor Inslee’s Executive Order](#) focusing on military spouse employment – including an update to the Military Transition Council to expand it to become the Military Transition **and Readiness** Council (great spousal solutions lead to better readiness). You can [see the award ceremony here](#) (from 35:00-38:40) in which JBLM, ESD and WDVA received the award and shared short remarks.

## **Benefits Data Dashboard Highlights**

**Our dashboard is updated weekly, on Thursday, in conjunction with the weekly UI numbers. The full dashboard can be found [here](#).**

- \$10.6 B to 1,369,547 individuals
- 70.1% Paid within 1 week (between March 8 and September 19th)
- Average time to resolve claims – 7.2 weeks
- Total individuals filed initial claim and paid – 1,037,539 (76% of total applicants)
- Total claimants not currently receiving payment and need resolution by ESD – 31,242 (2.3% of total applicants)

## **Weekly Numbers**

Thursday, we announced our weekly unemployment numbers. You can find the full press release [here](#). Highlights include:

- During the week of September 13<sup>th</sup>- September 19<sup>th</sup>, there were 19,574 initial regular unemployment claims (up 6.4% percent from the prior week)
- 540,153 total claims for all unemployment benefit categories (down 4.6 percent from the prior week)
- ESD paid out over \$154.5 million for 337,390 individual claims (a decrease of \$2.8 million and 2,963 fewer individuals compared to the prior week)

**Since the week ending March 7 when COVID-19 job losses began:**

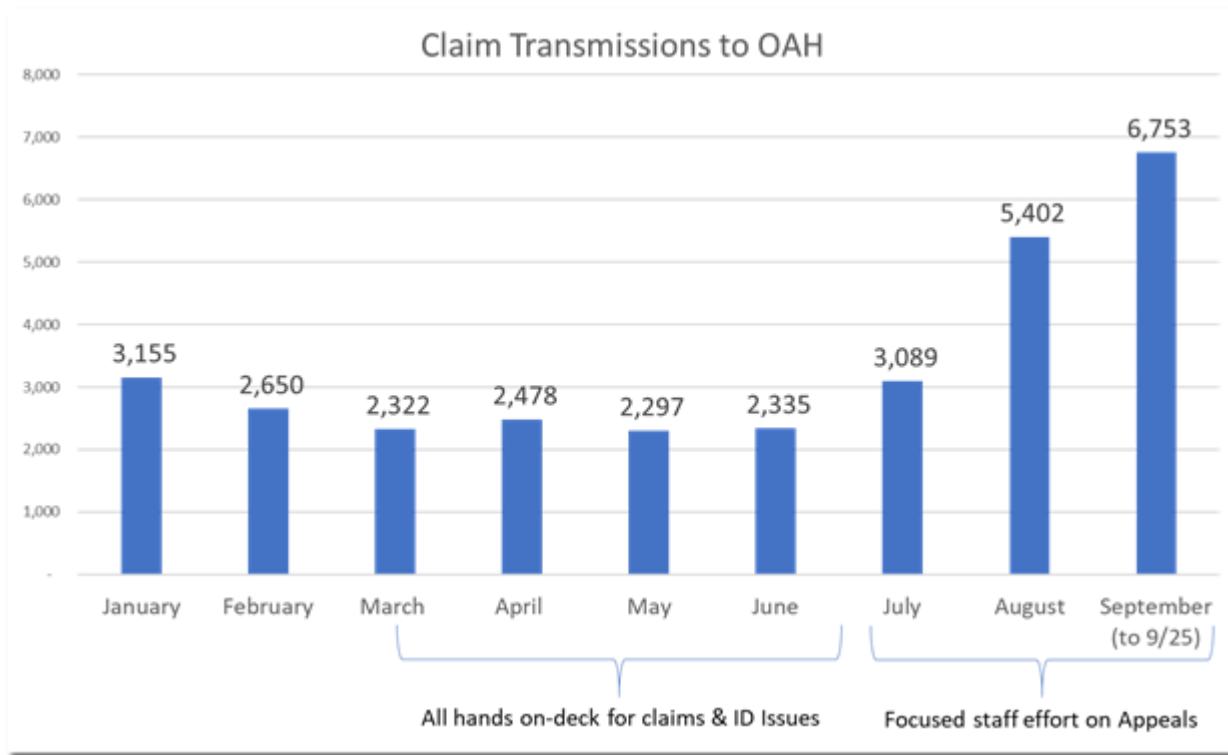
- A total of 2,529,153 initial claims have been filed during the pandemic (1,586,706 regular unemployment insurance, 492,531 PUA and 449,916 PEUC)
- A total of 1,369,547 distinct individuals have filed for unemployment benefits
- 1,037,539 individuals who have filed an initial claim have been paid – nearing a third of the state’s workforce

**Trust fund balance: \$2.3B**

## **Appeals progress**

The story of this crisis as it has impacted ESD has been about scale – and that scale has meant a huge bump at each phase in the benefits cycle (I call it the “Bump in the Python”). And at each of those points, teams have stepped up, resources have been shifted and we’ve tackled those bumps. Most recently, Appeals has been feeling the high volume.

With tremendous focus and effective efforts, we have made dramatic progress on appeals. There are many metrics available, but I’ll show you one in particular: the volume of claims we’re sending over to the Office of Administrative Hearings. This is just one demonstration of the incredible work being done to meet the needs of Washingtonians. With this focused effort, we are on track towards our goal of getting through the appeals backlog of those who filed appeals between March and August by the end of September! *Note – the appeals backlog will never go to zero as there will always be people filing appeals on their claims.*



### **Preparing you for this week's UI Trust Fund projections release**

On Thursday of this week, ESD will be releasing one of the regular projections updates for the Unemployment Insurance Trust Fund. As a reminder, this projection is one of three done during the year (the prior one was in June, the subsequent one is in November).

We know that many are awaiting this projection to see if/when/whether we'll need to get a Federal advance for our Trust Fund and if/when/whether we'll need to actually borrow against that advance. Thus, we wanted to share a few key facts that will be useful for you to know in advance:

The projection is a calculation directly based on the forecasts from the state's Economic and Revenue Forecast Council. It is not based on subjective assessments.

Federal law requires that we have at least 3 months of benefits available in our trust fund. If we do not, we are required, by law, to request an advance to borrow from if needed.

The advance serves as a line of credit and states do not borrow (take out loans) until the trust fund can no longer pay benefits. Additionally, any borrowing/withdrawals that occur against these advances are done daily and any interest charged is only charged on what gets borrowed, not on the total advance amount.

Currently, the federal government has made the loans interest free through the end of CY2020. I have already sent a letter to our federal delegation asking them to extend the interest free nature of the loans, should we need to borrow against the advance.

As you can see from [this list](#), there are already 21 states/territories who've obtained advances – with three not yet borrowing against those advances. We expect even more states to show up on this list in the coming months.

The projections will also provide estimates on state UI tax rates. These tax rates are determined and set by law.

We reinstated the [Unemployment Insurance Advisory Committee \(UIAC\)](#) in order to consider and provide advice to the department, legislature and governor to improve the Unemployment Insurance program. The UIAC will be briefed on the report Thursday.

On Thursday, we will share the projections and the announcement with you.