



MISSOURI HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
WITNESS APPEARANCE FORM

BILL NUMBER: HB 1085		DATE: 2/10/2021
COMMITTEE: Special Committee on Government Oversight		
TESTIFYING: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> IN SUPPORT OF <input type="checkbox"/> IN OPPOSITION TO <input type="checkbox"/> FOR INFORMATIONAL PURPOSES		
WITNESS NAME		
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION:		
WITNESS NAME: AMY BLOUIN		PHONE NUMBER: 314-518-8867
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION NAME: MISSOURI BUDGET PROJECT		TITLE: PRESIDENT & CEO
ADDRESS: 1 CAMPBELL PLAZA, SUITE 101-BUILDING A		
CITY: SAINT LOUIS	STATE: MO	ZIP: 63139
EMAIL: ablouin@mobudget.org	ATTENDANCE: Written	SUBMIT DATE: 2/9/2021 8:51 PM

THE INFORMATION ON THIS FORM IS PUBLIC RECORD UNDER CHAPTER 610, RSMo.

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HOUSE BILLS 1085, 1083, 1050, 1036, 1035, 873 and HOUSE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION 30 Amy Blouin, President & CEO Missouri Budget Project 314-518-8867 ablouin@mobudget.org The Missouri Budget Project supports House Bills 1085, 1083, 1050, 1036, 1035, 873 and House Concurrent Resolution 30. Each of the measures would forgive the repayment of federal unemployment overpayments that were made during the COVID crisis, and House Bill 873 would additionally forgive repayment of state unemployment overpayments. The Missouri Department of Labor and Industrial Relations (DLIR) reportedly overpaid 46,000 Missourians federal and state unemployment benefits totaling \$150 million. The overpayments are largely recognized as having been made due to administrative errors, rather than attempts to defraud the system. Individuals that testified before the Special Committee on Government Oversight described similar experiences, essentially documenting DLIR’s failings in administering special pandemic benefits. Although we appreciate that the Department faced significant challenges in administering rapid federal program changes, attempts to collect overpayments due to administrative failings will only harm the families who were most impacted by the economic fallout due to COVID, many of whom are still struggling to make ends meet under reduced wages. Requiring repayment would also harm Missouri’s local economies, as families would be forced to divert a significant portion of their incomes to repayment. In effect, requiring repayment would reduce the amount of income that is circulating in local economies at a time when Missouri’s economic conditions remain fragile, and could impede our economic recovery. Alternatively, forgiving both the state and the federal overpayments could have a stimulus effect on Missouri’s recovery. Mark Zandi, chief economist of Moody’s Analytics, has testified many times before Congress on the stimulative effect of various fiscal policies. Zandi found that the “bang for the buck” of unemployment benefits is \$1.49. The stimulative impact of state and federal unemployment benefits coupled with the knowledge that overpayments were largely due to administrative errors and understanding that Missourians faced significant stretches of unemployment due to the unusual nature of the pandemic, we support all of the bills before you today. But, due to the extraordinary nature of the pandemic, we would encourage you to approve a measure that includes forgiveness for both the federal and state overpayments.



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WITNESS NAME		
INDIVIDUAL:		
WITNESS NAME: CHARLES W BRAZEALE		PHONE NUMBER:
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION NAME:		TITLE:
ADDRESS:		
CITY:		STATE: ZIP:
EMAIL: cbrazeale@gmail.com	ATTENDANCE: Written	SUBMIT DATE: 2/9/2021 5:10 PM
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Mr. Chairman and Committee Members, Thank you for taking the time to consider a possible correction to the current actions of the State Department of Labor in regard to the recoupment of unemployment benefits paid out last year during the pandemic. I realize that the state's system was overwhelmed, and the it's possible that the state overpaid those who legitimately applied. I also realize that in any system relying on humans, there is great possibility for error. I believe the BIGGEST error being made is by the Department of Labor in their stubborn and ill-informed stance demanding repayment of benefits from Missouri citizens who did not intend to defraud anyone, but merely applied for and were granted unemployment benefits. If there have been errors made, they have all be made by the State of Missouri, not our fellow citizens who were forced out of work in the midst of COVID-19. I am the CFO for the City of St. Charles School District. We laid off bus drivers, para professionals, secretaries, custodians, and other classified staff during the height of school and business closures last Spring. These people were not on a summer break, they were furloughed due to the pandemic. I submit this testimony to you for your consideration on behalf on my fellow employees. I was fortunate enough to not be negatively financially impacted, however, when I see who among our employees was impacted, they are our lowest paid and most vulnerable. Please do whatever is necessary to stop the efforts to recoup unemployment benefits paid out to these people months after they actually received the payments. Again, to sum up the situation; many of our fellow citizens made legitimate application for unemployment benefits. That the State of Missouri was not able to correct accept, process, and pay these applications according to their rules, should not now be held against those who are among our most vulnerable citizens. Thank you for your public service to our state.



