



Testimony from Melynda Ankney
House State Government Finance Committee
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My name is Melynda Ankney. I am an Unemployment Insurance field auditor with the Dept. of Employment and Economic Development (DEED). I am also a MAPE member.

State workers really do believe we're all in this together – and we always step up, it's not simply a slogan to us. Just as the COVID-19 pandemic was starting to take over our lives and our state last month, I told my boss that I wanted to help in any way that I could.

I soon found myself traveling to the Unemployment Insurance call center in St. Paul after being redeployed instead of my office in Cambridge. I travel 43 miles each way and I usually don't mind the drive because traffic is light. I have also been asked to work on the Pandemic Unemployment Assistance Implementation process.

I am very proud of the work we are doing in the call center. We're doing all we can to help people through this pandemic. We received 149,000 applications in the first week and just surpassed over 500,000. It can be chaotic and crazy because the phones are ringing nonstop from 8:00 in the morning until 4:30 in the afternoon, and even beyond that because once people are in queue, we simply can't let them go; there are many nights when people are on the phones after close.

I started in the call center when I joined state government service eight years ago, so I am returning to my roots. I was only in the call center for five months before I went to field audit, but it is truly rewarding to be able to help people in really tough situations navigate how the Unemployment Insurance program works. Callers want information immediately. Thankfully, they are very gracious and patient with us so that we can get the correct information to them.

I enjoy providing Minnesotans with the help they need during this crisis. It does get very busy and by the end of the day people are exhausted because we've been on the phone talking nonstop for eight hours. Overall, spirits are high because we're doing what we can to help Minnesota.

Many state government employees stepped up to help our state through this pandemic. We're not only in call centers, we're also analyzing COVID-19 tests and tracking down people who have been in touch with those who have tested positive for this deadly disease and we handle isolation and quarantine. MAPE members are also the ones surveying nursing homes and long-term care facilities as well as working with restaurants to make sure their take-out services will be as safe as possible. State workers are developing programs so veterans, including vets with special needs, can access their disaster relief checks online instead of having to do it in-person.

We stepped up when our state needed our help. We ask that you continue to support us by ratifying the state contracts and ensure that state workers fighting this pandemic don't lose our current benefits.

Thank you.