

The Case for Further Robust Worker Focused COVID Relief

We need a relief solution that meets the needs of workers directly affected by this pandemic. Relief should:

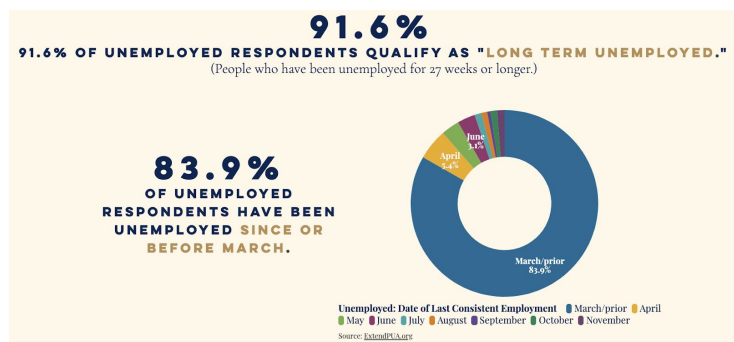
- Fill in the gap created by months of government inaction and not solved due to the lack of retroactivity in the December relief bill.
- Cover **all** unemployed, underemployed, and low-wage essential workers in one solution so that no issue is pitted against the other.
- Extend comprehensive worker-focused relief until the pandemic is over with smart economic triggers.
- Pass by mid-February to avoid lapses in unemployment relief (again).

Retroactivity: The Constituent Need Being Ignored.

Unemployed and underemployed workers support President Biden's Rescue Plan as a base to build from. One of the major concerns we are hearing: just like the December bill, is that it ignores the last 6 months of suffering.

Elected leaders need to take responsibility for the fact that the American people suffered while our federal government failed to pass legislation for 6 months. Millions of people must be made whole in order to move forward. Congress is currently placing the financial burden of their inaction on the American people and our families.

When the FPUC \$600/wk expired at the end of July 2020, [8 million](#) more people plunged below the poverty line. Millions more kept themselves afloat only by amassing deep debt. **Cutting the \$600 for 23 weeks shorted workers \$13,800 each over the last 6 months.** Underemployed workers and those ineligible for UI were without any assistance at all.



Nearly [12 million renters](#) owe an average of \$5,850 in back rent and utilities. In a recent survey we conducted of workers about their pandemic debt, debt *from this crisis* ranged from \$1,500 to \$110,000 with an average of \$10K per worker. Respondents on average said their debt would take 5 years to repay without any retroactive relief; several people said they'll never be able to recover from their debt. Some of these workers had drained their savings accounts, withdrawing amounts ranging from \$3,000 to \$30,000. For reference: respondents' usual (pre-pandemic) incomes range from \$12,000/yr to \$150,000/yr.

How Do We Solve It?

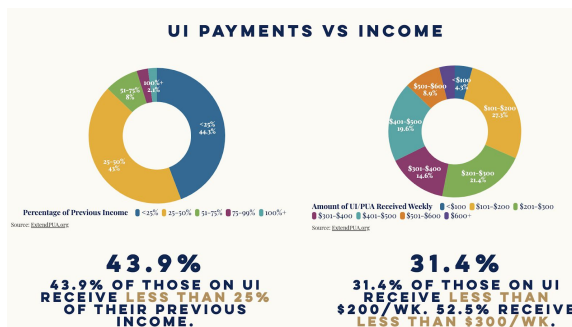
Either make FPUC and stimulus checks retroactive OR pass a larger direct payment targeted at both. \$2K isn't stimulus, it's survival money and it's nowhere close to how much we need to survive. FPUC \$600 x 23 missed weeks = \$13,800. Monthly stimulus checks would have equaled \$9,600. A significant direct payment of **at least** \$6,000 or a similar refundable tax credit or rebate should be made available immediately upon bill passage or completion of 2020 taxes. This payment can be more targeted to those workers directly affected:

- Eligibility based on two scenarios. Recipients must either have been:
 1. Collecting UI or PUA at some point between July 25 - Dec 26, 2020. *OR*
 2. Under a specified income cap based on **2020** income.
 - a. Unemployment payments should not be considered as part of eligibility "income" for 2020. If it is, the cap should be higher so even those receiving max benefits are eligible.
 - b. The goal is to include unemployed workers on unemployment as well as those who do not receive unemployment, underemployed workers, and low-wage essential workers.
 - c. The payment is intended as wage replacement rather than stimulus so the full amount would not need to be distributed to young dependents.

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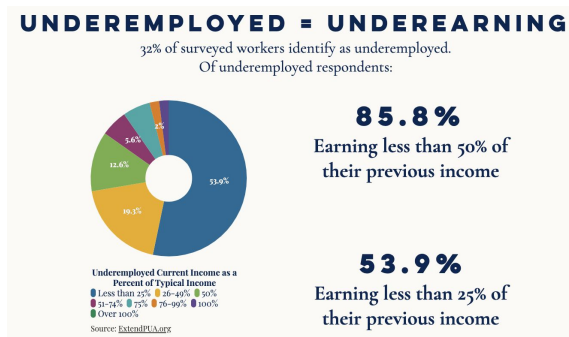
Why This Fight?

