



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts
House of Representatives
State House, Boston 02133-1054

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House and Senate approve unemployment insurance changes to assist laid-off workers, employers

BOSTON – The House of Representatives and the Senate have agreed to changes in the state’s unemployment insurance program to assist Massachusetts residents and employers impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

State Representative Todd Smola (R-Warren) said Senate Bill 2618 contains provisions extending unemployment benefits by an additional four weeks in certain circumstances, while also protecting employers from rate increases if they are forced to lay off workers due to the 2019 novel coronavirus or the State of Emergency declared on March 10. The bill was enacted in both legislative branches on May 21, and is now on Governor Charlie Baker’s desk for his review and signature.

Senate Bill 2618 calls for extending state unemployment benefits from 26 weeks to 30 weeks, beginning on January 1, 2021, if certain conditions are met. This extension would be implemented whenever initial unemployment claims filed in any week exceed 100,000, unless the federal government authorizes a period of extended benefits, in which case state benefits will remain in place for 26 weeks until the extended federal benefits have been exhausted.

The number of new unemployment applications filed in Massachusetts typically average between 7,000 and 10,000 per week. Over the last two months, however, 1.23 million new claims have been filed in the state, with about 38.6 million claims filed nationally.

Representative Smola noted that employers will also see relief under the bill, which prohibits unemployment benefits paid to individuals whose job loss is directly related to the novel coronavirus or the State of Emergency from being charged to an employer or used in the calculation of their experience rate. The bill also prohibits benefits from being charged to an

employer's account if the benefits are paid for by federal funds. These changes are retroactive to March 10, and will remain in effect until one year after the bill takes effect or 180 days after the termination of the State of Emergency, whichever is later.

Senate Bill 2618 also gives non-profit organizations a 120-day extension on their next scheduled unemployment payment without being charged penalties or interest. In addition, it removes language in current state law that caps dependency benefits at 50 percent of an individual's weekly benefit rate, a change that will take effect 540 days (18 months) after the termination of the State of Emergency.

In March, the House and Senate voted to waive the one-week waiting period for unemployment so individuals could begin receiving benefits immediately. The waiver was signed into law on March 18, and will remain in effect for 90 days after the State of Emergency is lifted. For additional information please contact Representative Smola at Todd.Smola@mahouse.gov or (617)722-2100.

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