



POLICY ALERT

Center for Public Policy Priorities

900 Lydia Street Austin, Texas 78702 PH: 512.320.0222/FAX: 512.320.0227 www.cppp.org

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For More Information: Don Baylor, baylor@cppp.org

UPDATE ON UNEMPLOYMENT ASSISTANCE FOR HURRICANE EVACUEES

Benefit Levels and Job Search Requirements Could Increase for Texas Evacuees Who Remain Jobless

More than 300,000 displaced Louisiana workers (62,000 of whom are living in Texas) have been collecting jobless benefits as a result of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, but as of November 27, the rules have changed. Now, many displaced workers living in Texas may qualify for additional assistance, including up to two extra weeks of benefits. But in order to continue collecting assistance, these workers must report their job search efforts to the Louisiana Department of Labor on a weekly basis, ending the emergency exemption previously authorized by Governor Kathleen Blanco.

Approximately 240,000, or 77%, of jobless evacuees are receiving Unemployment Insurance (UI), while the remaining evacuees are receiving Disaster Unemployment Assistance (DUA) through Louisiana's Department of Labor (LADOL). To date, displaced workers residing in Texas have received \$2,007,749 in DUA benefits, and \$16,858,687 in UI benefits, according to the Texas Workforce Commission.

An individual's unemployment or jobless status depends upon several factors, including the state of current residency, former employment status, and current jobless benefit status. **What follows are the latest options for displaced workers on UI or DUA:**

If an Individual's Unemployment Insurance Benefit has Expired or is Set to Expire:

- The individual may be eligible for a supplemental assistance through a joint federal-state program, Extended Benefits (EB). The EB program officially began on October 30, when Louisiana's unemployment level surpassed the threshold established by federal law. If the evacuees are living in Louisiana, they may qualify for an additional 13 weeks of Extended Benefits. Evacuees living in every other state, including Texas, are only eligible for two.
- LADOL is requesting that individuals register by contacting 1-800-430-8076 or by visiting www.laworks.net. For more information, see: http://www.ladol.state.la.us/qm_pressrelease_details.asp?PRseqno=371

If an Individual is Currently Receiving Unemployment Insurance (from LADOL) and Residing in Texas:

- To continue receiving Unemployment Insurance, the individual must now file weekly claims or job search reports by calling 225-342-8731 or 504-568-7385. For more information, visit <http://www.ldol.state.la.us/forms/ui/easycall.pdf>

If an Individual is Currently Receiving the Minimum DUA Benefit (\$98 per week) and Residing in Texas:

- The individual must now file weekly claims by calling 888-217-2440. See <http://www.ldol.state.la.us/forms/ui/easycall.pdf> for more information.
- The individual could qualify for a retroactive payment and ongoing increase in DUA benefits, up to \$258 per week. To maintain eligibility and to qualify for recalculated benefits, the individual must provide wage and employment documentation within 90 days from the initial DUA application.
- To apply, the individual must fax a 2004 tax return to the Louisiana Department of Labor at 316-362-4288 or, if a tax return is unavailable, contact the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) at 866-562-5227 and request that IRS fax a copy to the Louisiana Department of Labor. When the wage information is processed, the individual will be notified of the recalculated benefits.

For more information about the changes to the unemployment rules, see:

http://www.nelp.org/news/pressreleases/katrina_increase.cfm

http://www.ldol.state.la.us/qm_pressrelease_details.asp?PRseqno=367

http://www.ldol.state.la.us/qm_pressrelease_details.asp?PRseqno=370

For information related to Hurricane Rita and Texas residents, see:

<http://www.twc.state.tx.us/news/ritainfo.html>