

# Memorandum

**TO:** Economic Transition, Stabilization and Workforce Development Advisory Commission  
**FROM:** Laurie Esau, DLI Commissioner  
**DATE:** May 3, 2021  
**SUBJECT:** Return-to-Work Bonus Program

## Overview

The Montana Department of Labor & Industry recommends the following Return-to-Work Bonus program for review and comment. This program provides a one-time bonus of \$1,200 to individuals who become employed after they have worked their first four weeks.

Businesses across all industries in Montana are fighting for workforce talent due to COVID-19. This program will help remedy the immediate need for workers by providing an incentive to reenter the workforce and fill immediate vacancies. This benefits employers by adding talent to sustain, return to or even expand business capacity, while also benefiting workers by providing additional money to help address obstacles that may be otherwise impeding their ability to return to the workforce.

This program will incentivize workers whose level of employment was reduced or eliminated due to the COVID-19 pandemic and help them to reengage with and reenter the workforce.

This program will also support employers whose labor forces and business models were compromised due to COVID-19 protocols and subsequent changes in customer behaviors and expectations.

The Department certifies that this proposal qualifies for funding pursuant to the American Rescue Plan Act and all applicable guidance.

## Allocation Request

- Up to \$15,000,000
  - There are approximately 25,000 active unemployment claims and 14,000 job vacancies posted with MontanaWorks.gov.

## Structure

- The Return-to-Work Bonus program will focus on individuals with an “active” unemployment claim as of the approval date who become employed and begin work.
- Bonuses will be available on a first-come first-served basis to individuals who become employed no later than Oct. 31, 2021.
- \$1,200 to individuals who discontinue receipt of unemployment benefits and return to work, paid upon completion of their 4th full week (28 days) of employment.

- \$1,200 is equivalent to 4 weeks of the enhanced benefit amount of \$300/week.
- Upon confirmation of completion of the 4th week of employment, bonus payments will be issued by DLI directly to the individual.
- Upon payment receipt, individuals will also be asked to contact their local public workforce system partner to discuss current employment and related career pathways and options. This contact will be voluntary.

### Eligibility

- Eligibility will be based on a list of “active” claims; those individuals who file a weekly certification for unemployment benefits for the week ending the Saturday prior to the approval date for this program.
- Return-to-Work ‘Tickets’ will be issued to eligible individuals, so they are aware of the opportunity.
- Individuals will only be eligible for one bonus.

### Application & Verification

- DLI will create an online form through which individuals will apply for the bonus.
- DLI will confirm eligibility per our master eligibility list and track the four-week period from the hire date.
- DLI will contact the individual to verify continued employment as of four weeks past the hire date.
- Confirmation of continued employment will be done via a combination of the following:
  - Verification that the individual has not filed a subsequent Unemployment Insurance claim.
  - Contact with the individual to provide paycheck stubs.
  - Contact with the employer to confirm hire and employment duration.
  - Cross-reference with the New Hire database.