

April 2, 2020

Dear CT REALTOR®:

Below is information assembled from the Connecticut Department of Labor (DOL) including when and how real estate independent contractors among others will be able to file for Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA).

CTR is extremely pleased to learn that real estate brokerage and sales activities by independent contractors are presently contemplated to fall within the state implementation of the PUA program under the descriptions provided below.

Please note this section in italics below is verbatim from the DOL update:

*The Federal CARES Act allows self-employed individuals and independent contractors, who are normally denied regular unemployment benefits, to receive benefits through the federally-funded 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 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 contracts and will also provide the Labor Department with more of an opportunity to keep working on the backlog to prepare for the PUA program.*

Our CTR legal hotline cannot provide further interpretation or guidance than what we are able to get directly from the staff at the Department of Labor.

This information is as of April 2, 2020 at 11:00 AM. **Like all guidance, anything can change at any time and CTR will continue to strive to give you the best information and updates we can as things evolve.**

- CONNECTICUT REALTORS®

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**From CT Department of Labor – 4/2/20 at 11 AM**

#### **4-1-2020 CTDOL update on assisting the public during this Pandemic**

The Connecticut Department of Labor is working diligently to serve its residents and appreciates the public's patience as it works to process the thousands of claims that have been filed the last two weeks. All states are struggling to keep with IT systems are crashing, phone systems are crashing.

Typically the agency receives 3,000 new claims a week; in the last two weeks it has received more than 200,000 claims – more than one year's worth of claims in just over two weeks.

Of these claims the agency has processed nearly 80,000 by shifting staff responsibilities, borrowing former DOL staff that have gone to other agencies, and retirees.

Currently there is a five-week backlog for processing claims. Typically, claims processed in less than a week.

It will take some time to process all of these claims, but CTDOl is going as fast as it can and all claims will be retroactive to the date you filed.

The agency is looking at ways to streamline the usual required process by implementing a fast-track system. If it works, and we hope it will, it will help further automate the system. We'll get back to you with more information on that.

To help speed processing: select the "Temporary Shutdown" option which provides return date of 6 weeks or less. (This will require an employer registration ID number which can be found on the separation packet).

The DOL offers an online tutorial that walks you through the process.

<http://www.ctdol.state.ct.us/UI-Online/Guide%20for%20Filing%20CT%20Unemployment%20Claims.pdf>

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In order to program in the new federal UI programs, in addition to its IT staff, CTDOl has called back retirees to help, have BEST and DAS assisting and have 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
- Have statewide sister agency IT experts on site with DOL IT experts – working together
- Have multiple vendors on site keeping watch of functioning day and night.
- recruiting COBOL and [file.net](http://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**

FAQs updated daily on CTDOl website

<http://www.ctdol.state.ct.us/DOLCOVIDFAQ.PDF>

Tutorial for filing Unemployment claims (pictorial step-by-step for accuracy)

<http://www.ctdol.state.ct.us/UI-Online/Guide%20for%20Filing%20CT%20Unemployment%20Claims.pdf>

CTDOl's digital filing platform is open online 24/7 – unlike any other state in the nation. File application here [www.filectui.com](http://www.filectui.com) (accessible computer and mobile device)

General questions may be submitted to [dol.webhelp@ct.gov](mailto:dol.webhelp@ct.gov) . A response can be expected in 3 to 5 business days, depending on volume.

Our American Job Centers are closed to in-person visits, but claimants may call [860- 263-6975](tel:860-263-6975)

or [203-455-2653](tel:203-455-2653) for general information concerning unemployment benefits.  
Unemployment claims cannot be processed or expedited by calling this telephone service.

**In addition to processing thousands of claims, CTDOL is also looking at how to program the three federal stimulus unemployment programs into its 40-year-old COBAL system**

### Federal Stimulus

#### **Pandemic Unemployment Assistance – PUA (up to 39 weeks – 26 state and 13 federal weeks)**

For any individual that previously was not eligible for regular extended benefits, such as self employed. Also, unemployed individuals who have exhausted regular state benefits.

Individuals must be able and available to work unless they can not work because of the certain 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, 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 (March 29 – July 31, 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
- Increases the average CT benefit from approx. \$400 to \$1,000/wk
- The additional \$600 is applicable to regular and Shared Work UI, Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA), and Pandemic Emergency Unemployment Compensation (PEUC).

#### **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**.
    - Commissioner has waived this work search requirement for state UI benefits, but as of now, work search is required for this federal program. Possibly, a waiver for work search may be provided by the federal government.

## **Challenges implementing the three federal stimulus programs**

CTDOL is currently working on a new system for processing claims with the plan to have it operating mid-2021. That work unfortunately must be put on hold as we ask our IT staff, vendors and BEST to re-program the 40-year-old system comprised of a COBOL mainframe and four other separate systems. This is not a fully-automated system and requires manual determination for some steps. The agency is trying to automate as much as possible the new federal programs.

Because the federally-funded UI program has seen significant cuts in past years, staff is down by about 35%, so the agency is accessing and calling upon retired and transferred workers with IT and UI experience from all our state agencies. Also working with vendors, national UI experts, and IT experts from DOL, sister agencies, OPM, DAS, etc.

CTDOL is fortunate to be part of the ReEmployUSA five-state consortium made up of Connecticut, Maine, Rhode Island, Mississippi and Oklahoma. CT joined the consortium in order to build a new system more quickly, and now this 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.