

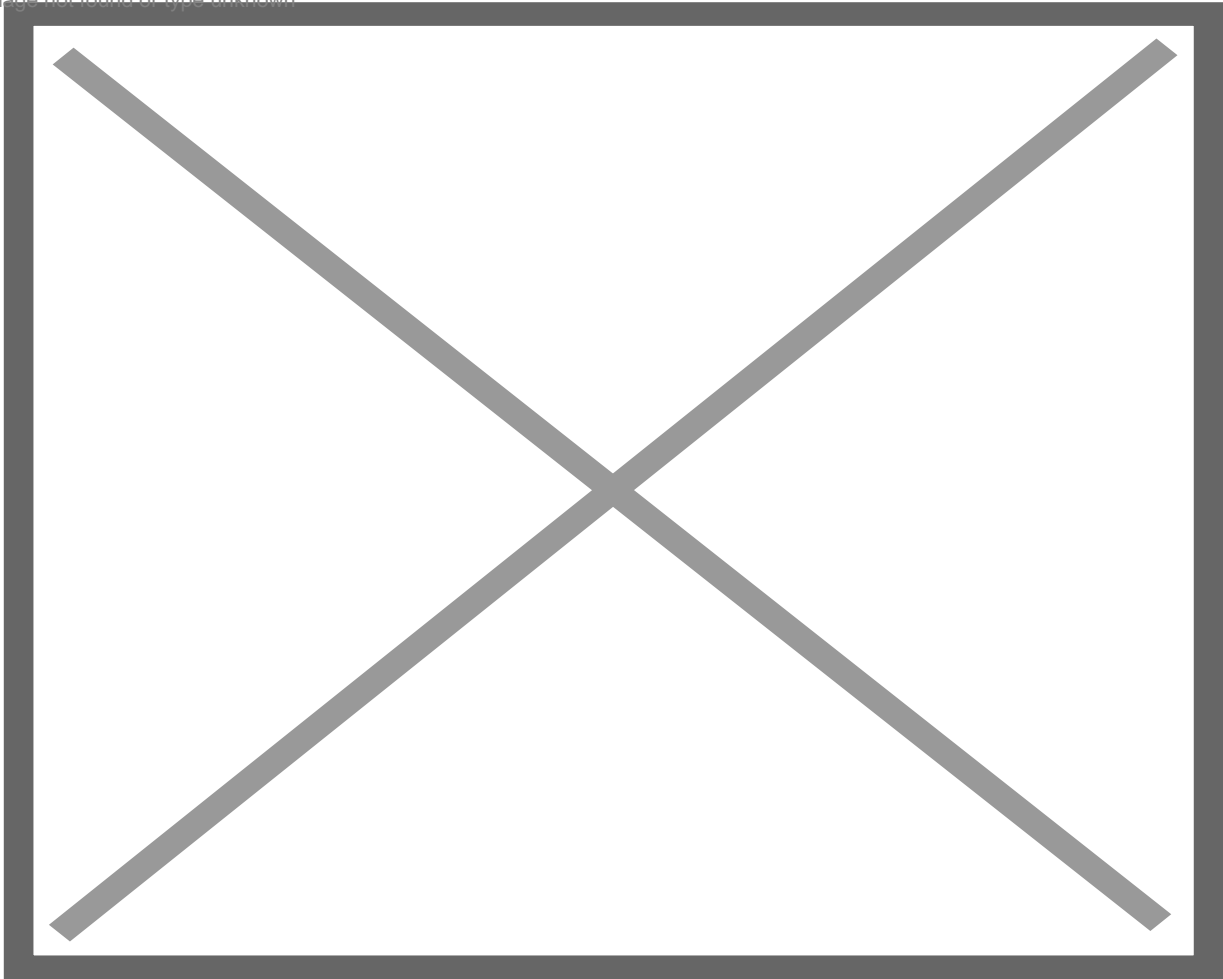
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Senators Blast Labor Commissioner for Two-Week 'Soft Shutdown' in Front of Christmas That Bars Residents From Visiting the Department

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Ernice Gilbert **December 02, 2020**

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Dept. of Labor Commissioner Gary Molloy By. VI LEGISLATURE

Labor Commissioner Gary Molloy during a hearing Tuesday was assailed by lawmakers after it was revealed that the department will be closed to in-person appointments for the next two weeks as part of Governor Bryan's "soft shutdown" executive order.

The decision to close two weeks in December, just ahead of Christmas, drew the ire of the senators present in the Committee on Education Workforce Development hearing.

"We have a soft close, so you suspend individuals from coming to the office. You had a protocol in place to make sure there was social distancing, but we suspend services to people four weeks before Christmas that might have helped to go back on the payroll," said Senator Kurt Vialet.

Committee Chair Donna Frett- Gregory agreed with Mr. Vialet, stating, "We can't continue to make excuses." She contended that all government departments and agencies were in some form of soft shutdown for the past ten months — since the outset of the Covid-19 pandemic. Ms. Frett- Gregory sought responses on how the soft shutdown would impact residents seeking help with unemployment.

Visibly offended, Mr. Molloy did not answer the question. Instead, he ranted on what he said was senators' lack of appreciation, and disrespect for Labor employees. "I am extremely disappointed. One of the things that is very clear here today is that there is no respect for what the Department of Labor has done and continuing to do."

Ms. Frett- Gregory fired back, telling the commissioner that it was disrespectful for him to levy such an accusation against elected officials. "That is the farthest thing from the truth," asserted Ms. Frett- Gregory. "We are not going to play on emotions today."

She added, "People are hurting in this territory and we recognize it."

The Department of Labor has not issued a press release on its two-week soft shutdown.