Pennsylvania Begins Implementing New Federal Unemployment Benefits, Eligible Claimants Get Extra $600 Starting Next Week

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Press Release, Public Health

Governor Tom Wolf announced today the Pennsylvania Department of Labor & Industry (L&I) is implementing new federal unemployment compensation benefits provided by the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act. The COVID-19 relief package temporarily provides an additional $600 per week, makes self-employed, independent contractors and gig workers eligible for benefits and extends unemployment compensation (UC) benefits for an additional 13 weeks.

The federal benefits are in addition to Pennsylvania's regular unemployment benefit, which is about half of a person's full-time weekly income up to $572 per week for 26 weeks.

Additional $600 Per Week

As part of the CARES Act, unemployment benefits are being expanded to provide an additional $600 per week beginning the week ending April 4, 2020, through the week ending July 25, 2020. This temporary emergency increase in benefits is referred to as the Federal Pandemic Unemployment Compensation (FPUC) program.

Today, L&I issued the first $600 payments. All eligible claimants that filed biweekly claims for the week ending April 4 and who received their regular UC payment should expect to see the additional money either Tuesday or Wednesday of next week. For other eligible claimants who have not yet received a regular UC payment, they will receive the extra $600 the week after receiving their first UC payment.

It is very important to note that anyone who currently has federal withholding tax taken out of their benefits will see the same 10% reduction in the FPUC payment, resulting in a $540 payment. For information about changing your withholding election, visit L&I's Taxes on Benefits page.

The $600 is paid separately from the biweekly UC benefit, and residents do not need to apply.

Visit the department's FPUC frequently asked questions for more information.

Self-employed, Contractors or Gig Economy Workers

The CARES Act also temporarily makes unemployment compensation available to self-employed, independent contractors, gig economy workers, and others not normally eligible for the benefit. The program is referred to as Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA). These workers cannot apply through the department's UC online system at this time. The U.S. Department of Labor requires that PUA be tracked separately from regular UC. For this reason, Pennsylvania must build a new online platform to process PUA benefits.

Eligible individuals should be able to start applying for PUA benefits within the next two weeks. Eligible claimants will receive backdated payments to January 27, 2020, or the first week they were unable to work due to COVID-19, whichever of the two dates is later. The PUA benefit will end December 31, 2020. The department will announce when the PUA benefit application is available.

Visit L&I's PUA frequently asked questions for more information.

13-Week Benefit Extension

The CARES Act provides an additional 13 weeks of unemployment compensation, including for workers who exhaust their regular unemployment benefits. Claimants will be eligible for Pandemic Emergency Unemployment Compensation (PEUC) from the week beginning March 29, 2020, through the end of the year. The department is awaiting additional federal guidance about the program and will provide an update when information is available.

Additional Information for workers impacted by COVID-19:

- Employment benefits webpage
- Employment benefits guide
- Frequently asked questions
- Tips for filing an initial UC claim
- Start a new claim video

On March 27, Governor Tom Wolf signed a law that makes applying for unemployment compensation easier to access by waiving the one-week waiting period to file, as well as the job search and work registration requirements, among other changes.

Visit the commonwealth's Responding to COVID-19 guide for the latest guidance and resources for Pennsylvanians or the Pennsylvania Department of Health's dedicated coronavirus webpage for the most up-to-date information regarding COVID-19.

View this information in Spanish.