



## **CT Dept. of Labor: Pandemic Unemployment Rate Triggers Extended Benefits; Agency Has Received 750,000 Unemployment Applications**

**August 4, 2020**

*(Wethersfield, CT)* – Today, Connecticut Department of Labor (CTDOL) Commissioner Kurt Westby announced that the state’s continued pandemic-related high unemployment rate triggered the start of High Extended Benefits. Primarily federally funded, the ‘trigger on’ to the High Extended Benefits program occurs when the state’s unemployment rate averages 8% or higher for three consecutive months. It offers claimants an additional seven weeks of extended benefits for a total of 20 weeks, and it extends the Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA) program for another seven weeks for a total of 46 weeks.

Commissioner Westby said, “Expanding benefits will help cover people whose eligibility for Extended Benefits was due to expire at the end of September. It builds some stability into the unemployment safety net for the long-term unemployed. With the expiration of the Federal Pandemic Unemployment Program last week, many claimants are seeing a large decline in their benefits—one that Connecticut cannot remedy without federal action. This extension of benefits will help workers for as long as the state remains above the three-month average threshold.”

Notified in a letter from the U.S. DOL Regional Administrator, the agency will inform claimants by mail that their extended benefits will be in place for 20 weeks rather than the standard 13 weeks. Claimants must continue to file their weekly certification on the [green button](#), but do not need to complete any separate applications. High Extended Benefits began August 2, 2020 and remain in place until the three-month average for state unemployment falls below 8%. When the state ‘triggers off’ of the High Extended Benefits program, claimants who have received 13 weeks of Extended Benefits will receive two additional weeks before benefits are ended.

Connecticut’s unemployment rate averaged 9.2% over the past three months—although the state’s economist indicates that [the actual unemployment rate is much higher](#), estimated between 16-17%, due to a survey data collection issue that federal Bureau of Labor Statistics is working to correct.

### **FEDERAL PANDEMIC UNEMPLOYMENT COMPENSATION (FPUC)**

The Federal Pandemic Unemployment Compensation (FPUC) benefit expired on Saturday, July 25, 2020. For people whose payments are held pending a hearing or eligibility matter, they will receive the FPUC for weeks payable between March 29, 2020 and July 25, 2020. CTDOL has launched a [web page](#) to keep residents updated on any federal action on this program.

### **CHANGE TO SUITABLE WORK REQUIREMENTS**

Under the state's public health emergency issued March 10, 2020, Connecticut broadened the established 'suitable work' guidelines that allowed certain workers to decline return-to-work orders if they had Centers for Disease Control-defined [health vulnerabilities](#). The state expanded the guideline to allow certain workers to decline return-to-work orders if a household member had the health vulnerabilities. With Connecticut in phase two of reopening, the state is going back to the established guidelines. Now, the guidance relates solely to the employee. If a worker who is at higher risk for the virus under CDC guidance is called back to work, they may decline that offer and maintain eligibility for benefits. The worker may not decline that offer and remain eligible for benefits if they do not fall under the CDC guidance unless sufficient cause otherwise exists as specified in the law. This change does not does not impact the [Commissioner's waiver](#) on looking for work.

## **APPLICATIONS NUMBERS**

### **Since March 13, 2020, CTDOL:**

- Has received 750,336 applications and processed 736,523 of them. We are currently working on applications from July 26, 2020; and
- Has about 300,000 weekly claims filed (state and federal programs combined)

Application processed time that was at six weeks at the beginning of the pandemic hit a low of one week prior to the Pandemic Emergency Unemployment Compensation and Extended Benefits program, is now less than two weeks. Prior to the pandemic, CTDOL was processing applications within three days.

## **TRUST FUND**

Since March 13, 2020, CTDOL has paid out more than \$4.4 billion in state and federal unemployment benefits. The breakdown is as follows:

- \$1.6 billion in state unemployment benefits;
- \$174 M in Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA) - for anyone who is not able to collect regular unemployment benefits;
- \$74 M Pandemic Emergency Unemployment Compensation (PEUC) – for individuals who have exhausted regular UI benefits;
- \$375 K in state Extended Benefits, \$5.7 M in federal Extended Benefits; and
- \$2.85 B in Federal Pandemic Unemployment Compensation (FPUC) – the \$600 additional weekly benefit that expires July 25, 2020.

The current Trust Fund balance is \$118 M. To date, Connecticut DOL officials have not borrowed, but expect to soon.

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