



Public Assistance During COVID19 Pandemic

4-6-2020 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 claims that have been filed the last three weeks. **All states are struggling to keep up with IT and phone systems which are routinely crashing.**

Typically, the agency receives 3,000 new claims a week; in the last three weeks it has received more than 280,000 claims – more than eighteen months activity in a three-week period. Of these claims the agency has processed over 115,000 by shifting staff responsibilities, borrowing former CTDOL staff that have gone to other agencies, and bringing back retirees.

Although claims are usually processed in three days, the current processing time is five to six 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.**

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/UIOnLine/Guide%20for%20Filing%20CT%20Unemployment%20Claims.pdf](http://www.ctdol.state.ct.us/UIOnLine/Guide%20for%20Filing%20CT%20Unemployment%20Claims.pdf)

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. That delay 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.

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 a vendor on site – all working round the clock.

CTDOL is managing a 5-part system with a 40-year-old mainframe:

- 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

Helpful information for claimants

CTDOL's digital filing platform is open online 24/7 – which improves the initial access to file a claim. File application here www.filectui.com (accessible by computer and mobile device)

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 . A response can be expected in 5 to 7 business days, depending on volume.

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

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

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)

For any individual that is not eligible for regular extended benefits, such as self-employed individuals, and those who have exhausted regular state benefits.

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 is self-employed, seeking part-time employment, does not otherwise qualify for benefits, and fits one of the above.

Federal Pandemic Unemployment Compensation – FPUC

(3/29 – 7/25, 2020)

Emergency Increase in Unemployment Compensation Benefits. Provides the following:

- Additional \$600 per week for every claimant
- UI benefits in CT currently range from \$15 to \$649/wk
- The additional FPUC will bring the range to \$615 to \$1,249/wk
- The additional \$600 is applicable to regular and Shared Work UI, Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA), and Pandemic Emergency Unemployment Compensation (PEUC), and Trade Readjustment Allowance (TRA).

Pandemic Emergency Unemployment Compensation – PEUC

- 13 weeks of federally funded benefits added to the end of the 26 weeks of regular state UI.
- 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.