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FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT: Delores Rose 573-751-1518

Missouri Implements \$600 Federal Pandemic Unemployment Compensation Program; Retroactive Payments Expected to Begin the Week of April 12, 2020

Jefferson City, MO — The Missouri Department of Labor and Industrial Relations' (DOLIR) Division of Employment Security (DES) received its first operational guidance related to the Federal Pandemic Unemployment Compensation (FPUC) program under the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act of 2020. The FPUC program is just one of the new programs provided under the CARES Act.

The FPUC does not include any provisions or benefits for eligible self-employed workers. Late Sunday DOLIR received federal guidance on that provision, the Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA) program. Because of the complexity of the PUA, DOLIR will need to analyze the information to effectively set up programming to implement the federal guidance. DOLIR will proceed as expeditiously as possible.

The FPUC provides that those eligible for at least one dollar (\$1 US) of unemployment compensation benefits during the week will receive an additional \$600 per week as a federal supplement. The DES expects FPUC payments to begin going out to eligible recipients as early as the week of April 12, 2020, after the technology updates and procedures get implemented. "We have already begun the process for the required system changes and have been anxiously awaiting the final guidance to code the specific rules and procedures into DES' online customer service portal (UInteract). Once the changes have been made and properly tested, the new code will go into production, and the new program payments will begin," said DES Director Chris Slinkard.

The \$600 federal supplement for those that are unemployed will be effective the week beginning March 29, 2020 for those filing their unemployment payment request for that week. Payments will be made retroactively for claims filed on or after March 29, 2020. The last payable week for the \$600 supplement will be the week ending July 25, 2020. During the FPUC program period, claimants who are eligible to receive regular unemployment weekly payments will receive the additional \$600 FPUC payment.

Missouri's regular unemployment insurance program continues to be in effect. Under Missouri unemployment law, most people who are currently employed and quit are not eligible for unemployment benefits. If an employer offers sick leave and/or other leave options to address COVID-19 in lieu of layoffs, then a person who quits on his/her own volition would not qualify for unemployment benefits. At this point, no federal legislation changes this part of Missouri's program eligibility for unemployment.

The CARES Act was signed into law on Friday, March 27, 2020. DOLIR Director Anna Hui, acting at the direction of Governor Parson, signed an agreement with the US Department of Labor (USDOL) on Saturday, March 28, 2020. The cost of the additional \$600 is 100 percent federally funded. The FPUC program is administered through a voluntary agreement between the state and the USDOL. Implementation costs and ongoing administrative costs for this program are also 100 percent federally funded.

The DES is taking an unprecedented number of calls. "Many claimants are calling with questions unrelated to filing a new claim. Our top priority is the filing of new claims for those who have found themselves without work through no fault of their own," said Slinkard. He advises, "Those with questions about the new laws or statutes regarding existing claims, should read our online FAQs, log in to UInteract to check their account status, and read the correspondence sent to them. This is so we can dedicate our time on the phones to those who need to file a new claim and do not have Internet access."

Unemployed workers are encouraged to file their unemployment claims online at uinteract.labor.mo.gov as soon as they are separated from their employer. For convenience, the UInteract website is available 24/7 and mobile-friendly. Over 90 percent of initial claims are now filed online.

For questions and answers related to the coronavirus and unemployment, as well as other effects on employment, visit labor.mo.gov/coronavirus frequently for updates.

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