

What You Need To Know About Expanded Unemployment Benefits in Response to COVID-19 in DC, Maryland, and Virginia

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With workers facing financial hardship as businesses temporarily close or reduce their workforce in response to the Coronavirus, the District of Columbia, Maryland, and Virginia have expanded eligibility for unemployment benefits.

Created in 1935, unemployment insurance is a form of social insurance providing income support to workers in the event of non-voluntary employment separation. Typically, each state establishes eligibility criteria and benefit levels for eligible workers. This eligibility criteria includes mandatory waiting periods or requirements that workers demonstrate they are actively searching for work.

In response to the Coronavirus, the DC Council passed emergency legislation waiving DC's mandatory one-week waiting period and requirements that employees demonstrate they are searching for work. Additionally, the emergency legislation expands unemployment benefits to employees quarantined or isolated by the D.C. Department of Health or any other applicable District or federal agency. Under DC law, a weekly benefit amount is determined by the amount of wages in the quarter in which earnings were the highest, with a maximum benefit amount of \$432 per week, typically for twenty-six weeks. ([*DC UI Claimant's Rights and Responsibilities*](#))

Similarly, Virginia has waived its mandatory waiting period to one-day and requirements that workers actively search for work. And, an increased number of workers are now eligible for benefits, including those directed to self-quarantine or caring for a sick family member. Under Virginia law, the maximum weekly benefit amount is \$378 and the minimum with \$60, determined by an employee's wages, with benefit durations lasting twelve to twenty-six weeks. ([*Virginia Employment Commission: "FAQ's - General Unemployment Insurance"*](#))

Unlike DC and Virginia, Maryland has no waiting period to file unemployment claims, a policy which was in effect prior to the Coronavirus outbreak. Recently, the Maryland legislature passed an emergency declaration extending unemployment benefits to those who lose their job due to the Coronavirus, including those caring for a sick relative. The legislation also waives work search requirements. In Maryland, unemployment insurance benefits range from a weekly benefit amount of \$50 to \$430 per week, determined by wages during an employee's base period. ([*MD Department of Budget and Management: "Displaced Employees: How Do I File For Unemployment Insurance Benefits?"*](#))

In addition, federal legislation could supplement state unemployment benefits. On March 26, 2020, the U.S. Senate passed the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security Act which would provide unemployed workers with \$600 a week on top of state-provided unemployment benefits for a period of

four months. The legislation also offers assistance to self-employed workers who would not typically qualify for unemployment benefits. The legislation has not yet been enacted into law and the U.S. House of Representatives is set take the matter under consideration later this week.