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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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TRENTON – The New Jersey Department of Labor and Workforce Development (NJDOL) began 2024 with an ambitious agenda of continuing agency improvements and enforcing worker protections, while recapping the past year filled with new initiatives and notable achievements.

The past six years of the Murphy Administration have brought significantly enhanced protections and benefits for New Jersey’s workforce, including a rise in the minimum wage, which is now [above \\$15 per hour](#) for most employees. Our workforce is thriving – it now [exceeds 4.3 million](#) workers, a historic high; and our state has seen a [nearly 25 percent growth among private sector worksites](#) compared with six years ago.

“NJDOL is proud to uphold the generous benefits and protections that have put New Jersey at the forefront for workers’ rights,” said Labor Commissioner Robert Asaro-Angelo. “The state has made significant investments to train and develop a highly skilled and diverse workforce, so it’s only right that workers are treated fairly throughout their careers. It’s these very rights that underpin a robust and resilient economy, making the Garden State the best place to live, work, and do business. So we begin the new year recommitted to fulfilling our mission of protecting workers, strengthening businesses, and promoting the dignity of work.”

Here is a sample of what NJDOL has achieved:

STRENGTHENING NEW JERSEY’S WORKFORCE

Since Governor Murphy took office in January 2018, the state has invested well over \$50 million to develop apprenticeship, pre-apprenticeship, and work-based programs, contributing to the creation of 652 new Registered Apprenticeship programs – a 100 percent increase – and the onboarding of more than 17,000 new apprentices. The state currently has 8,747 active apprentices in 1,263 programs. Of note, the [Growing Apprenticeships in Nontraditional Sectors](#) (GAINS) grant program has provided unprecedented opportunity for women and people of color, with more than two-thirds of GAINS grantees being women or minorities, and the program has doubled the number of women apprentices statewide from six years ago. To meet the growing need for skilled workers, the state dedicated [\\$10 million to expand apprenticeship training centers](#).

In fiscal year 2023, NJDOL awarded nearly \$6 million through the [New Jersey Builders Utilization Initiative for Labor Diversity](#) (NJBUILD) Women and Minorities in Construction Trades grant, the highest amount in a fiscal year in the program’s history.

Announced early in 2023, the [Lifelong Learning Accounts](#) program, a two-year pilot in partnership with the state Office of Innovation, provides career coaching, training, and employment support to jobless and chronically underemployed residents who do not have college degrees or workplace credentials. So far, the program has enrolled 54 participants, who have been awarded a total of \$60,800 to pay for training, career development, childcare, transportation, and other expenses related to gaining meaningful employment. New Jersey is one of few states with such a program.

With a commitment to offering all New Jerseyans the resources they need to succeed in the workforce, the [Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services](#) (DVRS), which provides career services to individuals with disabilities, accepted 7,100 new applicants during fiscal year 2023 and increased the number of referrals from the prior fiscal year.

In addition, the Division of Workforce Development, which provides a multitude of specialized [career services](#), has served more than 3,400 participants to date through the Pathways to Recovery program that aims to assist those impacted by substance use disorder to find gainful employment. The Job Opportunities for Building Success (JOBS) program, serving justice-involved individuals, was also expanded.

Also offering [business services](#), NJDOL connected with more than 1,700 businesses in fiscal year 2023, and hosted over 370 virtual recruitments attended by approximately 10,000 job seekers.

LEAVE BENEFITS

For 2023, preliminary estimates point to \$625 million in Temporary Disability Insurance (TDI) benefits paid to more than 80,000 claimants, and \$500 million in Family Leave Insurance (FLI) benefits paid to nearly 64,000 claimants. This is an increase of 55 percent and 400 percent, respectively, in benefits paid as compared to six years ago. The number of TDI recipients was about on par with the last several years, while FLI recipients have nearly doubled since the start of the Murphy Administration.

A [second round of NJDOL's Cultivating Access, Rights, and Equity \(CARE\) grant](#) awarded \$1.5 million to 17 grantees, including three collaboratives comprising nine organizations, to facilitate equitable outreach, education, and access to New Jersey's benefits and protections for eligible workers, such as TDI, FLI, and Earned Sick Leave. The second round expanded the grant's focus to include raising employer awareness of these programs while enhancing their capacity to support employees taking leave. It also included additional one-time funding for outreach and education on UI to workers and service providers.

The [inaugural round of the CARE grant](#) resulted in nearly 47,000 workers receiving targeted information on paid leave laws and other work rights during the program's first year, and more than 220,000 mass messages shared.

WORKERS' COMPENSATION

In 2023, NJDOL's Division of Workers' Compensation litigated and closed nearly 32,000 cases and collected almost \$1.4 million in penalties from employers that lacked workers' compensation insurance coverage. This coverage is important not only to ensure workers are properly protected, but also because lack of workers' compensation coverage is often a sign of worker misclassification.

INTER-AGENCY TEAMWORK TO COMBAT MISCLASSIFICATION

Early in 2023, NJDOL [announced an assessment of more than \\$1.3 million in back wages](#) and penalties to 20 contractors performing construction work at 88 Regent Street in Jersey City, where a multi-agency team of more than 60 investigators conducted an unannounced sweep in summer 2021 in response to allegations of worker misclassification. This joint investigation among the departments of Labor and Workforce Development, Treasury, and Banking and Insurance, and the Office of the Attorney General was a first-of-its-kind cooperative effort.

