



## Public Assistance During COVID19 Pandemic

4-20-2020 UPDATE

The Connecticut Department of Labor (CTDOL) is working diligently to serve CT residents and appreciates the public's patience as it works to process the thousands of unemployment insurance applications that have been filed over the last month. **All states are struggling to keep up with IT and phone systems which are routinely crashing.**

Before the COVID-19 pandemic began to dramatically affect Connecticut residents and its businesses community, the agency typically received ~3,000 new claims a week with a peak of under 10,000 per week; since March 13, 2020 it has received more than 386,000 applications – **well over two years of application activity in little more than a month.** The agency has processed\* over 293,000 by shifting staff responsibilities, borrowing former CTDOL staff that have gone to other agencies, and bringing back retirees, and creating multiple automated programs to process both initial and weekly claims.

In addition, during the 10 months of off-peak each year, the Agency was issuing approximately \$15 million per week in benefits payments. Under the COVID-19 pandemic, it has **issued over \$230 million in payments.**

Although prior to March 13, 2020 claims were processed in three days, the current processing time is now approximately 3-4 weeks (reduced from a recent peak wait of 6 weeks) based on the unprecedented volume. It will take some time to process all these claims, but CTDOL is working as quickly as possible, and **all claims will be retroactive to the week you filed.**

CTDOL recommends individuals select the direct deposit option for benefit payments rather than debit card. **Direct deposit**, made to a savings or checking account, occurs within two business days once a payment is issued. Debit card typically takes 7-10 days but due to a nationwide shortage of debit cards, it could take up to four weeks for the bank to issue one. A person selects their payment method when applying for benefits. If no option is selected, delivery method defaults to debit card.

To help speed processing, select the **“Temporary Shutdown”** as the reason for separation from employment. An online **tutorial guide** to walk you through the process step by step is found here: <http://www.ctdol.state.ct.us/UI-online/Guide%20for%20Filing%20CT%20Unemployment%20Claims.pdf>

In order to implement the new federal Unemployment Insurance (UI) programs, in addition to its IT staff, CTDOL has called back retirees to help, has Department of Administrative Services Bureau of Enterprise Systems and Technology (DAS/BEST) assisting and has vendors on site – all working around the clock.

**During the pandemic, CTDOL has been managing a 5-part system with a 40-year-old mainframe by:**

- Attending to daily malfunctions due to heavy traffic
- Working together with statewide sister agency IT experts on site
- Having multiple vendors on site monitoring system functionality day and night
- Recruiting COBOL and file.net developers to keep up with the unprecedented # of claims and create new programs for the federal CARES Act initiatives
- Reprogramming and building systems to administer the new federal stimulus programs

\*Some processed claims require further research to determine eligibility prior to issuance of payment.

## Helpful information for claimants

CTDOL's digital filing platform is open online 24 hours per day, 7 days per week.

File application here [www.filectui.com](http://www.filectui.com) (accessible by computer and mobile device)

Please advise your constituent who is unable to file for unemployment benefits via the Internet to use a cell/smart phone or a family/friend's computer, if possible. If none of those are an option, please have your constituent call (860) 263-6975 or (203) 455-2653 for assistance. One of our customer service representatives will gather the customer's contact information including name, phone number and SS# and will assign staff to contact the customer within 5 business days to take the unemployment claim over the phone.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) are **updated daily** on CTDOL website

<http://www.ctdol.state.ct.us/DOLCOVIDFAQ.PDF>

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General questions may be submitted to [dol.webhelp@ct.gov](mailto:dol.webhelp@ct.gov) .

Our American Job Centers are closed to in-person visits due to COVID-19, but claimants may call the following numbers for **general information** concerning unemployment benefits.

860-263-6975 and 203-455-2653 from 8:00 am to 4:00 pm Monday – Friday (excluding holidays)

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203-809-9847 and 203-892-6036 from 8:30 am to 4:30 pm Monday - Friday (excluding holidays)

203-548-7322 (Spanish) from 8:30 am to 4:30 pm Monday – Friday (excluding holidays)

**Claims cannot be processed or expedited by calling this telephone service.**

The Federal Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act allows self-employed individuals and independent contractors, who are normally denied regular unemployment benefits, to receive benefits through the new federally funded Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA) program. Due to the staggering number of claims being filed during the pandemic, CTDOL recommends that **self-employed and independent contractors wait until the new PUA system is up and available to take claims** before first applying for regular benefits. We expect to begin accepting applications by April 30, 2020. Delaying might expedite the process for self-employed and independent contractors in the future and will also provide the CTDOL with more of an opportunity to keep working on the backlog to prepare for the PUA program.

