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Emergency Bill Offers New Flexibility in Maine's Unemployment Insurance Program

AUGUSTA - Maine Department of Labor (Department) will begin to implement new flexible unemployment insurance (UI) measures that will benefit both workers and businesses thanks to emergency legislation from Governor Mills that was enacted by the Legislature Tuesday night. These temporary measures will help relieve the financial burden of temporary layoffs, isolation, and medically-necessary quarantine by making unemployment benefits available to individuals whose employment has been impacted by COVID-19.

"If workers do not have access to employer-provided paid time off or leave, this legislation can provide an important partial wage replacement," Labor Commissioner Laura Fortman said. This helps not only the individual but allows employers to retain their workforce and stabilize local economies.

Individuals who would otherwise be able and available to work and who maintain contact with their employer may now be eligible for UI. Anyone who has filed for unemployment benefits on or after March 15th will be reviewed under these new temporary measures. The legislation temporarily revises eligibility requirement to provide unemployment coverage in situations not typically covered, such as:

* An employer temporarily ceases operation due to COVID-19
* An individual is quarantined with the expectation of returning to work once the quarantine is over
* An individual must take a leave of absence to care for a dependent who is affected

The legislation is not intended to provide sick leave or short-term disability payments. The legislation waives the work search requirement for individuals still connected to their employer and waives the one-week waiting period so that benefits will be available sooner. Important for businesses, any benefits paid under these provisions would not affect the employers experience rating record.

UI Claims can be filed online or by phone at: <https://reemployme.maine.gov/> or 1-800-593-7660. The Department provides unemployment filing free of charge; individuals should never be asked to pay a fee to file a claim.

For more information and resources, visit the Departments COVID-19 page: <https://www.maine.gov/labor/covid19/,> and follow the Maine Department of Labor on Facebook @MElabor and Twitter @maine\_labor.

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