



VAL HOYLE
Labor Commissioner

Supporting Oregon families getting back to work as COVID-19 continues

To: Oregon Legislature
From: Val Hoyle
Re: Unemployment earnings exemption

The federal pandemic unemployment weekly \$600 supplement ends on July 31. There is no expectation that Congress will extend this program, despite its vital role in preventing full economic devastation. That means a loss of income for hundreds of thousands of Oregonians in the next week.

Without action from state lawmakers to support Oregon families, the months ahead will be even more financially challenging. Many workers will not be able to return to even part-time work without negatively impacting their unemployment benefits, and will be taking home less money overall each month.

State lawmakers can make a simple, measured change that would help workers and allow businesses to open their doors and re-employ their workers.

Proposal

Change the unemployment earnings exemption to increase the amount of money a worker can earn before their weekly benefit amount is reduced.

This will allow workers to get back to work part-time without losing money and help businesses feel comfortable opening up slowly without having to worry about supporting full time employees or asking workers to take a financial hit coming back to work.

Impacts

In a state reliant on the hospitality and tourism sectors, two sectors hardest hit with the economic impacts of COVID-19, many employers cannot yet resume full operations and hire workers back full time. At the same time, the loss of the additional unemployment money, without the ability to resume full-time employment, is going to leave workers in dire straits and workers having to choose between losing their unemployment benefits and working part time.

This step will help workers, help businesses, and support communities by putting money back into the local economy.

Context

In trying to help people with their UI issues, I've spoken directly to Oregonians who've lost their unemployment because they earned too much money. However, their earnings are not what anyone would describe as "too much"; we're talking \$150 a week; that comes to \$600 per month - this is not livable. In Georgia, Labor Commissioner Mark Butler recently worked with the Governor and Legislature to allow individuals to increase the earnings exemption amount from \$55 to \$300 so workers can continue to receive unemployment. Any amount made each week over \$300 is deducted from a claimant's weekly unemployment amount.

Allowing Georgians to supplement their income by making an additional \$300 or so a week while continuing to receive state benefits is allowing more of them to continue to heal from the economic





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wounds brought about by COVID-19 and brought over 40 million dollars into their economy. By adopting this or a similar policy, Oregon can support workers, and support work, better than we are.

Oregon lawmakers must take action to support businesses and workers as we continue to deal with the economic fallout from COVID-19. We must give our state's workforce viable options to put food on the table. This is a measure that is pro-worker, pro-business, and good for Oregon's economy and I strongly encourage you to adopt this policy.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Val Hoyle". The signature is written in a cursive style and is set against a light yellow rectangular background.

Val Hoyle
Labor Commissioner
Oregon Bureau of Labor and Industries

