

GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF NORTH CAROLINA
SESSION 2023

S

1

SENATE BILL 700

Short Title: 2023 Unemployment Insurance Reform.

(Public)

Sponsors: Senator Woodard (Primary Sponsor).

Referred to: Rules and Operations of the Senate

April 10, 2023

A BILL TO BE ENTITLED

AN ACT REFORMING THE EMPLOYMENT SECURITY LAWS BY INCREASING BENEFIT ELIGIBILITY TO A TWENTY-SIX WEEK PERIOD AND THE MAXIMUM WEEKLY BENEFIT AMOUNT TO THE SUM EQUAL TO FOUR HUNDRED FORTY-FIVE DOLLARS ADJUSTED ANNUALLY FOR INFLATION, BASING THE CALCULATION OF THE BENEFIT AMOUNT ON THE HIGHEST PAID QUARTER, INCREASING BENEFITS ALLOWED FOR PARTIAL UNEMPLOYMENT, PROVIDING BENEFITS IN CASES WHERE AN INDIVIDUAL LEAVES EMPLOYMENT FOR SPOUSAL RELOCATION OR HEALTH REASONS OR DUE TO AN UNDUE HARDSHIP, AUTHORIZING THE FORGIVENESS OF NONFRAUDULENT OVERPAYMENTS CAUSED BY AGENCY ERROR, AND ESTABLISHING A SHORT-TERM COMPENSATION PROGRAM TO BENEFIT EMPLOYERS AND EMPLOYEES.

The General Assembly of North Carolina enacts:

SECTION 1.1.(a) Increase Weekly Benefit Amount. – G.S. 96-14.2(a) reads as rewritten:

"(a) Weekly Benefit Amount. – The weekly benefit amount for an individual who is totally unemployed is an amount equal to the wages paid to the individual in the ~~last two completed quarters~~ highest paid quarter of the individual's base period divided by ~~52-26~~ and rounded to the next lower whole dollar. If this amount is less than fifteen dollars (\$15.00), the individual is not eligible for benefits. The weekly benefit amount may not exceed ~~three hundred fifty dollars (\$350.00)~~ four hundred forty-five dollars (\$445.00), adjusted annually for increases in the consumer price index. This adjustment shall be made on January 1 of each year and calculated as the percentage of change between the October Consumer Price Index in the calendar year prior and the December Consumer Price Index in the year most recently ended, calculated to the nearest tenth of one percent (1/10 of 1%), provided that this percentage change is positive. For the purposes of this subsection, the term "consumer price index" means the Consumer Price Index for All Urban Consumers (CPI-U), U.S. City Average, all items, not seasonally adjusted, standard reference base, as published by the Bureau of Labor Statistics of the U.S. Department of Labor."

SECTION 1.1.(b) Reform Partial Weekly Benefit. – G.S. 96-14.2(b) reads as rewritten:

"(b) Partial Weekly Benefit Amount. – ~~The weekly benefit amount for an individual who is partially unemployed or part totally employed is the amount the individual would receive under subsection (a) of this section if the individual were totally unemployed, reduced by the amount of any wages the individual receives in the benefit week in excess of twenty percent (20%) of the benefit amount applicable to total unemployment. If the total wages payable to an~~



1 individual for less than full-time work performed in a week claimed exceed one-half of the
 2 individual's weekly benefit amount, the amount of wages that exceed one-half of the weekly
 3 benefit amount shall be deducted from the benefits payable to the claimant. If the amount so
 4 calculated is not a whole dollar, the amount must be rounded to the next lower whole dollar.
 5 Payments received by an individual under a supplemental benefit plan do not affect the
 6 computation of the individual's partial weekly benefit."

