



PRESS RELEASE
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Ohio appears to fall behind with new unemployment programs

Lag in setting up benefit system for jobless workers

Many state governments have had trouble handling the tsunami of claims for unemployment benefits. In the last three weeks alone, 696,519 claims have been submitted in Ohio -- nearly double the number all last year. Congress approved significant expansions of benefits in the CARES Act last month. Policy Matters Ohio Research Director Zach Schiller issued this statement on Ohio's slow progress in rolling out those programs:

"We are glad that the Department of Job & Family Services will start paying the extra \$600 a week to claimants by the end of next week, as ODJFS Director Kimberly Hall said yesterday. However, Ohio is nowhere near providing new federally funded benefits to the self-employed, independent contractors, gig economy workers and others who have lost their jobs because of COVID-19 and who don't meet the state's stringent earnings requirements. A laid-off restaurant worker who was employed 30 hours a week at the minimum wage wouldn't meet Ohio's \$269 average weekly minimum to receive benefits, and won't be able to get them (or the extra \$600 a week) until a new system is put in place.

"While few states have started offering this new Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA) to those who wouldn't ordinarily qualify, Ohio appears to be falling behind. Kentucky moved early to begin trying to provide benefits to those who didn't qualify earlier, and is already making some payments. Michigan has started [accepting](#) applications for PUA benefits, and [could start](#) paying them next Monday, April 20. That's because PUA is modeled closely after UC offered after natural disasters. Lieutenant Governor Husted said Friday that the states offering such benefits already had systems established 'because they had hurricanes or things like that.' States that have not built those systems in the past, like Ohio, 'are having to start from scratch,' he said.

“However, Ohio [offered these benefits](#), too, just last year in 10 counties after flooding last spring. Moreover, in contrast to what Husted said Friday, federal guidance for the program has been available since Sunday, April 5. A number of states have started accepting applications and said they’ll offer PUA benefits this month or early next month. Husted has said the administration hopes to have them available by mid-May, ‘hopefully sooner.’

“While it’s good to hear that ODJFS will begin making the supplemental \$600 weekly payments, it is only just coming in line with most of its neighbors, which already are making such payments.

“[Michigan](#) and [West Virginia](#) are making the additional payments now. Pennsylvania [issued](#) its first checks Friday, and claimants who had filed by April 4 should get payments today or tomorrow. [Kentucky](#) said last week it was starting to make payments. Other states including Illinois, Massachusetts and New York also have begun making the \$600 payments, while California, Louisiana and New Jersey said they will start this week.

“Ohio shouldn’t lag behind our neighbors. We should be a leader in offering benefits to struggling families.”

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Policy Matters Ohio is a nonprofit, nonpartisan state policy research institute with offices in Cleveland and Columbus.