

Legislation to Help More Workers Receive Unemployment Insurance Benefits

Written by Wisconsin Senate Democrats, Jay Wadd
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<http://newprogressive.com/images/stories/S5/unemployment-virus-outbreak-dp-s5.jpg>



Bills would end one-week waiting period, concept of substantial fault, and allow people in occupational training and with disabilities to receive benefits.

MADISON - State Senator Dave Hansen (D-Green Bay) and Democrats in the Legislature announced they will be introducing legislation to expand workers' access to the unemployment benefits they've earned. The package which contains eight bills will make it possible for more Wisconsin workers to get the benefits they've earned. Included in the package is a bill authored by Senator Hansen and State Representative Katrina Shankland that eliminates the one week waiting period to receive benefits.



“Many of the road blocks people are experiencing when they apply for their unemployment insurance were put in place by the Republicans under Scott Walker,” said Hansen. “Among those roadblocks is the one-week waiting period for people to receive their benefits. It is unnecessary and needs to be permanently repealed.”

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The COVID-19 pandemic exposed failings within the unemployment system, many of which are the result of Republicans attempts to limit who qualifies for benefits. In addition to changes to the process itself, Republicans cut funding from the program which led to reduced staffing in the division when the pandemic hit. The result is not only fewer people who need and earned benefits qualifying for them but the process taking longer to approve benefits for others.

“The Republicans and Scott Walker waged a war on unemployment and now we’re seeing the results. Many people who have earned benefits no longer qualify because of their changes and even people who do are being forced to wait to receive the benefits they’ve earned. To make matters worse, the Republicans have chosen to meet only once since the pandemic started and they continue to ignore their responsibility for solving the unemployment crisis.”

The package being put forth by Governor Evers and Democratic legislators includes provisions that will allow people with disabilities who are able to work to receive unemployment benefits. Wisconsin is one of only two states that denies them the benefits they’ve earned. Another bill would eliminate the concept of substantial fault which has caused confusion for both employers and employees and when employees are entitled to benefits when they are discharged by their employers and delaying benefits. The package also contains legislation that would reinstate the ability of those participating in extended occupational training to receive extended UI benefits.

“We know people want to work and that the economy is what causes most people to find themselves without jobs through no fault of their own. People should not be punished in times of economic disaster. Instead we should be doing everything we can to help them get back on their feet. It’s good for them, their communities and our economy. That’s what this package is designed to do.”

Combining internal transfers, intergovernmental transfers, new hires, and contracted vendors, DWD has more than tripled the total number of UI resources from roughly 500 people as of March 14 to more than 1,700 as of July 7 and recently transferred another 100 employees from other agencies to help process unemployment cases.

“The Governor and state employees have been doing all they can to process every claim quickly. But more needs to be done. It is my hope that Republicans will join us to pass substantive unemployment reform to address this crisis.”