

May 15, 2020

Dear Governor Lamont,

It has been two months since the shutdown of the State Capitol that effectively ended the regular legislative session. However, that did not end our roles as elected representatives. In fact, our members and staff are fielding historic volumes of phone calls, letters, and emails. The volume of correspondence compels us, once again, to share with you the frustrations voiced by many constituents in our communities.

After workers were laid off because businesses had to reduce hours and, in many cases, close their doors, they were desperate for help. When they went to the Department of Labor, their desperation turned to extreme frustration. Whether it was simply the inability of the department to process these claims, a lack of manpower to deal with the huge volumes, or the technical failures of the systems in place did not matter to the unemployed. The buildout of the state's unemployment IT system to include federal unemployment expansions over the last couple of weeks has done little to reduce constituent frustration.

We hear every day from frustrated and angry people who have been unable to get answers or solutions from the DOL concerning their unemployment insurance claims. We are hearing from constituents that the wait time for a response may be five to seven weeks, and we know some people have not received a single check since being out of work. This is unacceptable, and our state's unemployment compensation operation needs to be a top priority.

We can only imagine the feeling of one of our frustrated constituents with no income and no unemployment check who learns that your office will be hiring a consulting firm for \$2 million. That money would be better spent hiring additional support staff at DOL, and that is exactly what we would have recommended had you taken the time to reach out to a single one of us over the weeks that you had been in discussions with the Boston Consulting Group.

The consulting contract is just the latest in a pattern of bad decisions that are catching people by surprise. Every day, we hear from the people we represent of their concerns over the lack of transparency and clarity when it comes to the work of the council you handpicked to formulate guidelines for reopening. This group has largely worked in secret without any input from the public. It is the public's lives and livelihoods that are at stake here, and their voices must be heard as we move forward with subsequent phases of reopening Connecticut.

Members of our leadership have repeatedly raised concerns of transparency and public scrutiny related to the current pandemic response, as well as your partnership with the

Dalio Foundation. Our concerns have been ignored to a great extent and continue to be exacerbated.

This is just the beginning of a long road to reopening and a recovery (assuming there is not a second wave of COVID-19). Your lack of collaboration and transparency do not bode well for critical choices about the future of our state. The use of hundreds of millions of dollars from the federal government has yet to be determined. To date, we have received no prior notice and no correspondence from you or your staff about how that money will be spent, including the \$2 million for the Boston Consulting Group. Also, you have yet to reach out to discuss in any detail possible solutions the legal and financial risk businesses will face during the reopening process if they are not completely in compliance with guideline requirements. We are concerned that, once again, you will consult with academic and industry elites, and ignore the voices of our neighbors and constituents, whom we hear from every day.

There are the obvious problems of COVID-19 sickness, unemployment, and business closings that have likely touched every family in one way or another. But, other less visible and underreported problems will need to be addressed. We know that there are negative consequences for the mental and physical health of children as result of the isolation and sheltering. And, unfortunately, the reality is that some of these children live in volatile home situations, where abuse is a more frequent occurrence during these times. As elected officials, we need to be sure these groups are not forgotten as we invest in programs to begin recovering.

Our cities and towns are struggling with many of the same problems that we must deal with at the state level. We know that you have reached out to them to get a better understanding of the direct costs of the pandemic; however, again, you have not communicated to us your ideas about relief for municipalities. How much money should be dedicated to cities and towns? How will it be distributed? Will it be for increased costs, or will there be additional support for lost revenue because landlords are unable to pay their property taxes?

The growing intensity and convergence of problems gives us pause, and you have given us no reason to trust that we will be part of the decision-making process surrounding these and countless other issues.

Therefore, we respectfully request that you re-engage with us and launch a more collaborative process that, at the very least, includes state lawmakers in discussions *before* decisions are made.

As co-equal partners in state government we did not pull up our stake in that partnership when business in Hartford was put on pause March 12. We need greater public scrutiny, not less, when it comes to formulating policies as we move forward.

Connecticut will be better served in the long run by greater collaboration among its equal partners.

We look forward to addressing these matters with all due speed.

Sincerely,

Representative Themis Klarides and the House Republican Caucus