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Chairperson

Committee on Environment, Revenue and Taxation, Labor,
Procurement, and Statistics, Research, and Planning

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Senator Perez Joins Multilateral Effort to Rectify PUA Eligibility

Guam, February 2, 2021 – On Monday, Senator Perez held a Guam Department of Labor informational hearing to provide status updates on the unemployment program authorized by Continued Assistance to Unemployed Workers Act of 2020 (Continued Assistance Act of 2020) that was signed into law on December 27, 2020.

The act extends PUA with a weekly benefit amount (WBA) of up to \$345 for an additional 11 weeks until March 14, 2020 and with a phase out period until April 5, 2020. The act also reauthorizes FPUC for an additional \$300 weekly amount until March 14, 2020 with no phase out period.

The latest guidance from USDOL clarified that those workers with reduced hours are not eligible to receive additional PUA and FPUC under the new legislation. Although GDOL does not segregate data of claimants who are unemployed or underemployed, the impact is expected to be significant for many workers on Guam.

GDOL Director David Dell'Isola, who has been in constant communication with USDOL to reconsider the latest guidance, has recommended to those with reduced hours to withhold making claims, instead of risking having to repay the benefits. Should the benefits be reinstated for workers with reduced hours, claims can be backdated, if applicable, to December 1, 2020.

For many states with unemployment programs coverage is provided for those with reduced hours. PUA is the stopgap measure for those left out of their state unemployment programs. Guam is unique in that PUA is the only unemployment assistance available to our people.

Congressman Michael San Nicolas has written a letter to USDOL making the argument that PUA is meant to complement states' unemployment insurance (UI) programs, and should be treated as entirely separate. The Congressman further stated his position that reduced-hours workers have been impacted by closures, and should continue to avail of PUA. "When we have executive orders that are reducing occupational capacities, you are in effect closing down portions of the business," Congressman San Nicolas said.

Governor Leon Guerrero and her team are also closely working with Congressman San Nicolas and USDOL advocating for clarified guidance that would reinstate the unemployment benefits for workers with reduced hours.

“This issue needs to be resolved quickly, as the program ends soon,” Senator Perez said. “I am committed to advocating for the people in our community who’ve been left out of PUA and now find themselves in challenging situations due to the new guidelines outlined by the U.S. Department of Labor.”

Senator Sabina Perez announced on Tuesday she is submitting a letter to President Biden urging for assistance to reinstate unemployment assistance to workers with reduced hours.

Senator Perez’s action is part of a collective effort with Governor Lou Leon Guerrero, Congressman San Nicolas, and Guam Labor Director Dell’Isola, who have been working in their capacities to rectify the issue.

The Guam Department of Labor will continue to assist the public with PUA applications next week from 9 am to 3 pm by appointment at both Dededo and Yoña sites.

Senator Perez is advising Guam residents to check the Guam DOL’s website for up-to-date information: dol.guam.gov.

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