



# NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## OESC Appeals Tribunal focused on protecting victims of domestic violence

**OKLAHOMA CITY, OK** (November 19, 2014) – For victims of domestic violence, filing for any type of government program can be dangerous. Because many in this group flee the abuse and the abuser, keeping their contact and other information private is paramount. The Oklahoma Employment Security Commission (OESC) has addressed this concern by beefing up safeguards for victims of domestic violence in the unemployment benefit appeals process.

The statistics paint a grim portrait. In Oklahoma, 49 percent of women and 40 percent of men have experienced domestic violence at some time in their lives, according a 2010 National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey. This abuse includes physical assault, rape and stalking. Victims of domestic violence can be eligible for unemployment benefits under Section 2-210 of the Oklahoma Employment Security Act, which provides for compelling family circumstances. The section states that such circumstances may include “domestic violence or abuse, verified by any reasonable or confidential documentation, which causes the claimant to reasonably believe that continued employment jeopardizes the safety of the claimant, the claimant’s spouse, the claimant’s parent(s), or the claimant’s minor child(ren).”

To help safeguard the information of victims of domestic violence who file for unemployment benefits, the OESC Appeal Tribunal has adopted protections that are triggered the moment such cases enter its system. The process begins in the Appeals Processing Unit, where OESC employees scan incoming appeals and supporting documentation for indications of violence.

“If I get something that suggests domestic violence, I take it to my supervisor,” says Al Serradell, Workforce Specialist III, who helps build the files that come through the system. The supervisor then decides whether or not to flag the case. What draws scrutiny can vary on a case-by-case basis, so Appeals Tribunal staff consider the big picture when deciding whether or not to flag a case. A single incident involving a couple who remain together, for example, may not necessarily require action.

“But if they’ve quit their job or moved because of violence, that’s a red flag,” Serradell says.

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## OKLAHOMA EMPLOYMENT SECURITY COMMISSION

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At the Appeals Tribunal, paperwork routinely goes through several hands, ensuring that several sets of eyes review everything. If a file is flagged, a red sheet is put inside showing it's a domestic abuse case so staff know to redact the address on correspondence. That translates into two sets of correspondence going out in a case, one with the full name and address sent to the claimant and another with the claimant's name but no address sent to other interested parties. Appeals Tribunal staff are also trained not to give addresses and other personal information over the phone.

When hearing notices are sent, they go out to victims of domestic violence with extra information. This information includes a pamphlet explaining the state's Address Confidentiality Program, which provides victims who have moved away from their abuser a substitute address for correspondence between them and various agencies, as well as materials outlining YWCA Oklahoma City Domestic Violence Sexual Assault and Stalking Crisis Services.

"We try to give them the information they need to prepare for their hearing and at the same time some resource information to help them in their efforts to regain a safe and stable life," says Karl Jahnke, Director of the OESC Appellate division.

Victims of domestic violence can access the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-799-SAFE (7233). For further information on OESC's efforts to protect victims of domestic violence, please contact John Carpenter, OESC Public Information Officer, at (405) 557-5469 or [john.carpenter@oesc.state.ok.us](mailto:john.carpenter@oesc.state.ok.us).

**About OESC** – The Oklahoma Employment Security Commission is Oklahoma's state workforce agency. OESC matches jobs and workers to benefit local labor markets; prepares a skilled workforce to meet employers' needs; gathers, analyzes and disseminates information about the labor force to improve local economic decisions; and provides unemployment compensation to support unemployed workers and their communities.

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