

STATE OF WISCONSIN

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JOINT COMMITTEE ON FINANCE

Urgent Request

January 25, 2021

Governor Tony Evers
115 East, State Capitol
Madison, WI 53707

Governor Evers,

As Co-Chairs of the Joint Committee on Finance (JFC), we request that you immediately initiate a request for proposal (RFP) to upgrade the unemployment insurance (UI) information technology system (IT System). You have existing authority and resources to take this step. If you believe the UI IT System is truly the cause of the unacceptable backlog of unemployment claims under your administration, your action on this issue is egregiously overdue.

It is documented that your administration has been looking into replacing the UI IT System for over a year, if not longer. Over that time, hundreds of thousands of unemployed citizens have had their benefits unnecessarily delayed by your lack of leadership. This has been evidenced in multiple audits and by the resignation of your department secretary. Yet in your call for a Special Session, you indicated that the process of writing an RFP has not started and you want funding for a consultant to begin this work.

According to a Legislative Fiscal Bureau (LFB) memo, you have numerous current appropriations and existing authorities that could be used for IT upgrades:

- Finance a system through the state master lease program (which is how IT upgrades are typically financed).
- Expedite the procurement of a new system and any contractors needed to successfully implement a new system.
- Utilize past or future federal funds made available to the administration.
- Existing appropriations which the governor has the authority to prioritize.
- Request expenditure authority through the JFC review process.

The state Department of Administration (DOA), which you oversee, has a bureau that handles procurements. They have published hundreds of solicitations, including RFPs, since you took office and have resources that can assist with an IT System RFP. The DOA also enters into master leases to finance IT system projects. From 2014-15 to 2019-20, approved IT project master lease funding totaled \$142.1 million for 28 projects. Many, if not all, of the solicitations and master leases occur without legislative approval.

We also must point out the confusion that has been caused by your call for a Special Session. You claim to need legislative approval for the project even though just weeks ago your administration found more than \$1 million dollars to sign a contract with Google to help with unemployment claims. No legislative approval was needed for that decision. Why now?

Your call for a special session doesn't make any sense unless the purpose of your delay is to pass blame and play political games to cover up your failure to plan for and execute processing unemployment insurance claims. You have repeatedly lamented legislative oversight and now you are trying to hide behind legislative approval when it is not needed. It is troubling to see your lack of leadership every time you are called to stand up for Wisconsin's citizens.

If you continue to believe that you need legislative approval to update the UI IT System, your existing authority and current law enables you to request a 13.10 meeting of the JFC to consider supplemental appropriations, transfer funds, or take other actions to assist you. The committee has reserve funds and broad authority to make these available as a **last resort**. We invite you to make this request.

You have been Governor for more than two years. The buck stops with you. You may not like oversight, but your performance has shown it is needed. Blank checks will not be approved. Use the tools and resources you currently have to be a leader and provide the relief our taxpayers and unemployed citizens deserve.

Sincerely,



Mark Born
Co-Chair



Howard Marklein
Co-Chair