

Washington Unemployed Losing 26 Weeks of Benefits

Local News

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Washington state's long-term unemployment benefits will decrease by 26 weeks after April 21, state officials announced Tuesday. Officials with the Employment Security Department said the decrease was triggered after the state's unemployment rate dropped to 8.2 percent in February. Regular unemployment benefits last up to 26 weeks and are paid by the state. However, two long-term benefit programs are funded by the federal government, and are triggered on and off by the state's unemployment rate. Because the state's three-month average fell below 8.5 percent, the first program, known as emergency unemployment compensation, will shrink from 53 weeks of benefits to 47 weeks, officials said. The second program, known as extended benefits, currently pays up to 20 weeks of benefits after an unemployed worker has run out of both regular and emergency benefits. Because the current state unemployment rate is less than 10 percent higher than same period 3 years ago, it is being completely eliminated on April 21.

In total, the maximum weeks of unemployment benefits will drop from 99 to 73 for most eligible workers. "The good news, if any is here, is that our unemployment rate is getting better," said Sheryl Hutchison, a spokeswoman for the Employment Security Department. However, she noted that "the loss of these benefits will make the situation a lot more urgent for families around the state." Officials estimate that approximately 12,500 unemployed workers will lose benefits immediately when extended benefits end on April 21. More than 11,000 workers will exhaust their emergency benefits within eight weeks after April 21. Another 40,000 people could run out of unemployment benefits during the final six months of the year. The department said that currently, about 175,000 people are claiming either regular, emergency or extended benefits each week. About 76,000 people in the state have claimed all of their available unemployment benefits to date. Those who are still unemployed and claiming long-term benefits will soon be receiving notices from the department informing them of the change.