

Congress Needs to Act Now and Extend Unemployment Benefits for Struggling Workers

Raleigh

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Next week, thousands of North Carolinians who are out of work due to COVID-19 will see a drastic reduction in their unemployment benefits despite this pandemic being far from over.

The additional \$600 a week unemployed workers have received from the Federal Pandemic Unemployment Compensation program has been a lifeline for struggling families and communities over these past few months.

But unless the federal government acts quickly, these benefits will expire this weekend and many people will be without money they need to pay bills and provide for their families. I am urging Congress to do the right thing for the health of our families and the health of our economy by extending this critical program.

The people who rely on these benefits are out of work through no fault of their own. We've seen COVID-19 create the highest unemployment since World War II and completely change our way of life. But it hasn't changed the fact that people still need to pay their rent, put food on the table and make ends meet.

The federal government agreed to send an additional \$600 to unemployed workers back in March. It's irresponsible for Congress and the president to stop providing this critical support now when the virus still is spreading rapidly and states, especially in the South, are seeing record high case counts. Hospitals and ICU beds are full in Florida and Texas, and the virus is worse than it was in March and April. North Carolina still has hospital capacity, but we know how quickly that could change. It's not safe for some people to go back to work and many don't have jobs to return to yet. Benefits from the Federal Pandemic Unemployment Compensation program have not only helped people pay their bills — they've been critical to the health of our local businesses when unemployed people use their benefits to put money into the economy by purchasing food, paying rent and buying other necessities.

So far, between the state and federal benefits, North Carolina has paid over 815,000 people more than \$6.2 billion dollars here in our state. And this spring, my administration took executive action to make sure these benefits were accessible to more furloughed North Carolinians. This funding has a multiplier effect on our communities, going from families' pockets back into local small businesses, which helps keep our economy afloat.

If these benefits are cut off, it will hurt the unemployed as well as our local economies.

This extra \$600 has been particularly important in North Carolina. Several years ago, our state legislature slashed unemployment insurance benefits to one of the lowest in the nation and made them available for only 12 weeks. By comparison, a South Carolinian can receive benefits for up to 20 weeks and a Virginian for up to 26 weeks. Legislators had the opportunity to change this during their last session but did not.

I urge our legislature to re-evaluate our state's own unemployment compensation when they return. But, right now, North Carolinians need immediate action from Congress and the president. For months, we have asked people to do their part to fight this virus — wear masks, set aside family traditions, become homeschool teachers overnight. Now it's time for Washington to do its part and support the people and families who have made these sacrifices.

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