



COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS  
**THE GENERAL COURT**  
STATE HOUSE, BOSTON 02133-1053

Rosalin Acosta  
Secretary, Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development  
One Ashburton Place, Suite 2112  
Boston, MA 02108

September 24, 2020

Dear Secretary Acosta,

We are writing to you today regarding an urgent and time-sensitive request concerning the distribution of FEMA funds under the Lost Wages Assistance (LWA) program. We applaud the state for agreeing to take part in the program for six weeks. The additional benefits have made an enormous difference to many who are struggling without work during this difficult time.

However, we have also heard significant concern from constituents who receive traditional unemployment insurance benefits but whose benefit amounts fall below the \$100 threshold to qualify for LWA. While we are aware that the impetus for this threshold is the Executive Order, we find the \$100 threshold extremely unnecessary, arbitrary, and punitive to low-wage workers, the very people who have been hit hardest by the economic fallout from COVID. To add perspective, a person who is eligible for unemployment benefits for all the weeks LWA is available but whose benefits are \$76/week would be disqualified from receiving an extra \$1800. That means, for some, \$24/week is separating them from receiving this extra benefit; for others, though, it is as little as \$1.

This past week, Rhode Island, by Executive Order, temporarily increased the minimum benefit amount to \$100, thereby ensuring that everyone receiving benefits is entitled to LWA. In addition, New Hampshire also increased the weekly benefit amount to make sure that all individuals on regular UI are LWA eligible. We ask that Massachusetts do the same as its neighboring states, restoring equity to the distribution of LWA. This would benefit not only the recipients of those funds, but the entire state. If this helped even 1,000 people, it would result in an infusion of \$1.8 million into our state's economy. Not only does the increased purchasing power aid businesses in the state, but these benefits also contribute to taxes for state coffers.

We, therefore, ask that the Department of Unemployment Assistance quickly provide data on the number of individuals who are disqualified from LWA because of the threshold and then work with the Administration and Legislature to raise all ineligible claimants' Extended Benefits and regular UI benefits to the \$100 threshold for the six weeks of the LWA program and for individuals whose cases are resolved on appeal during the time the LWA money is available. As the \$100 threshold includes the dependency allowance and is not reduced by subsequent partial earnings, we have been informed that

the number of affected constituents is very small. As in the example above, an investment of only \$144 by the Commonwealth would yield additional benefits of \$1800 for the claimant, a return of nearly 13X. This is a very small investment that would ensure that our lowest wage workers in the state, who are the most vulnerable during this pandemic, are receiving the most help possible in this unprecedented moment of economic turmoil.

Thank you for your kind consideration and compassionate response. We look forward to a fruitful discussion as soon as possible to ensure that this necessary enhancement can be made before FEMA ends the distribution of LWA funds.

Respectfully,

Rep. Lindsay Sabadosa

Rep. Tram Nguyen

Sen. Pat Jehlen

Sen. Eric Lesser

Rep. Stephan Hay

Rep. Paul Mark

Rep. Christopher Hendricks

Rep. Tricia Farley-Bouvier

Rep. Steven Ultrino

Rep. Mindy Domb

Rep. David H.A. LeBoeuf

Rep. Maria Robinson

Rep. Peter Capano

Rep. Jack Patrick Lewis

Rep. Christina Minicucci

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Rep. Linda Dean Campbell

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Rep. Tami Gouveia

Rep. Kay Khan

Rep. Joan Meschino

Rep. Kenneth Gordon

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Sen. Jason Lewis

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Rep. Alan Silvia

Rep. Jon Santiago

cc: Michael Doheny, Undersecretary and General Counsel

Speaker Robert DeLeo

Senate President Karen Spilka