
POLICY MATTERS OHIO

Additional Benefits Approved for Unemployed Ohioans

The transportation budget approved by the General Assembly and signed by Gov. Strickland April 1 included measures that will help many unemployed workers in Ohio.

Thousands of jobless Ohioans whose unemployment compensation benefits would otherwise run out will receive an extra 20 weeks of benefits paid out of the federal unemployment trust fund. The bill allows Ohio to trigger these benefits based on its unemployment rate -- and ours, unfortunately, is high enough that it will trigger the benefits now. By adopting this trigger, the state ensures that unemployed workers will get the benefits immediately, and that they will last longer than if no action had been taken.

The bill also will allow jobless Ohioans who had worked at employers with fewer than 20 employees to receive a newly available federal subsidy for 65 percent of their COBRA payments for up to nine months. After some controversy, this was approved as an emergency measure, so that the measure goes into effect immediately instead of in 90 days. This provision currently lasts till the end of this year, though it could be extended.

Both of these measures were made possible by the federal stimulus act, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act.

Finally, Ohio also will receive about \$88 million in federal stimulus payments based on its long-time statute allowing the most recent earnings of unemployed workers to be taken into account when they apply for unemployment compensation. Under the ARRA, states are able to qualify for a total of \$7 billion in funds if they have taken steps to improve eligibility for UC benefits. Since Ohio already had this in place, we immediately qualify for one third of the funds that we are eligible for.

In order to receive the additional \$176 million, Ohio will need to take additional steps to improve eligibility. We must approve at least two of the following four measures:

- 1) Allow unemployed workers seeking part-time work to qualify
- 2) Allow workers with compelling family circumstances to qualify (these include victims of domestic violence, those caring for an immediate family member who is sick, and those following a spouse to a place not within commuting distance from their job due to a change in the location of the spouse's employment)
- 3) Pay \$15 a week in unemployment benefits for each dependent of a claimant who is receiving benefits, up to \$50 a week, or
- 4) Extend benefits to those who participate in approved training programs.

These steps would make benefits available to workers who need them and modernize Ohio's unemployment system so that it conforms to today's economy. For instance, part-time workers make up a fifth of Ohio's workforce. More information on this issue is available from Policy Matters Ohio or from this fact sheet of the National Employment Law Project: <http://www.nelp.org/page/-/UI/uima.fact.sheet.jan.09.pdf?nocdn=1>

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