- The FPUC expired July 26th, leaving tens of millions of Americans surviving on just state UI or PUA payments for TWENTY THREE WEEKS. State UI and PUA are not, and were never designed to be, a livable wage in any state. In Oklahoma, the average is just \$44/week.
- In our [survey](#) of 1,300 unemployed workers, we found that 44% are receiving less than ¼ of their previous income.
- The FPUC has been in every bill proposal, including Senator McConnell's own bill in the Fall; it has had bipartisan support at the level of at least \$300 since its expiration in July. The partisanship that deterred any bill's passage does not mean we should forget the clear need.
- Millions are in deep debt. Over 10 million people are behind on rent. More have paid their rent with high interest credit cards, loans, or savings, which aren't helped with rent relief.



Relief Must Include All Affected Workers:

- 76 million people in the US were unemployed and only about 25 million of those people received unemployment. These workers received NO assistance since the \$1,200 check over 6 months ago.
- Tens of millions of Americans have been severely underemployed throughout this crisis, including our essential workers.
- Some who have been unemployed have been forced back into the workforce in unsafe positions, settling for underemployment to close the gaps left by the lapse of FPUC and unlivable unemployment. 32% of our [worker-respondents](#) said they are currently underemployed. 85.8% of those people are earning less than half of their previous income. 53.9% of them are earning less than a quarter of their previous income. We need direct aid payments to underemployed workers so they can pull their way out of the debt accrued over those 6 months while still paying for their current needs.
- Eligibility should be determined independent of immigration status.



Other Workers Needs for this Bill:

- **Additional weeks of PUA, PEUC, and FPUC** that tier off in response to recovery triggers, rather than a predetermined date. The baseline would have to be the end of the pandemic.
 - These should not be based solely on the official unemployment rate, which leaves out too many people to be a reliable measure in this pandemic. In December, when the official unemployment rate was 6.7%, the ACTUAL unemployment rate was 11.4%. When taking SOME of the underemployment into account, 15.8% of workers were affected. (Source: EPI). We will need additional safeguards and considerations.
 - Legislation must take into consideration industries like live entertainment and hospitality that will struggle to return regardless of unemployment rate. In the Arts & Entertainment sector, unemployment was at 4.7% a year ago, popped up to 50% during the crisis, and is now still 18% officially (a low estimate.) (Source: BLS)

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- Unemployment and direct aid coverage **expanded to all affected workers in the US**, regardless of their immigration status.
- Stop taxing UI and forgive and refund UI and PUA taxes from 2020.
- **Enhanced federal social service assistance.** This should include:
 - Rent and mortgage relief for all affected, including, but not limited to, low income families.
 - Healthcare relief:
 - 100% subsidy for the COBRA program to protect workers' healthcare, and extension of eligibility to 36 months.
 - Expansion of Medicaid and requiring, not just allowing, all states to extend Medicaid coverage for COVID-19 testing to the uninsured.
 - A continued open enrollment period until the pandemic is over.
 - Food assistance - Extend enhanced SNAP benefits and expand eligibility, expand minimum and maximum payments, and suspend job-related requirements.
- **Relief for essential and frontline workers** by providing hazard pay, PPE, and workplace protections.
- **Funding for state and local governments** to strengthen their unemployment systems and pay out millions of backlogged claims, keep employees on payroll, and provide much-needed social services to individuals who are struggling.

There are no blue states or red states. We are People.

Who Is ExtendPUA.org:

ExtendPUA.org is a grassroots movement started by jobless citizens facing long-term unemployment and advocating for comprehensive COVID relief legislation focused on The People. Both Executive Directors of the organization are unemployed members of the entertainment industry. We began our advocacy in July and have accumulated an engaged base of over 25,000 people and a volunteer team who are all directly affected.

What We Do:

Resource Cultivating:

Our website provides information, resources, and tools for people to advocate to their elected officials directly. We've garnered over 40 national news media placements to encourage and empower others to advocate, as well as share our community's stories and connect workers directly to tell their stories to their elected leadership.

Constituent Lobbying:

We have set up 30 meetings directly with Senators and their staff, bringing over 100 constituents to tell their stories. We have followed up those meetings with letters from our organization and written and video stories from constituents, sharing a total of 300 stories so far.

Community and Coalition Building:

We have cultivated a community of the unemployed. We are directly engaged with 20,000 unemployed workers. We have also partnered with national and local organizations: Freelancers' Union, Live Events Coalition, NIVA, LEC, NITO, Unemployed Action/CPD, Spaces in Action, Restaurant Organizing Project, MWA, and more.

"ExtendPUA has advocates and affected workers in all 50 states. We are happy to meet with your office to discuss workers' pandemic relief needs further, send you stories from your constituents, or set up a meeting with your office and constituents to discuss further."

Stephanie Freed, Co-Founder, stephanie@extendpua.org