

Information on Unemployment Benefits in Response to COVID-19

Updated March 25, 2020

With statewide orders to limit gatherings to 10 people or less and with the mandatory closure of many businesses around the Commonwealth of Virginia, the Virginia Synod has compiled a list of basic information regarding unemployment benefits. The objective of this document is to make it easier to access these services in this extraordinary time.

Please Note: The Virginia Synod is not an expert in unemployment benefits or in unemployment law. If you have questions, please contact the Virginia Employment Commission or a lawyer who specializes in unemployment claims.

For Employers

Since churches typically don't pay unemployment insurance taxes, can employees from churches file for unemployment benefits?

Currently, since churches and small non-profits are typically don't pay unemployment insurance taxes, church employees are not typically eligible for unemployment insurance. Some churches elect to pay unemployment insurance voluntarily and their employees would typically be eligible. According to Governor Northam's call with Virginia Faith Leaders on 3/23/20, Virginia seems to be working with the Federal government to try and change this rule, but it is still in effect as of 3/23/20.

The website Church Law & Tax has posted an article with more information on unemployment benefits and church employees. You can find the article using this link:

<https://www.churchlawandtax.com/web/2020/march/layoffs-coronavirus-unemployment-benefits.html>

For Employees

Where do I start?

I'm Unemployed, Now What? (Document created by Virginia Employment Commission)

<http://www.vec.virginia.gov/unemployed/resources/im-unemployed-now-what>

Please note that despite what the above document says, according Gov. Northam's Press Release of March 17, 2020, "Governor Northam has directed the Commissioner of the Virginia Employment Commission to waive the one-week waiting period to ensure workers can receive benefits as soon as possible."

My workplace is temporarily closed, and I do not have paid leave and will not receive a paycheck. What can I do?

"You may file a claim for Unemployment Insurance (UI) benefits with the Virginia Employment Commission (VEC). To receive benefits, you must meet certain minimum requirements, including having sufficient past earnings and an immigration status that allows you to work. If VEC approves your claim, you will receive a weekly benefit payment that is dependent on your past earnings. The maximum benefit amount is \$378 for up to 26 weeks. For more information about Unemployment Insurance benefits and to file a claim, please visit <http://www.vec.virginia.gov/node/11699>." – VA Gov. Northam Executive Order 53 FAQ document:

<https://www.governor.virginia.gov/media/governorvirginiagov/governor-of-virginia/pdf/Frequently-Asked-Questions-Regarding-EO-53.pdf> (Accessed 3/23/20)

How do I file a claim?

Looking for Questions and Answers about Unemployment Claims related to the Coronavirus, you can find general information on this site: <http://www.vec.virginia.gov/qa-coronavirus>

This site from the Virginia Employment Commission offers information on unemployment insurance in both English and Spanish: VA Employment Commission: Unemployment Insurance (Info in English and Spanish)

<http://www.vec.virginia.gov/unemployed>

If you are filing a claim, the link on the Virginia Employment Commission will send you to the VA Workforce Connection Front Page. Here's the direct link to that page:

<https://www.vawc.virginia.gov/vosnet/>

How much am I eligible for in Unemployment Benefits?

Benefit Range

According to the Virginia Employment Commission website on March 25, 2020, the minimum amount that a qualified individual can receive is \$60 for up to 26 weeks and the maximum amount that a qualified individual can receive per week is \$378 for up to 26 weeks. The amount is based on what you have earned during the qualifying periods. *(Please notes these minimum and maximum amounts may be changed in the future by changes to Federal law.)*

There is a table that shows the benefit available based on one's salary during qualifying periods. The table is confusing and hard to interpret, but it can be found here: Unemployment Benefit Table:

<https://www.vec.virginia.gov/sites/default/files/bentable.pdf>

There is an Online Benefit Calculator that is not operated by the Commonwealth of Virginia, but is much easier to use. If you decide to use this calculator, ignore the advertisement at the top of the page. It may have a "start" button, but it is an ad. Scroll down on the page to the calculator function that allows you to enter salary amounts. This will give you an idea of the total benefit per week that you may be eligible to receive. This is only an estimating tool. It is not a promise of benefits and it is not the place where you apply for benefits. You can access the calculator here:

<https://fileunemployment.org/virginia/va-calculator/>