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WITNESS NAME		
INDIVIDUAL:		
WITNESS NAME: ELAD GROSS		PHONE NUMBER:
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION NAME:		TITLE:
ADDRESS:		
CITY:		STATE: ZIP:
EMAIL: elad.j.gross@gmail.com	ATTENDANCE: Written	SUBMIT DATE: 2/10/2021 8:13 AM
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I am a Missouri taxpayer. I support the state forgiving overpayments made to Missourians through no fault of their own.



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WITNESS NAME		
REGISTERED LOBBYIST:		
WITNESS NAME: JEREMY LAFAVER		PHONE NUMBER: 816-654-3666
REPRESENTING: MISSOURI BUDGET PROJECT		TITLE:
ADDRESS: 7200 MADISON AVENUE		
CITY: KANSAS CITY		STATE: MO
		ZIP: 64114
EMAIL:	ATTENDANCE:	SUBMIT DATE: 2/10/2021 12:00 AM
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WITNESS NAME		
INDIVIDUAL:		
WITNESS NAME: MERIDITH GREEN		PHONE NUMBER:
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION NAME:		TITLE:
ADDRESS:		
CITY:		STATE: ZIP:
EMAIL: artofsignlanguage@gmail.com	ATTENDANCE: Written	SUBMIT DATE: 2/10/2021 10:50 AM
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I was inadvertently paid unemployment benefits while out of work as a mixed earner and freelance interpreter. I should have initially been allowed to apply for PUA benefits but was told I first needed to apply for UI and then be denied, instead I was granted and paid UI for months until they decided because I no longer worked for Stlcc as a Staff interpreter that I should pay back \$7,000 of federal and state UI benefits. After hours of unfruitful attempts to remedy this issue via the state's phone system, I still have yet to resolve the overpayment and prove that I deserved them. My future wages will likely be garnished.



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WITNESS NAME			
INDIVIDUAL:			
WITNESS NAME: NANCEE WALKER-MICHAM		PHONE NUMBER:	
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION NAME:		TITLE:	
ADDRESS:			
CITY:		STATE:	ZIP:
EMAIL: walkermicham@gmail.com	ATTENDANCE: Written		SUBMIT DATE: 2/10/2021 1:31 PM
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Hello my name is Nancee Walker-Micham and I am one of the many Missouri Citizens being asked to payback Unemployment Benefits thru no fault of my own. I provided everything they asked for and was deemed as eligible for benefits. I am a self employed musician as well as substitute teacher in the Taney County area. The reasoning is not being made clear and I don't understand why during these trying times we are made to feel we have done something wrong. Please make it clear to our Governor that this would bring great hardship to those of us who are just trying to get on with life after a Pandemic. Thank you , Nancee



