



April 9, 2020

Dear Gov. John Bel Edwards:

Unemployment insurance is one of the most effective policy tools governments can deploy to combat a recession. The undersigned organizations implore you to expand this program to ensure that as many Louisianans as possible have the financial resources necessary to weather this pandemic at home while they are unable to work through no fault of their own.

The impending recession due to COVID-19 is unavoidable. But what is not inevitable is the financial suffering of thousands of Louisiana families. Using the federal dollars recently made available, Louisiana has an opportunity to increase benefit levels and speed up the administration of those benefits. Our current average benefit of \$220 a week is one of the lowest in the country, and only replaces 23% of the average Louisianan's weekly wage. Only five other states have weekly benefits under \$300 a week. Only 11% of unemployed Louisianans currently get benefits, the fifth-lowest recipient rate in the country.

We commend you for quickly waiving the one-week waiting period, work search requirements and employer rating to position Louisiana for federal unemployment insurance relief dollars. But to boost the incomes of as many Louisianans as possible, more actions are needed through an executive order:

- Waive the minimum base earnings of \$1,200. Too many low-wage Louisianans have lapses in their employment due to caring for a family member, illness, previous layoffs and seasonal work. Waiving this arbitrary requirement would ensure all working Louisianans can qualify for unemployment insurance.
- Waive the current formula that calculates the weekly state benefit amount in favor of a flat rate of \$370 a week, which is the national average.
- Enact worksharing. This will help employers avoid mass layoffs and would keep more people connected to employment during the recession.

Administrative changes will also be crucial in increasing Louisiana's take-up rate. Provisions in the Families First Coronavirus Response Act require intentional action by states to increase reciprocity rates and strengthen their unemployment insurance programs. The Louisiana Workforce Commission should use its federal money to:

- Increase outreach in low-income, rural communities that have inconsistent access to internet
- Increase staff capacity and update technology
- Make its website and staff more accessible to those with limited English proficiency, particularly for Spanish, Vietnamese and Creole/French speaking communities
- Ensure employers are communicating how to enroll in unemployment insurance with staff during layoffs and have updated resources to share with staff who are laid off.

By providing relief to unemployed workers who need it most, thereby allowing them to stay home, the federal unemployment assistance will improve public health while helping the economy stay afloat during this crisis. But we must be intentional and strategic in order to maximize its impact.

Sincerely,

504 HealthNet
Justice and Accountability Center of Louisiana
Kingsley House
League of Women Voters of Louisiana
Louisiana Appleseed
Louisiana Budget Project
Louisiana Fair Housing Action Center
March of Dimes
National Birth Equity Collaborative
Power Coalition for Equity and Justice
Step Up Louisiana
United Way of Southeast Louisiana
Workplace Justice Project