

## DUA Benefits Extended for Hurricane Victims

Individuals who relocated from Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands following Hurricanes Irma and Maria gain access to a 26-week extension of Disaster Unemployment Assistance (DUA) benefits. The Disaster Recovery Reform Act of 2018, Public Law No. 115-254 was enacted Oct. 5, 2018, extending the duration of DUA for individuals unemployed as a direct result of the major disasters declared due to Hurricanes Irma and Maria in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. This law extends the number of weeks in the disaster assistance period (DAP) from 26 to 52 weeks after the date of the disaster declaration.

There is a large number of potentially eligible individuals in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands, as well as individuals who relocated to other states. The following individuals are potentially eligible:

- Individuals who exhausted DUA;
- Individuals who exhausted regular Unemployment Insurance (UI), even if they did not apply for DUA during the original DAP;
- Individuals who had a lapse in continued claim filing, if the reason for the lapse is not disqualifying; and
- Individuals who never applied for DUA (for reasons other than collecting regular UI during the original DAP) if they can show good cause for late filing.

This DUA extension is unprecedented. Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands have had to make extensive preparations to carry out the provisions of the extension. These preparations took a lot of time and both territories are just now implementing the extension. Puerto Rico made their initial announcement of the availability of DUA extended benefits to DUA exhaustees on Jan. 22, 2019; potentially eligible UI exhaustees were notified March 22, 2019. The U.S. Virgin Islands is going to notice their potential claimants by March 31.

Puerto Rico has reported a very low number of individuals filing claims since the notices went out. Individuals may not have had sufficient time to file claims with the original 60-day filing deadline of March 25, 2019 (which has been extended another 60 days), or may still not be aware that these extended benefits are available. The U.S. Virgin Islands potentially faces the same predicament.

Affected eligible individuals, who may be currently residing or have temporarily relocated to the United States, should be aware of the following benefits:

- To file for extended DUA in Puerto Rico, interstate claimants should contact the Puerto Rico Department of Labor at (787) 945-7898, Monday through Friday, from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Visit <https://www.trabajo.pr.gov/> for information on filing for extended DUA benefits. The deadline for filing for extended DUA in Puerto Rico has been extended to May 24, 2019.
- To file for extended DUA in the U.S. Virgin Islands, interstate claimants should contact the Virgin Islands Department of Labor (VIDOL) at (340) 715-5712 Monday through Friday, from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. VIDOL plans to update their website at <http://www.vidol.gov/unemployment-insurance/> with information on filing for extended DUA benefits. The deadline for filing for extended DUA in the U.S. Virgin Islands will be 60 days from the date of announcement of the availability of extended DUA, which is expected to occur on March 25, 2019.