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AUGUSTA - Governor Janet Mills and Commissioner of Labor Laura Fortman announced today that the Administration will provide certain individuals who are unemployed due to COVID-19 with a one-time direct relief payment of $600 through the State's newly-created Pandemic Relief Program (PRP). The relief payment is meant to assist unemployed Maine people at a time when they continue to face substantial economic hardship as a result of COVID-19 and are losing their Federal unemployment benefits at the end of the month unless Congress acts. This payment includes self-employed, sole proprietors, and other business owners who are unemployed and losing their Federal unemployment benefits this month.

"Families across Maine are still grappling with the unprecedented economic hardships caused by the pandemic. While this relief payment is not enough to make unemployed Maine people whole, it is our hope it will serve as a lifeline to sustain them during the holidays and until Federal support arrives," said Governor Mills. I urge Congress to provide funding to the states so that we can direct relief to the people.

We urge Congress to extend Federal unemployment programs, but with their future unclear, we are stepping in to try to provide a level of assistance and certainty, said Laura Fortman, Commissioner of the Maine Department of Labor. We estimate that up to 42,000 Maine people could be eligible for this one-time $600 payment. We hope that this supplemental benefit will help struggling Maine people provide basic necessities for themselves and their families during these unprecedented times.

Governor Mills authorized the Maine Department of Labor (MDOL) to distribute the payment using $25.2 million in CARES Act Coronavirus Relief Funds (CRF). The one-time payment, which is not an unemployment benefit, will be distributed to those who are unemployed or partially unemployed due to COVID-19. They must have either exhausted PUA or PEUC benefits

on or after week ending November 14 or have previously established a COVID-19 related claim, meet the requirements of the program, and have filed certifications for weeks ending December 5, 12, or 19.

Too many Maine people are facing difficult choices because of the COVID economic and health crisis, said Cynthia Phinney, President of the Maine AFL-CIO. We applaud Governor Mills for taking action to support Maine workers. With the holidays and cold weather upon us, this one-time payment will help thousands of workers struggling to make ends meet.

This action by Governor Mills will provide meaningful help to people who are struggling in this economy, said Chris Hastedt, Senior Policy Advisor for Maine Equal Justice. It is an important step in recognizing the crushing financial needs of so many laid off workers.

The one-time payment will be made by the end of December to the individuals account or debit card on file with the unemployment program. Eligibility is based on existing unemployment claim information. There is no need for claimants to call or apply separately for this supplemental benefit. All payments under PRP will be completed by the December 30, 2020 deadline as established by the U.S. Treasury for the disbursement of Federal CARES Act Funding.

For more information on the PRP, visit https://www.maine.gov/unemployment/. (https://www.maine.gov/unemployment/.)

The federal unemployment programs created by the CARES Act the Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA) and Pandemic Emergency Unemployment Compensation (PEUC) are scheduled to expire on December 26, 2020 unless Congress acts. On December 3, the Maine Department of Labor sent a letter - https://www.maine.gov/labor/news_events/article.shtml?id=3701158 (https://www.maine.gov/labor/news_events/article.shtml?id=3701158) to the members of Maines Congressional Delegation urging Congress to keep unemployment taxes for Maine businesses as low as possible and to extend and further support unemployment programs for Maine workers who lost their jobs through no fault of their own. To help accomplish this, Commissioner Fortman outlined several actions Congress could take.

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