

Governor Baker agrees to extend max length of unemployment benefits

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State House News Service

Gov. Charlie Baker on Tuesday evening signed into law a suite of unemployment insurance relief measures that are aimed at helping employers and claimants during the coronavirus pandemic.

The bill signed into law (S 2618) includes an expansion of the maximum allowable claims period from 26 weeks to 30 weeks for any week in which claims exceed 100,000; a provision exempting employers' experience ratings from impacts of COVID-19 and the current state of emergency; and lifts a cap on dependency benefits that currently stands at 50 percent. The legislation bounced between the House and Senate in different versions since April and lawmakers got it to Baker's desk last week before Memorial Day weekend.

Senate Minority Leader Bruce Tarr last week said the bill includes "a number of important tools ... to help not only the integrity of the unemployment insurance system but also to help those who are dependent upon it, and for whom so many have become dependent as a result."

The state's unemployment rate surged to 15.1% in April as the state lost 623,000 jobs. Since March 15, Massachusetts labor officials have received more than 1.23 million new claims for traditional unemployment insurance or the expanded eligibility Pandemic Unemployment Assistance program.