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WITNESS NAME			
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION:			
WITNESS NAME: SUE GREENBERG		PHONE NUMBER: 3148636930	
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION NAME: ST. LOUIS VOLUNTEER LAWYERS AND ACCOUNTANTS FOR THE ARTS		TITLE: EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR	
ADDRESS: 3301 WASHINGTON 2E			
CITY: ST. LOUIS		STATE: MO	ZIP: 63103
EMAIL: vlaa@vlaa.org	ATTENDANCE: Written	SUBMIT DATE: 2/10/2021 10:18 AM	
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Thank you for holding this hearing. The House should take immediate action that would require the Department of Labor to waive collecting overpayment of unemployment benefits in cases where the claimant is not at fault or if repayment would be contrary to equity and good conscience. Please amend your bill so the legislation covers waiving both the federal and state repayments. My testimony is based on my long career as an arts worker and advocate. I have served as the executive director of the St. Louis Volunteer Lawyers and Accountants for the Arts (VLAA) since 1986. VLAA invests in Missouri artists, creative businesses and cultural organizations by providing quality pro bono direct legal and accounting services, sponsoring ongoing educational programs and supporting initiatives that nurture our vibrant cultural ecosystem. Together with our colleagues at Kansas City Volunteer Lawyers and Accountants for the Arts, we provide services to the entire state. Covid-19 is having a devastating impact on Missouri's cultural sector, beginning with cancelled gigs and venue closures in March. Artists — especially performing artists — will be the very last back to work; the challenges of keeping audiences, casts and crews safe have pushed production schedules well into 2021. We've heard from musicians, actors, teaching artists, filmmakers and other creatives who applied — in good faith — for traditional, PUA and PEUC unemployment benefits so they could pay their rent and put food on their tables. They were surprised and frightened when they received letters from the Division of Employment Security claiming that they were ineligible for benefits and demanding repayments ranging from \$2,000 to \$10,000. With all due respect, would you or your neighbors be able to repay \$10,000, navigate an unfamiliar appeals process or sleep at night knowing that future wages will be garnished? Empathy is always important, but it is particularly vital during a public health crisis. Finally, please ask the DOL for its timeline for implementing Mixed Earner Pandemic Unemployment Compensation (MEUC), which was signed into law on December 27, 2020. This benefit is designed to provide financial assistance to arts workers, gig workers, freelancers and other self-employed individuals who receive artificially low unemployment benefits due to part of their income coming from W-2 wages. Missouri should ensure that these workers receive the assistance they need.



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WITNESS NAME		
INDIVIDUAL:		
WITNESS NAME: SUSAN GIBSON		PHONE NUMBER:
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION NAME:		TITLE:
ADDRESS:		
CITY:		STATE: ZIP:
EMAIL: Onesuegibson@protonmail.com	ATTENDANCE: Written	SUBMIT DATE: 2/9/2021 4:05 PM
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I am in favor of all these bills that will prohibit the state of Missouri from attempting to recover any insured worker benefits under Chapter 288, RSMo., that were incorrectly distributed to claimants during the COVID-19 state of emergency.



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WITNESS NAME		
INDIVIDUAL:		
WITNESS NAME: WILLIAM FORD		PHONE NUMBER:
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION NAME:		TITLE:
ADDRESS:		
CITY:		STATE: ZIP:
EMAIL: wrford1984@hotmail.com	ATTENDANCE: Written	SUBMIT DATE: 2/9/2021 8:04 PM
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I am a married father of two young children. I was furloughed from my marketing job at Washington University in St. Louis for three months over the summer. I applied for unemployment for the first time ever and was deemed eligible to receive benefits on April 28. I received payments for three months until returning to work on July 27. This money nearly replaced my salary and I used it to pay my mortgage and buy groceries. I was notified on August 28 that DES ruled I was not eligible to receive benefits beginning with the week ending May 30 due to "reasonable assurance of reemployment." DES sent another correspondence on Dec. 15 claiming I was overpaid roughly \$8,300 and asking that I pay it back. It is difficult to comprehend how I was deemed not eligible and I'm still not sure I have received a sufficient explanation as to why. I have spent the last month confusedly trying to appeal these claims to no success thus far and I now feel legislative action such as this is my only path to having this unexpected debt forgiven. Having another payment plan set up for debt we didn't plan for will severely strain our monthly budget, affect our ability to pay other debt and hamper our ability to start saving for the future.



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WITNESS NAME			
INDIVIDUAL:			
WITNESS NAME: ARNIE "HONEST-ABE" DIENOFF-STATE PUBLIC ADVOCATE		PHONE NUMBER:	
BUSINESS/ORGANIZATION NAME:		TITLE:	
ADDRESS:			
CITY:		STATE:	ZIP:
EMAIL: ArnieDienoff@Yahoo.Com	ATTENDANCE: Written		SUBMIT DATE: 2/10/2021 2:33 PM
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I am in Opposition to this Bill. There was much Fraud and People that have been Collecting these Federal COVID C.A.R.E. Act Funds in a Fraudulent Manner Need to Pay back the State. The State needs to Recover these Fund as it is wrong and ALL Missourians did not get the benefit of having these Over-Payments. These Citizens were Not Entitled to receive these Over-Payments, which Causes Our Federal Debt and State Unemployment Security Fund to be in Debt.