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As Congress Debates Unemployment Extension, Advocate Says Payments Allow People To Live With Dignity

New Hampshire Public Radio | By Shehzil Zahid

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File Photo

Congress is in negotiations to extend federal unemployment benefits under the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act.



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Both Democrats and Republicans have put forward proposals to extend benefits with different outcomes. Democrats would rather see \$600 in benefits continue until the end of the year, but Republicans want to reduce the benefits to \$200 and eventually replace the benefits with a program that would pay workers 70% of the income they collected before they lost their job.

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wages of many workers and discourages them from returning to work.

Marta Hurgin works with the Legal Advice and Referral Center in New Hampshire. Hurgin said the myth that people on unemployment benefits are lazy and do not want to work is just wrong.

“Unemployment isn’t a ticket to getting wealthy or rich,” said Hurgin, “It should just allow people to live with dignity and the \$600 allowed people to do that.”

She said that it is crucial that benefits continue with a meaningful amount, adding that the \$600 benefit had helped people keep up to date with their bills.

“The \$600 has been really life changing and life saving for a lot of clients,” said Hurgin.

56-year-old Cherie Greene is a temp worker in Manchester who’s been out of a job since April. She said she started collecting unemployment benefits soon after and the extra boost has been life-changing for her.

“While we had that extra \$600, for the first time in my life, I had enough money to start a savings account,” said Greene.

The benefits allowed Greene to save about \$5,000, but her savings won’t last her more than two months if she is not able to find a job soon. Her age and preexisting health conditions make her wary of seeking onsite work in the pandemic, but she’s begun to interview for onsite positions because not much remote work is available for her.

She said she would rather have a job to support herself when unemployment benefits end.

The benefits are set to expire at the end of the week, on July 31.



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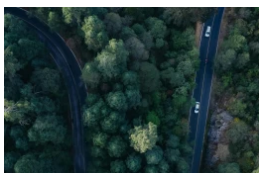
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NH News

NH used its federal COVID aid wisely, a new analysis says

[Annmarie Timmins - New Hampshire Bulletin, December 21, 2023](#)

New Hampshire allotted less to one-time expenses than most other jurisdictions included in the report.

New England News

Former Mass. lawmaker accused of collecting pandemic unemployment benefits while working for NH company

[Associated Press, November 17, 2023](#)

Dean Tran is accused of collecting around \$30,000 in pandemic unemployment benefits, while working a consulting job with a New Hampshire-based automotive parts company.



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Business and Economy

Sununu vetoes bill targeting interest on overpaid unemployment compensation

Rick Green, Keene Sentinel, August 1, 2023

Richard Lavers, deputy commissioner of New Hampshire Employment Security, said present law allows the state to eventually charge 1% interest monthly on owed principal.



Health



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At least 45,000 in NH have lost Medicaid since COVID-19 protections expired

Paul Cuno-Booth, June 12, 2023

State officials said they are working to make sure people who no longer qualify for Medicaid know about other health insurance options.



NH News

As COVID reaches 'aftertimes,' hospitals drop mask mandates

David Brooks - Concord Monitor, April 7, 2023

Concord Hospital and Dartmouth Health are among the hospitals allowing for face masks to be optional.

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