NJ Labor Department to Begin Making Pandemic Unemployment Assistance Payments This Week

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

April 29, 2020

TRENTON – The New Jersey Department of Labor and Workforce Development announced that recipients of federal Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA) — the self-employed, independent contractors and others who are not usually eligible for unemployment insurance benefits — will start being notified of their PUA eligibility today, and the Department will begin making payments Friday.

PUA is a new program authorized by Congress as part of the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act to provide unemployment benefits to workers not eligible for regular unemployment. In addition to people who are self-employed or independent contractors, this includes those who do not have enough recent earnings to receive regular unemployment benefits.

Workers in this group, who have applied for regular unemployment and been denied, do not have to do anything further. The Department will start reaching out today, and will start processing payments this week.

“The Department has worked hard over the past month to get this program up and running despite the unprecedented challenges of COVID-19, and it is now available,” said Labor Commissioner Robert Asaro-Angelo. “While it will take time to determine eligibility for everyone who seeks PUA benefits, the process has begun to get billions of additional dollars into the wallets of eligible self-employed workers.”

In one month’s time, the NJ Department of Labor team created the infrastructure to implement this new federal program -- to determine eligibility, protect confidential personal information, prevent fraud and issue payments.

Claimants must certify for these benefits online each week. The certification schedule -- based on Social Security number -- can be found at myunemployment.nj.gov.

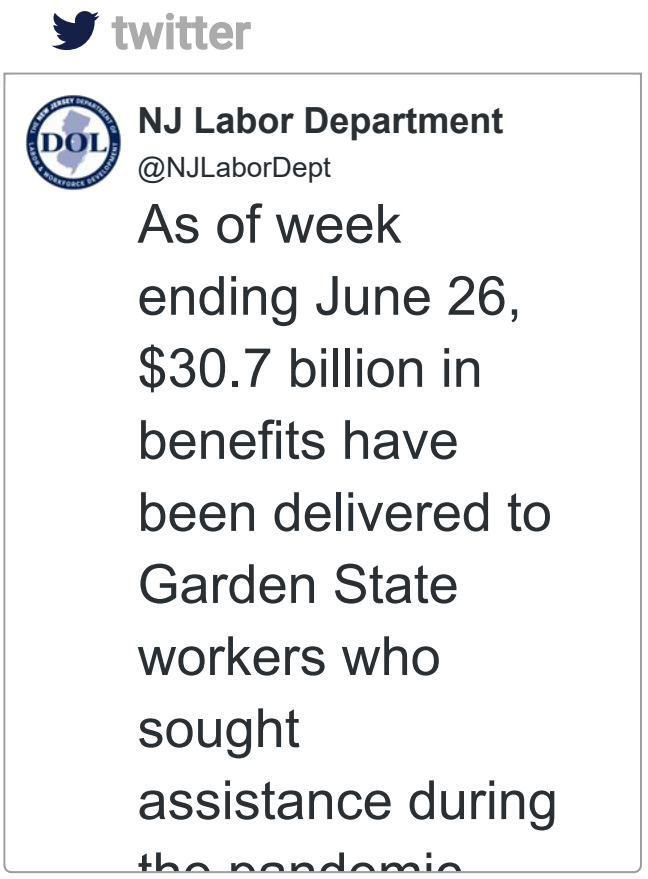
Claimants will receive payments retroactive to when they filed their unemployment claim. However, they must certify their PUA claim for each week they are claiming benefits, even if they previously certified their regular unemployment claim for the same week. In other words, PUA claims are processed separately from regular unemployment claims, therefore certifying information must be completed separately.

The initial group of PUA-eligible claimants will be notified today of their time slot to certify for benefits on Friday. They will receive payment on Tuesday, May 5.

Workers who certify for benefits on Friday will also receive a separate $600 supplemental payment as part of the CARES Act for each week they were eligible for PUA since March 29. Those who certify after Friday will receive the CARES Act supplement the following week.

Claimants instructed to certify for PUA Friday, Saturday or Sunday will receive payment on Tuesday. Those who certify on Monday or later will receive payment two business days after they certify.

Workers who are eligible for PUA, but for whom available wage records are incomplete, will be issued weekly PUA payments for the minimum amount of $231, plus the separate $600 weekly supplemental benefit, once they certify for benefits according to the schedule. These



workers will be contacted separately to update their income information, and any necessary adjustment to their weekly benefit rate will be made based on the updated income information they provide.

Here is what New Jersey's self-employed workers, independent contractors and others who may be eligible for PUA need to know:

- The first step to receiving PUA is to apply for state unemployment benefits and be denied.
- If you have already applied for state unemployment, you do not need to do anything else right now.
- If you have not applied for state unemployment benefits yet, instructions for self-employed, independent contractors and others not eligible for regular unemployment can be found here.
- If you already applied, but did not follow the instructions outlined above, don't worry. Your application will still be reviewed for PUA eligibility.
- If you have not heard from us, *there is no reason to call or email*.
- Look for more information in your mail or email inbox.
- PUA claims will be backdated to the date you first became eligible, so you won't lose any benefits. The first week of potential eligibility is the week ending February 8, 2020.
- You may be required to produce income records for 2018 and 2019.
- Additional information, including answers to many frequently asked questions, can be found here.

Hundreds of thousands of workers have become unemployed, furloughed, or had their hours reduced have filed for unemployment benefits since the COVID-19 pandemic hit New Jersey in mid-March. Despite the rapid influx of claims, New Jersey has dispersed more than $1 billion in unemployment benefits to more than 550,000 people.

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