The full text of today’s letter is below.

January 16, 2019

The Honorable R. Alexander Acosta, Secretary
United States Department of Labor
200 Constitution Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20210

Dear Secretary Acosta:

The country is in the midst of the longest federal government shutdown in history. This shutdown has had a significant and harmful impact on more than 800,000 federal workers who have been furloughed or ordered to work without pay. These people serve the American public diligently and devotedly and simply do not deserve to be caught in the middle of a shutdown.

We are aware that Connecticut Governor Lamont is advocating for state law changes to facilitate the provision of unemployment compensation for these workers in the event the U.S. Department of Labor (USDOL) authorizes states to provide such benefits. The Chair of the House Ways and Means Committee, Representative Richard Neal has requested the USDOL provide guidance to the states on how to ensure unpaid federal workers are able to access unemployment compensation. Finally, we are also aware that other states are looking for USDOL approval for providing unemployment compensation to furloughed and federal employees working without pay in those states.

Time is not on the side of federal workers who may miss a second paycheck. We support those requests and urge you to take expeditious action to:

- Authorize states to provide unemployment compensation benefits to those federal employees who are working without pay;
- Waive the work search requirement for furloughed employees and those working without pay who are paid unemployment compensation; and
- Authorize states to provide lenient procedures for these employees to repay those benefits upon return to paid work and to order states not to classify these benefits as overpayments nor subject to penalties or interest.

In Connecticut, there are approximately 1,500 federal employees who are either furloughed or working without pay. Many of these employees have expressed how they are unable to pay their bills and how this financial stress is affecting their personal and professional lives. Unemployment compensation would help these workers make ends meet while the date of their next paycheck remains unclear. Further, some federal security employees who must avoid debt that could compromise their work are unable to take out loans.
This shutdown – despite some comments to the contrary – has had very real impacts on the public, and especially on the federal workers who are either furloughed or working without pay. While ideally, these workers would be paid their hard earned salaries, at the very least they should be able to access unemployment compensation benefits.

We urge your quick, compassionate response to our request.

Sincerely,