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New Jersey Applies for Lost Wages Assistance Funds


08/26/2020

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Eligible Unemployed Workers Would Receive Up to \$300 Per Week;

New Program Will Take Several Weeks for States to Implement

TRENTON – The New Jersey Department of Labor and Workforce Development submitted an application today to the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) for Lost Wages Supplemental Assistance (LWA), which provides limited additional benefits to many of the state’s unemployed workers.

LWA allows for temporary supplemental financial support to those whose jobs or wages have been adversely affected by COVID-19. LWA provides up to \$300 per week to eligible individuals, in addition to the weekly benefit amount they receive from other unemployment compensation programs.

In New Jersey, the first tranche of the federal grant would provide up to \$300 per week to claimants collecting unemployment for the weeks of Aug. 1, Aug. 8 and Aug. 15. Only people whose unemployment is COVID-related are eligible, under terms of the memorandum the President issued on Aug. 8. Additionally, those receiving less than \$100 in weekly unemployment benefits are excluded from the supplemental benefit.

“We are looking into every option to ensure that every single penny will be in pockets of countless New Jersey families seeking benefits,” **said Governor Murphy**. “However, even as we do this, we still need the federal government to reauthorize the \$600 federal unemployment benefit to ensure that we provide the financial security desperately needed during this pandemic.”

“We will always do whatever we can to get more money into the pockets of our unemployed workers,” **said Labor Commissioner Robert Asaro-Angelo**. “But, it’s important to note that this is not an extension of the successful federal Pandemic Unemployment Compensation program, which provided an extra \$600 to everyone receiving unemployment. LWA will end as soon as the funds dry up, it excludes some of our lowest-wage earners and part-time workers, and, perhaps most importantly, adds another layer of red tape that workers in need have to cut through.”


Of the states that have applied, 93 percent have sought grants at the \$300 level, which the federal government pays, rather than kick in an extra \$100, which would have cost New Jersey approximately \$80 million a week.



As of Tuesday, FEMA had approved 28 states' applications for \$300 payments and 2 states' applications for \$400 payments. One state, South Dakota, has declined to participate.

This new program must be created from scratch, and run separately from New Jersey's existing state and federal unemployment programs. This is not something New Jersey or any state will be able to do quickly or easily.

"This is not the answer for unemployed workers around the country who have been hit hard and fast by COVID-19. It is our hope that Congress extends the \$600 supplement so that workers, especially those in high cost-of-living states like ours, can keep food on the table and a roof over their heads until we can get beyond COVID and they can get back on their feet," **Asaro-Angelo said.**

The FEMA grant has a spending cap of \$44 billion. Once the allocation is exhausted, benefits will end. Thus, states must reapply after the first three weeks, giving FEMA the opportunity to calculate the program's remaining balance after the first round of grants. The program ~~also would be halted~~ if FEMA's Disaster Relief Fund balance drops below \$25 billion.  (<https://twitter.com/GovMurphy>)

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