Number of Initial Claims Plateauing While Thousands of Applicants Access PUA Portal
More Than 50,000 PUA Claims Filed in First Three Days of Launch

SPRINGFIELD – The Illinois Department of Employment Security (IDES) today released new statewide data showing the department processed 72,671 new initial claims for regular unemployment benefits during the week ending May 9. The department has now processed 1,076,461 claims for regular unemployment benefits from March 1 through May 9. This amount is nearly 11.5 times the number of claims the department processed over the same period last year, when IDES processed just 87,000 claims for regular unemployment benefits.

IDES has processed 33,729 Pandemic Emergency Unemployment Compensation claims (PEUC), which provides up to 13 weeks' worth of 100% federally funded benefits to individuals who have exhausted their regular state unemployment benefits. PEUC is potentially available for weeks beginning on or after March 29, 2020 and continuing through the week ending December 26, 2020.

While the number of initial claims for regular benefits has plateaued in the last two weeks, IDES will experience an increase in overall claims processed when the federal Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA) claims data becomes available Thursday, May 21, 2020. Launched on May 11, more than 50,000 PUA claims have been filed through the new portal in the first three days of operation. IDES expects the number of claimants accessing the new unemployment system to continue to grow in the coming days and weeks.

Statewide unemployment claims data, which reflects activity for the week prior, is made available on the IDES website every Thursday afternoon. PUA claims data will follow these same federal embargo provisions, with this week's data available on Thursday, May 21. Previous initial claims data has undergone a revision to properly account for the number of successfully processed claims.

Workers who believe they may be eligible for new federal benefits under the Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA) program, must *first* apply for regular unemployment insurance *before* applying for benefits under PUA when a new application portal opens on Monday via the IDES website.

Claimants who receive an eligibility determination of $0 can then appeal that decision by providing verification of wages earned or they can submit a claim for PUA benefits. Claimants who have already applied for and been denied regular unemployment benefits can submit a claim through the new PUA portal when it opens. Receiving a denial for regular unemployment benefits is a mandatory first step in determining eligibility for PUA.

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PUA provides 100% federally-funded unemployment benefits for individuals who are unemployed for specified COVID-19-related reasons and are not eligible for the state's regular unemployment insurance program, the extended benefit (EB) program under Illinois law, or the Pandemic Emergency Unemployment Compensation program (PEUC), including independent contractors and sole-proprietors. Up to 39 weeks' worth of benefits are potentially available under the program for COVID-19-related unemployment claims.

IDES contracted with Deloitte to implement and maintain the web-based PUA program. While a program of this magnitude would normally take up to a year to design and implement, the department successfully launched the online portal in four weeks.

PUA claims will be backdated to the individuals' first week of unemployment, but no earlier than February 2, 2020, and will continue for as long as the individual remains unemployed as a result of COVID-19, but no later than the week ending December 26, 2020. The program is similar to the federal Disaster Unemployment Assistance program which provides unemployment benefits in response to local disasters.

Those with questions or in need of assistance with unemployment benefits at this time are encouraged to visit IDES.Illinois.gov.

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