Governor Bullock Announces Montana is Now Issuing Additional $400 Weekly Benefit to Unemployed Montanans

Montana is one of four states to issue the maximum $400 benefit and one of the first states to begin issuing payments

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Governor Steve Bullock today announced the Montana Department of Labor & Industry is now issuing the $400 weekly payment through the Lost Wages Assistance Program for Montanans filing for unemployment benefits due to COVID-19.

"These greatly needed benefits will put money in the pockets of Montanans who need it most and ensure they can continue taking care of their families during this difficult time, while also protecting the progress we've made so far toward economic recovery," Governor Bullock said. **"While I'm pleased we've prioritized providing the full $400 benefit to Montanans and are one of the first states to get payments out the door, I urge Congress to get back to work and find a sustainable solution that will bring the stability Montanans need."**

After Congress did not reauthorize the $600 a week benefit for unemployed Americans in July, the Trump administration created the Lost Wages Assistance Program, which allows state labor departments to issue $300 a week in FEMA disaster relief funds to claimants. States have the option to provide another $100 a week from their own state funds to issue additional payments of up to $400.

Montana is one of four states in the country to issue the maximum $400 payment and is one of the first states in the country to begin issuing payments. Governor Bullock determined Montana would use a portion of the state Coronavirus Relief Fund to ensure Montanans have the maximum benefit possible and can continue taking care of their families during the pandemic.

After Congress failed to act in July, the Trump administration's solution is only temporary, as FEMA funds are limited. FEMA has estimated the funding could last for only several weeks depending on how many states participate.

To qualify for this additional funding, claimants must self-certify that they are unemployed or partially unemployed due to disruptions caused by COVID-19. Many claimants have already identified their unemployment was due to COVID-19, and $31.3 million in payments on those claims were issued on Wednesday, August 26.

For the benefit week ending August 29, claimants will see a new question on the weekly payment request form asking if their unemployment or partial unemployment for that week was due to disruptions caused by COVID-19. If they answer "yes", they will also qualify for the additional $400 payment for that week. According to the federal guidance issued for this program, all Pandemic Unemployment Assistance claims are deemed to qualify for $400 payments and those payments will start going out next week.

While claimants do not need to fill out a separate UI claim for these benefits, LWA funds will be paid in a separate direct deposit or check from their regular UI payments. DLI has issued a series of direct emails to claimants explaining these filing and payment changes. Additional information on the LWA program for UI claimants is available here.

The first week for which the additional $400 payment will be available is UI benefit week ending August 1, 2020. DLI will provide retroactive payments to eligible claimants from that week forward. The duration of payment is dependent on the terms of the President's Memorandum. To date, Montana has received a total of four weeks of funding from FEMA - the initial three weeks of funding, which were approved with the application, plus an additional award for one more week. DLI will be applying for additional funding on a week to week basis as long as the program remains open.