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# NJ Labor Commissioner Asaro-Angelo Assumes Role as Chair of National Association of State Workforce Agencies

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

September 22, 2021

**TRENTON** – New Jersey Labor Commissioner Robert Asaro-Angelo was instated as Chair of the National Association of State Workforce Agencies (NASWA) on Wednesday – a role that will give New Jersey a strong voice for the federal unemployment reforms the state has called for during the pandemic.

NASWA is the national organization representing all 50 state workforce agencies, D.C. and U.S. territories. These agencies deliver training, employment, career, and business services, in addition to administering the unemployment insurance, veteran reemployment, and labor market information programs. NASWA provides policy expertise, shares effective state practices, and promotes state innovation and leadership in workforce development.

After strongly and repeatedly advocating that true improvement to the UI system in New Jersey and across the country can only come with federal reform and support, Asaro-Angelo was chosen by his counterparts across the nation in February 2021 as the Chair-Elect of the NASWA for the 2021 association year.

“It is an honor to take on this responsibility on behalf of the millions of New Jersey workers, and millions more across the nation, who proved the federal unemployment insurance system wasn’t built to support all workers, and was ill-prepared for an emergency,” said Asaro-Angelo. “As Chair of NASWA, my goal is to share best practices from the states and work collaboratively with federal and state policy makers to improve our workforce development, worker protection and benefit programs.”

The NJDOL paid nearly \$35 billion in Unemployment Insurance (UI) benefits to 1.6 million claimants from March 2020 through week ending September 4, 2021, with the aid of recently expired, emergency unemployment programs established under the federal CARES Act in March 2020, and renewed by the Continued Assistance Act in Dec. 2020 and again by the American Rescue Plan in March.

Regular state UI and extended benefits provided nearly \$9 billion to New Jersey workers and families, while the temporary emergency programs – Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA), Pandemic Emergency Unemployment Compensation (PEUC), and Federal Pandemic Unemployment Compensation (FPUC) – contributed almost \$25 billion, including to hundreds and thousands of New Jerseyans who would have otherwise been ineligible for regular unemployment. In addition, more than \$1 billion was paid to claimants under the Lost Wages Assistance program, which provided a \$300 weekly supplemental benefit on top of regular UI for a maximum of six weeks through FEMA funds in fall of 2020.

Last month, the U.S. Department of Labor announced that states will receive millions of dollars in assistance to modernize their unemployment systems, while demonstrating a strong federal commitment to upgrade the entire system that record numbers of workers are relying on during the Covid-19 public health emergency.

U.S. Secretary of Labor Marty Walsh said in a recent press release, “The pandemic underscored the need for modernization of the 53 different systems that administer unemployment insurance benefits in the United States, and it exposed significant vulnerabilities in state technology to criminals looking for an opportunity. The Biden-Harris administration and Congress provided the means to reform this critical safety net for future crises, and our department is committed to executing that mission in a way that leaves no community behind.”



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"We will miss you, Tim. Thank you for showing us your big heart, letting us hear your great laugh, and for the help you provided to most -- if not all -- of those in the Division of Workers' Compensation along the way."

<https://twitter.com/GovMurphy/status/1443263008424275968>

Sep 29, 2021



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The Return and Earn program will assist New Jerseyans in returning to the workforce, and provide employers with the resources they need to fill the vital positions that will allow them to grow and thrive.

<https://twitter.com/GovMurphy/status/1442535848197697538>

USDOL will begin assisting states, including New Jersey, by providing \$2 billion allocated as a part of the American Rescue Plan Act, targeting the most acute challenges states have faced over the last year such as creating system adaptability, wage verification processes, addressing fraud, and ensuring equity in access to benefits. Most importantly, USDOL hopes to provide software to support end-to-end administration of UI, including benefit delivery, employer tools and appeals.

"I'm proud of how quickly and how well we have been able to adapt our systems to serve so many New Jerseyans who have needed benefits during the pandemic, but this unprecedented demand for service has also shown us that the time to upgrade has come," said the State of New Jersey's Chief Technology Officer, Christopher Rein. "The strong partnership between the Department of Labor and our Office of Information Technology enabled rapid capacity increases, an improved citizen access experience, and fraud detection technologies. Looking forward, a key component is to build systems that can share critical information; this vital integration can only be advanced with federal support, so we are thrilled to be embarking on this project collaboratively with our federal partners."

The New Jersey Department of Labor and Workforce Development and the New Jersey Office of Innovation have been working with U.S. Digital Service, housed in the Office of the President, since June 2020 to address the vital need for technological support and improvements, while underscoring that federal policy and systemic barriers often prevent unemployment insurance claimants from receiving benefits in a timely, efficient manner.

"When solving any public problem, we need to deploy multidisciplinary expertise and perspectives – policy, design, and technology – to create better, more modern, and more resilient solutions," said Beth Simone Noveck, the State of New Jersey's Chief Innovation Officer. "The Office of Innovation has been proud to collaborate with the federal government, New Jersey's Department of Labor and Workforce Development, and other civil society partners to modernize Unemployment Insurance and work toward delivering the world-class quality of programs and services that New Jerseyans deserve. This step by the Biden Administration will strengthen our efforts and significantly advance our work."

Commissioner Asaro-Angelo added: "We have been fighting for New Jersey workers every step of the way. I am confident our partnership with USDOL will result in policy and technology infrastructure changes that will be a victory for all our state's workers. We will soon have the resources and tools to move us toward success. While these funds are an important first step, the issues exposed by this pandemic highlighted weaknesses across the federal system that can only be addressed through comprehensive reforms."

For more information on NASWA, visit [www.naswa.org](http://www.naswa.org).

For more information on the New Jersey Department of Labor and Workforce Development, visit [www.nj.gov/labor](http://www.nj.gov/labor).

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