## Federal Stimulus

In addition to processing thousands of claims, CTDOL is working to program the three federal stimulus unemployment programs into its 40-year-old COBOL system

### Pandemic Unemployment Assistance – PUA

(up to 39 weeks)

PUA is intended for those who are not eligible for, or have exhausted entitlement to, state and federal benefits or pandemic emergency unemployment compensation (PEUC). These benefits will be retroactive for all eligible claims. The program dates to February 2, 2020 and retro payment (including FPUC \$600) will be based on the date they became un/underemployed due to COVID-19. Covered individuals also include self-employed, those seeking part-time employment, and individuals lacking sufficient work history. These individuals should wait to file. **DOL expects to begin accepting applications by April 30th.** Individuals must be able and available to work unless they cannot work because of the specific circumstances that relate to COVID-19, including:

- The individual, household member, or one under their care has been diagnosed
- A child or other under the individual's care is unable to attend school or another facility due to closure
- The individual is unable to reach the place of employment because of an official public quarantine, has been advised by a health care provider to self-quarantine, or their place of employment has been closed
- The individual was scheduled to start work and the job is no longer available
- The individual has become "the breadwinner" or major support for a household because the head of the household has died
- The individual must quit his or her job as a direct result of COVID-19
- The individual meets any additional criteria established by the Secretary of Labor

### Federal Pandemic Unemployment Compensation – FPUC

(3/29/20 – 7/25/20)

Emergency Increase in Unemployment Compensation Benefits

- For any UI-eligible claimants (state and federal), PEUC recipients and PUA recipients, Shared Work UI and Trade Readjustment Allowance (TRA)
- Additional \$600 per week for eligible claimants; paid retroactively to week filed (after March 29)
- **Payments are expected to commence the week of April 27<sup>th</sup>.**
- Retro \$600/wk. in a separate deposit/credit from weekly payment
- UI benefits in CT currently range from \$15 to \$649/wk.
- The additional FPUC will bring the range to \$615 to \$1,249/wk.

### Pandemic Emergency Unemployment Compensation – PEUC

- Will extend the 26 weeks of regular state UI to 39 weeks. The 13 weeks of PEUC payments are paid after the 26 weeks of regular benefits.
- Payments will be retro to the week of filing subsequent to March 29, 2020, if claimants exhausted all rights to regular unemployment compensation (UC) under state or Federal law for benefit year that ended after July 1, 2019
- Eligibility:
  - Have exhausted all rights to UI under state or federal law; and
  - Must be able to work, available to work, and actively seeking work.
  - CTDOL Commissioner has temporarily waived the work search requirement for state UI benefits. We await guidance on work search requirements for this federal program.

## Challenges implementing the new federal stimulus programs

Please have patience as we work around the clock to provide eligible CT residents with Unemployment Insurance (UI) benefits.

CTDOL is currently working on a new, modernized system for processing UI claims with the plan to have it operating mid-2021. In doing so, we are fortunate to be part of the ReEmployUSA, a five-state consortium made up of Connecticut, Maine, Rhode Island, Mississippi and Oklahoma. CT joined the consortium in order to build the new system less expensively and more quickly.

This work inopportunately must be put on hold as we ask our IT staff, vendors and DAS-BEST to re-program our existing 40-year-old system. The current UI computer system is comprised of a COBOL mainframe and four connected components. It is not a fully automated system and requires manual determination at multiple points in the process.

Fortunately, the ReEmployUSA consortium is lending its expertise to help CT provide the federal benefit programs faster, by developing new applications so we can bypass manual processes with automation. Still, because the federally funded Unemployment Insurance program has seen significant cuts in past years, CTDOL staff is down by about 35%. Therefore, we are accessing and calling upon retired and transferred workers with IT and UI experience from other state agencies, as well as working with vendors and national UI experts to process the unprecedented number of claims we are receiving.