

# The Providence Journal

## Unemployment benefit goes up, reflecting rise in cost of living

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CRANSTON — The maximum weekly unemployment benefit will go up modestly starting next month.

For those without dependents, it will be \$551, up from \$546 now.

For those with dependents, the maximum will be \$688, up from \$682 now.

The increases apply only to those who start collecting benefits after July 1, said Raymond A. Filippone, assistant director of the state Department of Labor and Training who oversees unemployment programs.

The increases will not apply to those who are currently collecting jobless benefits; their benefit amounts will continue to be based on the old rules, Filippone said.

Technically, the increases will apply only for unemployment claims filed with an effective date of July 4 or later, he said. “It affects people filing a new claim with an effective date of July 4” or afterward, Filippone said in an interview at the agency’s headquarters on Tuesday.

About 32,700 people were drawing unemployment benefits through the agency for the week that ended June 9. The agency distributed about \$14 million in benefits for the week that ended June 11, Filippone said.

Kate Brewster, executive director of the Poverty Institute, of Providence, a social-policy think tank, said that the increase in the maximum weekly benefit will help.

“As the cost of living rises every year, it’s important that we adjust our unemployment benefits to coincide with that, so that people don’t fall further behind,” Brewster said.

The state labor agency sets the maximum weekly unemployment benefit around this time each year. It is calculated at 67 percent of the average Rhode Island weekly wage. (For 2009, the average weekly wage was \$822.48, according to state labor agency spokeswoman Laura Hart.)

About 25 percent of people collecting unemployment benefits through the state labor agency are at the maximum weekly benefit rate, Filippone said.

In general, someone who is laid off and eligible for unemployment benefits can figure on collecting a benefit equal to about 60 percent of his or her gross weekly salary — though the benefit cannot exceed the applicable maximum weekly amount, Filippone said.

Also on Tuesday, the agency set the new maximum weekly benefit for the state's Temporary Disability Insurance (TDI) program at \$700 for someone without dependents, up from \$694 now. For someone with dependents, the maximum weekly TDI benefit will be \$945, up from \$936 now.

The new TDI benefit amounts will apply for claimants who begin their benefit year on or after July 1. Thus, for those currently collecting TDI, benefit amounts will continue to be based on the old rules, Filippone said.

(The TDI maximum is calculated at 85 percent of the average weekly wage.)

In general, someone who suffers an injury or illness outside of work and who is eligible for TDI can figure on collecting an amount equal to about 80 percent of his or her gross weekly salary — though the benefit cannot exceed the applicable maximum weekly amount, Filippone said.

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