In April, Governor Murphy and Pennsylvania Governor Josh Shapiro [announced interstate efforts against wage theft and misclassification](#). During the press conference, Governor Shapiro called New Jersey the "gold standard" for addressing worker misclassification.

In December, Attorney General Matthew J. Platkin and Commissioner Asaro-Angelo [filed the first lawsuit](#) under a 2021 law that permits the state to file suit in New Jersey Superior Court against employers who misclassified workers. The State's [complaint](#) was filed against shipping and logistics companies STG Logistics Inc. and STG Drayage LLC.

Notably, NJDOL's Division of Wage and Hour Compliance has assessed more than \$6.6 million on behalf of more than 3,400 misclassified workers since a misclassification penalty was implemented by law in September 2021.

WORKER PROTECTIONS

In summer 2023, NJDOL introduced two online tools to help employers comply with state laws and to hold bad actors accountable.

[MyWorkingPapers.nj.gov](#) streamlines the working papers process for minor workers while allowing NJDOL to better protect young workers and inform them of their rights.

The [New Jersey Wage Hub](#) provides the reporting mechanisms public works employers need to comply with the Prevailing Wage Act and Diane B. Allen Equal Pay Act. Effective August 15, 2024, contractors performing public work will be **required** to report certified payroll records via [NJ Wage Hub](#), which is accessible by the public.

The [Workplace Accountability in Labor List](#) (The WALL) publicly names companies that shortchange workers and skip required contributions to programs such as unemployment insurance and workers' compensation. Employers on the list are ineligible for any public contracting work. The [WALL](#), which currently has 102 listings, can be viewed and downloaded by the public.

To date, the Division of Wage and Hour Compliance has issued 147 stop-work orders since this power was expanded in July 2019. In August, [27 stop-work orders](#) were issued to Boston Market locations across the state for multiple violations. The division quickly recouped [more than \\$630,000](#) in back wages for 314 affected workers.

The Wage and Hour Division completed its first strategic enforcement initiative involving the [retail laundromat industry](#). More than \$56,000 in wages were found to be owed to employees, and many workers were not receiving Earned Sick Leave as required by law. NJDOL [teamed up with industry leaders and employee advocates](#) to increase awareness of workers' rights and share best practices to prevent future violations.

In a second strategic enforcement initiative focused on the drywall industry, NJDOL reached a [first-of-its-kind enhanced compliance agreement](#) with a Lakewood subcontractor that committed numerous violations. In a separate case, investigators issued [10 stop-work orders](#) – including eight in a single day – to a first-tier drywall subcontractor and nine second-tier subcontractors who were installing drywall at a Raritan luxury apartment community.

The [Temporary Workers' Bill of Rights](#) went into full effect in August, expanding the rights and protections afforded to many temporary laborers, and allowing for greater oversight of temporary help service firms and third-party clients by NJDOL and the Division of Consumer Affairs (DCA) within the Department of Law and Public Safety.

Additionally, the Division of Public Safety and Occupational Safety and Health (PSOSH) conducted 368 free site visits under the [OSHA On-Site Consultation program](#), exceeding USDOL OSHA metrics by 10 percent. These consultations are free and voluntary for public and private employers.

UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE IMPROVEMENTS

The sudden influx of Unemployment Insurance (UI) claims across the country during the COVID-19 pandemic shined a bright spotlight on the need for a UI system that better serves those who need this critical lifeline.

Tapped by the U.S. Department of Labor (USDOL) and U.S. Digital Service (USDS) in 2021 as a pilot state for modernization and improvement of the federal UI system, NJDOL continued its UI improvements throughout 2023, rolling out new features to the [check your claim status](#) page that allow claimants to view, manage, and resolve initial application, weekly certification, and identity verification issues online. After initial improvements to the UI initial application, an internal survey showed nearly 70 percent of users had an easier time performing tasks previously considered challenging.

“Through NJDOL’s Office of Unemployment Insurance Modernization and an agile, modular improvement strategy, we’re laying the foundation not only for a better UI service, but one that can be continually upgraded in the future – because modernization should be an ongoing endeavor,” said Commissioner Asaro-Angelo.

In October 2023, [USDOL awarded NJDOL a grant for \\$11,250,000](#) in support of the department’s work.

New Jersey’s innovative efforts to improve UI administration have served as a model for states across the nation. As such, [Commissioner Asaro-Angelo testified before the U.S. House Ways & Means Oversight Subcommittee](#) in October, highlighting the importance of NJDOL’s work to prevent UI fraud without impeding payments to legitimate claims.

Furthermore, NJDOL UI agents answered 44 percent more calls from claimants in 2023 versus 2022, and saw a 134 percent increase in appointments made for in-person assistance.

LOOKING AHEAD TO 2024 AND BEYOND

Approximately 100 new laws have fallen under NJDOL’s purview since January 2018, and the department anticipates more worker-friendly policies in the remaining two years of the Murphy Administration to protect New Jersey’s workforce and keep businesses strong.

“In the time remaining with this administration, we’re aiming to set New Jersey residents up for success, and not leave any unfinished business,” Commissioner Asaro-Angelo added. “Each year has presented new sets of challenges, but also new opportunities for progress, and we’re ready for what the future brings.”

Keep up to date with the latest NJDOL news and highlights [here](#).

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