

Bay State extends aid to jobless

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Unemployed workers in Massachusetts will get more help from the state and federal governments.

Those exhausting their jobless benefits in Massachusetts can collect unemployment benefits for up to seven additional weeks, following an extension recently approved by Congress.

This extension follows an earlier, 13-week extension approved in July, meaning unemployed workers in Massachusetts can stretch their initial 26 weeks of benefits by as many 20 additional weeks.

The second extension went into effect last week. It applies to those who have exhausted their first extension and file a claim by March 28, 2009. The Division of Unemployment Assistance began sending notifications and applications to eligible claimants by mail last week. More information about the extended benefit program is available at www.mass.gov/dua.

The state also said it would offer Saturday hours for people who want to apply for unemployment compensation by phone. Teleclaim Centers will be open from 8 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. through the end of the year. The state had already said it would increase weekday hours to run from 8:30 a.m. to 6:30 p.m.

"We recognize that individuals are facing long wait times on our phone lines, and we are working hard, through increased staffing and extended hours, to decrease the wait times," Secretary of Labor and Workforce Development Suzanne M. Bump said in a statement.

The Globe reported last week that a surge in layoffs was straining the state's ability to process unemployment claims, leading to long waits for those filing by phone and long lines at walk-in centers.

People who live in the 617 or 781 area codes should call 617-626-6800 to reach the Teleclaim Centers. All others can call 877-626-6800. ■