Labor Department Implements Customer-Service, Tech Improvements to Address Historic Increase in Unemployment Claims

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

April 14, 2020

TRENTON – The New Jersey Department of Labor and Workforce Development (NJDOL) has made a series of moves – from upgrading computer technology to adding personnel and boosting phone capacity – to get unemployment claims processed faster and customers' questions answered quicker.

The announcement comes as record numbers of unemployment claims continue to flood the New Jersey Labor Department, and labor departments across the country.

"I feel it in the pit of my stomach for every worker's claim we haven't gotten to yet," said Labor Commissioner Robert Asaro-Angelo. "We are paying benefits to nearly 300,000 New Jerseyans, but that is of little consequence if your claim isn't one of them. Our entire staff empathizes with your frustration and uncertainty. That's why we have been working around the clock to find solutions to common problems weighing on the system."

Here is a list of the measures that have been, or are about to be, implemented to improve customer service at the Department:

- The first batch of supplemental unemployment payments has processed and distributed, getting an extra $600 into claimants' pockets just after the holidays. Some 258,062 unemployed residents are seeing this money in their accounts yesterday and today, for a total of $154.8 million in payouts.

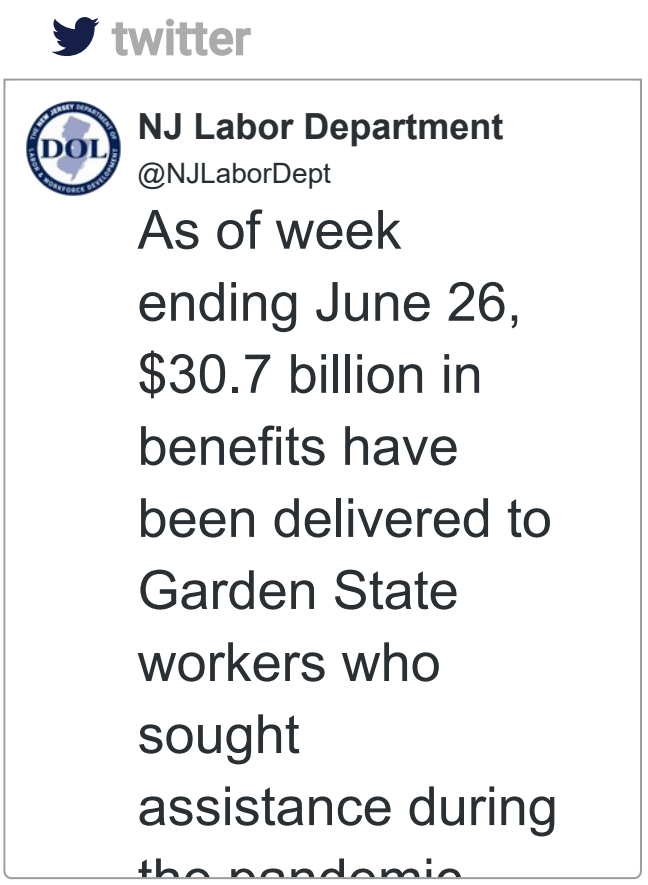
- Some 166,000 residents -- more than 60% of those waiting for an agent to review their unemployment application -- have had their claim processed, thanks to updated IT programming. This enabled these applicants to receive a quick determination of their eligibility. Going forward, this same percentage of claims formerly requiring an agent review will be entered directly into the system as a result of this significant upgrade.

- Hundreds of laptops have been delivered and configured and hundreds more are arriving this week, allowing additional claims agents and support staff to work from home, which will speed processing time for claims requiring agent review, and allow more staff to triage customer questions.

- A document explaining the benefits process for independent contractors and freelancers will be posted on our website today, guiding this group through the process to collect their Pandemic Unemployment Assistance payments as soon as possible. This will reduce a significant volume of phone and email inquiries.

- An intelligent automated reply to emails has been deployed so that whenever someone sends an email, they receive a reply specific to their inquiry directing them to the appropriate Labor's FAQs, pin reset and solutions to other common questions. This will relieve stress for customers who have been waiting for an email reply and provide them with steps they can take on their own.

- The capacity of the call centers was expanded Wednesday to provide additional inquiry lines. Prior to this upgrade, tens of thousands of callers were met with dead air, or a dial tone, because the system was beyond its capacity. This is no longer happening. Additionally, more callers are able to provide their information over the phone.



- An automated pin reset function has been developed, which eliminates a common reason for applicant calls.

- The Appeal Tribunal has been set up to conduct virtual appeal hearings, alleviating delays for customers who were denied unemployment benefits and are appealing the decision.

“The unceasing efforts of our Division of Information Technology and Unemployment Insurance staff, coupled with the assistance of the Office of Information Technology staff, have enabled us to reconfigure our legacy computer systems to serve more customers than ever before,” said Asaro-Angelo. “They have been working nonstop since the pandemic struck New Jersey, and I want to thank them for their commitment to getting benefits to everyone who deserves them as quickly as possible.”

The number of jobless claims is far higher than New Jersey has ever experienced – 576,904 New Jerseyans applied for unemployment in the three weeks starting March 15. After the first week of the pandemic, the number of new claims jumped more than 1,600 percent from the week before COVID-19 struck.

The number of new unemployment claims moving through the system without issue has increased, thanks to the updated programming. Claims are being backdated, so anyone who has had trouble getting through will not lose a week of benefits.

It’s important to note that workers cannot choose to collect unemployment benefits if employment is available. A worker who voluntarily quits a job is ineligible for unemployment.

For more information on benefits eligibility, customers are urged to visit myunemployment.nj.gov.

Go back to all press releases

Copyright © State of New Jersey, 1996-2021

Department of Labor
1 John Fitch Plz,
Trenton, NJ 08611