STATE PROVIDES UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE & ASSISTANCE BENEFITS UPDATE ON COVID-19 RELIEF BILL/CARES ACT EXTENSIONS

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DEPARTMENT OF LABOR AND INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS

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STATE PROVIDES UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE AND ASSISTANCE BENEFITS UPDATE ON COVID-19 RELIEF BILL/CARES ACT EXTENSIONS

HONOLULU — On Dec. 27, 2020, a federal COVID-19 relief package that extends and provides additional federal unemployment benefits was signed into law. The Hawaii Department of Labor and Industrial Relations (DLIR) is currently reviewing HR133, which includes extensions of CARES Act unemployment insurance and assistance benefits.

As was the case with previous federal unemployment programs, the DLIR must receive guidance from the U.S. Department of Labor (U.S.DOL) before it can fully implement the changes and begin issuing payments. It is unlikely that all of the guidance will be issued before January 2021 and the state cannot pay benefits until it receives rules for these modified programs.

The department is diligently working to build additional programs within its unemployment computer system to process the revised federal benefits and bring much-needed relief to eligible claimants. Any benefits delayed will be paid retroactively if necessary and claimants will be made whole. The DLIR will make announcements via its website, news releases, in the unemployment insurance portal, and at https://twitter.com/HI_DLIR as it implements provisions of the COVID-19 relief bill.

Highlights of the extension of the CARES Act provisions include:

Federal Pandemic Unemployment Compensation (FPUC)

- Provides up to 11 weeks of an additional $300 weekly benefit to eligible claimants.
- A claimant must be eligible for regular UI, PUA, EB20, or PEUC to receive FPUC.
- Once implemented, FPUC is available between Dec. 27, 2020, and week ending March 13, 2021.

Pandemic Emergency Unemployment Compensation (PEUC)

- Increases the number of weeks of benefits an individual may claim through the PEUC program from 13 to 24.
- Once implemented, PEUC is available between Dec. 27, 2020 and the week ending March 13, 2021 and allows individuals receiving benefits as of March 13 to continue through April 10, 2021, as long as the individual has not reached the maximum number of weeks.

Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA)

- Increases the number of weeks of benefits an individual may claim from 39 to 50.

- Once implemented, PUA is available between Dec. 27, 2020 and the week ending March 13, 2021 and allows individuals receiving benefits as of March 13 to continue through April 10, 2021, as long as the individual has not reached the maximum number of weeks.
- Limits payment of retroactive PUA benefits for new PUA claimants to weeks of unemployment after December 1, 2020.
- Provides states authority to waive overpayments made without fault on the part of the individual or when such repayment would violate equity and good conscience.
- Claimants will be required to provide income verification for eligibility to qualify for PUA. Existing and new claimants will have 90 days from Dec. 27 to submit documentation, but beginning on Jan. 31 new, initial claims will have 21 days to submit the documentation.

Miscellaneous Provisions

- Extends through March 14, 2021 a provision in the CARES Act which amended the Families First Coronavirus Response Act to provide federal support to cover 50% of the costs of unemployment benefits for employees of state and local governments and non-profit organizations.
- Extends through March 14, 2021 the CARES Act provision which reimbursed states for the cost of waiving the "waiting week" for regular unemployment compensation. Sets the reimbursement percentage for weeks ending after Dec. 26, 2020 at 50 percent instead of 100% federal funding.
- Extends through March 14, 2021 the CARES Act provision which gave state unemployment offices temporary, emergency authority to use "non-merit" staff.
- Extends through March 14, 2021 the provision in the Families First Coronavirus Response Act which provided temporary full federal financing of Extended Benefits (EB) for high-unemployment states. States are normally required to pay 50 percent of the cost of EB, which is a program in permanent law.
- Extends through March 14, 2021 the waiver of interest on federal loans states have taken in order to pay state unemployment benefits.

Important note: None of the benefits described above, nor unemployment benefits of any kind, are available to employees who are terminated for cause, quit their job without good cause, refuse to return to work, or refuse to receive full-time pay. Attempts to collect benefit payments in these situations could be viewed as fraudulent. Investigation of job separation is part of the eligibility determination process.

For more information about unemployment insurance and other labor issues please visit the FAQs at https://labor.hawaii.gov/covid-19-labor-faqs/.

Equal Opportunity Employer/Program
Auxiliary aids and services are available upon request to individuals with disabilities.
TDD/TTY Dial 711 then ask for (808) 586-8866

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View DLIR news releases:
http://labor.hawaii.gov/blog/category/news/

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