



UNEMPLOYMENT CLAIM

e-Alert: COVID-19

03.27.20

Changes to Massachusetts Unemployment Benefits

Background

On March 10, 2020, Massachusetts Governor Charlie Baker declared a state of emergency across the Commonwealth in response to the COVID-19 outbreak. On Wednesday, March 18, the governor signed legislation making important changes to state unemployment rules along with other key legislation. We have included a summary of this new legislation and other Massachusetts unemployment changes below.

Summary

On Wednesday, March 18, Governor Baker signed legislation designed to provide unemployment assistance to workers who have been laid off or had their hours significantly reduced due to the COVID-19 outbreak. Effective March 10, 2020, the typical 10-day waiting period required to apply for unemployment benefits has been waived. This legislation will remain

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in effect until 90 days after the state of emergency ends. See the official press release [here](#).

Aside from this new legislation, the Massachusetts Department of Unemployment Assistance has issued an emergency rule change allowing employers to classify their employees as being on “standby status,” meaning they are temporarily unemployed because of a lack of work due to COVID-19. This will allow employees to file for and collect unemployment benefits without actually being terminated. Employees on standby will be able to collect up to eight weeks of unemployment benefits. They simply need to demonstrate that they have a date when they are expected to return to work. They are not required to search for new employment in order to collect these benefits, since they are technically still employed. You can find more information about “standby status” [here](#).

Finally, under Massachusetts’s WorkShare Program, employers may opt to provide partial unemployment benefits to employees who have had their work hours reduced by 10% – 60%. This option is intended for employers considering reducing their employees’ work hours as an alternative to enforcing layoffs. Employers who choose to make use of this program can supplement their employees’ lost hours using their unemployment funds. You can find more information about the WorkShare program [here](#).

Employer Next Steps

- Examine these unemployment options to determine if they apply to your current or projected plans.
- If you decide to take part in some or all of these unemployment programs, be sure to educate your employees on all unemployment changes and how the process will work.
- If you are a Full-Service or Virtual HR client and have questions or concerns about this matter, please email us at covid19@hrknowledge.com.

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