



LABOR DEPARTMENT ISSUES OVER \$230 MILLION IN BENEFITS TO CONNECTICUT RESIDENTS; AUTOMATION PROGRESS CONTINUES

April 23, 2020

WETHERSFIELD – The Connecticut Department of Labor provided \$83 million in benefits this past week and has now processed 327,000 of the 402,000 applications the agency has received since March 13, when unemployment began to spike due to the pandemic and resulting business closures. In the past five weeks, the agency has now provided \$230 million in unemployment benefits.

“Our new automation programming has allowed us to process over 100,000 applications for benefits, which has made a tremendous difference since the agency is handling more applications that we would typically receive in two years,” said State Labor Commissioner Kurt Westby. “Although we continue to receive thousands of new applications every day, the new automation allows our staff to focus on more complex claims that must be manually processed.”

According to Westby, the agency is on target for reducing the processing time of claim applications from six weeks to one week by April 27. He noted that additional enhancements are ongoing, with a goal to apply automation to more complex claims to further speed up processing efforts.

“The task was complicated, due to our 40-year-old mainframe that uses a COBOL operation system,” Westby said. “In addition to the tremendous work accomplished by our staff, we are grateful to partner agencies, especially the Department of Administrative Services and Bureau of Enterprise Systems and Technology, for their expertise and being part of the solution.”

Westby noted that the team continues to complete programming, in addition to developing new systems to accommodate the three federal stimulus programs for unemployment insurance. This includes programming for Federal Pandemic Unemployment Compensation (FPUC) that will allow the agency to add the additional \$600 to weekly state benefit payments, and Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA) that provides benefits for self-employed individuals. FPUC is scheduled to begin the week of April 27, and the agency expects to begin accepting applications for PUA by April 30 with both programs to be retroactive.

Media Contact: Office of Communications

200 Folly Brook Boulevard, Wethersfield, CT 06109-1114

Phone: (860) 263-6535 – Fax: (860) 263-6536 – www.ct.gov/dol

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The third federal program, Pandemic Emergency Unemployment Compensation (PEUC) is a 13-week federal extension that will allow eligible claimants to collect the additional weeks after exhausting the 26 weeks of state benefits. The agency plans to have this system in operation by mid-May.

As part of its commitment to the public, agency staff are working 12-hour days and responding to 3,000 emails daily that have been received through CTDOL's Online Assistance Center and Webhelp email systems. General information phone lines staffed by more than 25 employees offer online guidance to hundreds of additional residents requesting help with filing an application.

The agency reminds those that have recently filed an application for unemployment benefits to look for an email from the Labor Department that advises of next steps for filing a weekly claim. This includes checking any spam or junk email boxes. It also recommends claimants select direct deposit for receiving benefits since this is the quickest method. Those choosing direct deposit will have their benefits sent directly to a checking or savings account of their choice within two business days after a claim application has been processed and approved for payment. In contrast, due to the national pandemic, a shortage of debit cards is causing up to a four-week delay when the bank issues the cards.

"During this time of uncertainty, we know a weekly benefit payment can help remove much of the anxiety when it can be used to pay bills or buy food," Westby said. "While we can never be totally prepared for the impact a pandemic can have on our community, the dedicated Labor Department staff continue to implement new methods and ideas so we can help assist Connecticut's families as quickly as possible."