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NJDOL Looks Back at 2021 Accomplishments While Continuing to Aid Workers, Businesses Amid Ongoing Global Pandemic

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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TRENTON – No state was spared from the tsunami of unemployment claims nor from the difficulties of implementing new federal benefit programs that continued throughout 2021, the first full calendar year of the COVID-19 pandemic. New Jersey alone received just shy of 2.5 million initial claims for benefits. Despite this enormous increase in workload, NJDOL is proud to have distributed nearly \$40 billion in COVID-related benefits to 1.6 million workers over the past 21 months, while advancing the other federal- and state-mandated missions of the department.

“Make no mistake, the Department of Labor has a huge mission,” said Commissioner Robert Asaro-Angelo. “There will certainly be new and lingering challenges in the coming year, but at every turn, our team – and the entire Murphy Administration – is driven by the continuous fight on behalf of our workers and employers who follow the law and do the right thing. Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, we have made enormous strides in the past 12 months.”

UNEMPLOYMENT MODERNIZATION

As of November, New Jersey had recovered approximately 76% of jobs lost as a direct result of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, a cumulative 5.5 million continued weeks of unemployment benefits were claimed during the year, a 103% increase over pre-pandemic claims. At its 2021 peak, NJDOL experienced its highest call volume in June 2021 which had an average daily call volume of 12,476 handled connects. Thanks to staffing increases and process improvements, the average call wait time in December 2021 was less than 3 minutes.

To help process the historic volume of claims, NJDOL continued to automate. A new online employer response in the E-Adjudication process allows employers to electronically provide separation information when an unemployment claim is filed. This programming upgrade eliminated the need for employers to return the forms by mail.

To date, NJDOL has identified more than 500,000 attempted fraudulent claims and prevented more than \$5.4 billion in losses.

Part of the credit goes to ID.me, a company specializing in identity proofing. In New Jersey and more than 20 other states, ID.me completes identity checks on all new claims. To date, 183,000 claimants have successfully confirmed their identities. However, that is less than one-third of all of the claimants we have referred to ID.me, raising a flag that many of the remaining 529,000 could be attempted fraudulent claims.

In mid-December, [NJDOL announced](#) it had been chosen by its federal partners at U.S. Department of Labor (USDOL) and U.S. Digital Service (USDS), housed in the Office of the President, as a pilot state for modernization and improvement of the federal unemployment insurance system. The goal of the Claimant Experience Pilot is to design an application system that provides equitable and timely access to unemployment benefits for eligible workers, while rooting out identity theft and sophisticated fraud rings that have bogged down state systems throughout the pandemic.

FAMILY LEAVE AND TEMPORARY DISABILITY INSURANCE

The Division of Employment Accessibility Services reported that most Temporary Disability and Family Leave claims are processed within two weeks. Specifically, 80 percent of Temporary Disability and 75 percent Family Leave claims filed online are processed within 9 days, with the same percentage of paper applications being processed within 14 days.

The Temporary Disability Insurance program provides cash benefits to New Jersey workers who must stop working due to a physical or mental health condition or other disability unrelated to their work. Family Leave Insurance provides up to 12 weeks of cash benefits for time taken off from work to bond with your new child before your baby's first birthday, as well as additional job protections.



NJ Labor Department
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NJDOL has a huge mission. There will certainly be new and lingering challenges in 2022, but at every turn, our team is driven by the continuing fight on behalf of our workers and employers.

The department outlines the accomplishments of the past year:
bit.ly/3FSCC0e



CAREER SERVICES AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

NJDOL's Office of Career Services has served more than 400,000 workers through its One-Stop Career Centers since the beginning of the pandemic – both virtually and through the addition of by-appointment in-person services.

In March of 2021, NJDOL launched SkillUp New Jersey, a free virtual training program to help jobseekers upgrade their skills and training for certification. Nearly 20,000 New Jersey residents have completed a SkillUp training course through the Department.

The Office of Business Services worked directly with more than 3,000 employers to fill job openings, as the so-called Great Resignation continues to impact businesses. More than 2.8 million job matches occurred in 2021, introducing the employer community to potential jobseekers.

Furthering this mission, Governor Murphy's Return and Earn Program took an innovative approach to pandemic recovery by incentivizing smaller employers to hire and offer on-the-job training to workers, while providing unemployed candidates a \$500 incentive to rejoin the workforce. Since the start of the program in September, 3,893 employers have expressed interest in the program; NJDOL has contracted with 92 employers to date, for a \$733,000 in investment in New Jersey's workforce. Interested employers can visit nj.gov/labor/returnandearn for more information.

NJDOL advanced its mission to further apprenticeship opportunities this year by distributing more than \$9 million in grants to partners who will support and grow apprenticeship programs across the state. Apprenticeship in New Jersey has increased 90 percent since Gov. Murphy took office, taking the learn-while-you-learn model that originated in the building trades and opened it up to a wide variety of fields and positions.

In Fiscal Year 2021, the Department awarded nearly \$850,000 through NJBUILD's Women and Minority Groups in Construction Trades Program to the Newark Workforce Development Board, Hudson County Building Trades, and the Elizabeth Development Company.

WORKERS' RIGHTS AND PROTECTIONS

The Division of Wage and Hour and Contract Compliance recouped wages for 3,473 workers in FY21, totaling nearly \$4.3 million. Additionally, by utilizing new tools and resources to expand enforcement of worker protections, NJDOL conducted the first multi-agency task force investigation on construction misclassification in collaboration with the Office of the Attorney General, the Department of the Treasury, and the Department of Banking and Insurance.

In 2022, the newly established Office of Strategic Enforcement and Compliance will oversee and coordinate across the divisions of the Department and other state agencies to focus on protecting workers from misclassification and ensuring employers are following the law and providing employees with access to the benefits they have earned.

New Jersey remains at the forefront of national conversations around unemployment modernization and workforce protection issues. In February 2021, Labor Commissioner Robert Asaro-Angelo was chosen by his counterparts across the nation as the chair of the National Association of State Workforce Agencies (NASWA), the national organization representing 50 state workforce agencies, plus 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.

For more information on NJDOL programs and services, please visit:

- nj.gov/labor
- myunemployment.nj.gov
- myleavebenefits.nj.gov
- careerservices.nj.gov
- myworkrights.nj.gov

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Department of Labor

1 John Fitch Plz,
Trenton, NJ 08611