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## DC Council Should Act Quickly to Pass Unemployment Modernization

By Ilana Boivie

The DC Council took a step closer this week to improving benefits for people who need help when they lose a job. DC's Unemployment Insurance (UI) benefits haven't been raised in a decade and are lower than in most states. But this week, the Committee on Business, Consumer, and Regulatory Affairs held a hearing on a [bill](#) that would go a long way to address this neglect. The DC Council should act quickly to improve UI benefits, by writing this legislation into the fiscal year 2017 budget.

UI is an important part of the safety net for workers and their families, helping them avoid falling into poverty after a job loss. Workers who get UI are those who lost jobs through no fault of their own and are actively searching for work. If they do not get UI, some will fall back on other public assistance programs, and others are at risk of increased credit card debt, eviction, and other consequences. UI also helps the overall DC economy by maintaining consumer spending in times of high unemployment.

However, DC's current Unemployment Insurance program falls short of these goals, as benefits provided are grossly inadequate to meet unemployed workers' needs. The legislation would improve DC's UI program in four key ways:

- 1. Raise the maximum weekly UI benefit amount to \$430.** The current maximum weekly benefit is just \$359, below Maryland (\$430), Virginia (\$378), and 38 other states. \$359 per week translates to a wage of less than \$9 per hour. This is below the federal poverty line for a family of three, and far below the living wage in DC.
- 2. Incentivize workers to retain part-time employment.** The bill would allow workers who have part-time employment to receive a modestly higher amount of partial UI benefits. For instance, a worker earning \$100/week from part-time employment while receiving UI benefits will have her benefits reduced by \$33 instead of \$64.
- 3. Ensure that the most vulnerable workers who have an uneven or low earnings history can get UI benefits up to the maximum length of 26 weeks.**
- 4. Adjust the maximum weekly benefit each year for inflation to ensure that workers' purchasing power would keep up with inflation.** The maximum weekly benefit was last raised in 2005. Since then, the benefit has lost roughly 26 percent of its purchasing power.

Several witnesses who have lost their jobs gave powerful, emotional testimony about how difficult it has been for them to make ends meet and provide for their families while they continue to look for work. Each of the benefit provisions listed above would have helped these workers in different ways.

We hope that the Council will act quickly on behalf of unemployed workers in the District to pass this important legislation, by writing all of its provisions into the BSA, so that benefits can be raised as quickly as possible.

To read DCFPI's full hearing testimony, click [here](#).