April 1, 2020

Illinois to Implement Expanded Unemployment Benefits Under the CARES Act

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As part of the recently enacted $2 trillion Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act), Congress included expanded unemployment benefits in partnership with state unemployment agencies. The CARES Act creates a pandemic unemployment assistance program through Dec. 31, 2020, and retroactively to Jan. 27, 2020. The CARES Act will provide payment to those not traditionally eligible for unemployment benefits (self-employed, independent contractors), along with others who are unable to work due to the COVID-19 public health emergency, (e.g., furlough, layoff, reduced hours, etc.).

In addition to eligible individuals receiving an extra $600 per week for up to four months and regular state benefits through July 31, 2020, the CARES Act also provides 13 weeks of benefits for those who remain unemployed after state benefits are exhausted. In the case of individuals' hours being reduced rather than a layoff, the CARES Act creates "short-time compensation" programs whereby they receive a prorated unemployment benefit.

The Illinois Department of Employment Security (IDES) announced Tuesday that Illinois is in the process of implementing the CARES Act benefits. However, the benefits are not yet available, and IDES instructed individuals to "not call to inquire about these new federal programs. Our employees are processing applications for current benefits. Further details about the new federal programs and how to apply will be made available once they have been finalized."