7 **SECTION 2.1.** Increase Duration of Benefits. – G.S. 96-14.3 reads as rewritten:

8 "**§ 96-14.3. Duration of benefits.**

9 (a) ~~Duration.—The number of weeks an individual is allowed to receive unemployment~~
 10 ~~benefits depends on the seasonal adjusted statewide unemployment rate that applies to the~~
 11 ~~six month base period in which the claim is filed. One six month base period begins on January~~
 12 ~~1 and one six month base period begins on July 1. For the base period that begins January 1, the~~
 13 ~~average of the seasonal adjusted unemployment rates for the State for the preceding months of~~
 14 ~~July, August, and September applies. For the base period that begins July 1, the average of the~~
 15 ~~seasonal adjusted unemployment rates for the State for the preceding months of January,~~
 16 ~~February, and March applies. The Division must use the most recent seasonal adjusted~~
 17 ~~unemployment rate determined by the U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, and~~
 18 ~~not the rate as revised in the annual benchmark.~~

Seasonal Adjusted Unemployment Rate	Number of Weeks
Less than or equal to 5.5%	12
Greater than 5.5% up to 6%	13
Greater than 6% up to 6.5%	14
Greater than 6.5% up to 7%	15
Greater than 7% up to 7.5%	16
Greater than 7.5% up to 8%	17
Greater than 8% up to 8.5%	18
Greater than 8.5% up to 9%	19
Greater than 9%	20

19 (a1) Maximum Duration. – An eligible individual is entitled to receive unemployment
 20 benefits for a maximum period of 26 weeks, unless the benefit period is extended expressly by
 21 State or federal law.

22 (b) ~~Total Benefits. – The total benefits paid to an individual equals the individual's~~
 23 ~~weekly benefit amount allowed under G.S. 96-14.2 multiplied by the number of weeks allowed~~
 24 ~~under subsection (a) of this section.26."~~

25 **SECTION 3.1.** Recognize Spousal Relocation and Undue Hardships. – G.S. 96-14.8
 26 reads as rewritten:

27 "**§ 96-14.8. ~~Military spouse relocation~~ Spousal relocation, undue family hardship, health**
 28 **reasons, and domestic violence are good causes for leaving.**

29 An individual is not disqualified for benefits for leaving work for one of the reasons listed in
 30 this section. Benefits paid on the basis of this section are not chargeable to the employer's
 31 account:

- 32 (1) Military spouse relocation. – Leaving work to accompany the individual's
 33 spouse to a new place of residence because the spouse has been reassigned
 34 from one military assignment to another.
- 35 (2) ~~Domestic violence; violence; sexual offense; stalking.~~ Domestic violence; violence, a sexual offense, or stalking – Leaving work for
 36 reasons of domestic violence; violence, a sexual offense, or stalking if the
 37 individual reasonably believes that the individual's continued employment
 38 would jeopardize the safety of the individual or of any member of the
 39 individual's immediate family. For purposes of this subdivision, an individual
 40 is a victim of ~~shall verify that they are experiencing or have experienced~~

1 domestic ~~violence~~ if violence, a sexual offense, or stalking by reasonable
 2 documentation, including, but not limited to, one or more of the following
 3 ~~applies:~~ following:

- 4 a. The individual has been adjudged an aggrieved party as set forth by
- 5 Chapter 50B of the General Statutes.
- 6 b. There is evidence of domestic violence, sexual offense, or stalking.
- 7 Evidence of domestic violence, sexual offense, or stalking may
- 8 include any one or more of the following:
 - 9 1. Law enforcement, court, or federal agency records or files.
 - 10 2. Documentation from a domestic violence or sexual assault
 - 11 program if the individual is alleged to be a victim of domestic
 - 12 violence or sexual assault.
 - 13 3. Documentation from a religious, medical, or other professional
 - 14 from whom the individual has sought assistance in dealing
 - 15 with the alleged domestic violence, sexual abuse, or stalking.
- 16 c. The individual has been granted program participant status pursuant to
- 17 G.S. 15C-4 as the result of domestic violence committed upon the
- 18 individual or upon a minor child with or in the custody of the
- 19 individual by another individual who has or has had a familial
- 20 relationship with the individual or minor child.

21 (3) Health reasons. – Where an individual leaves work due solely to their own or
 22 a family member's disability or other health condition, whether or not related
 23 to the work, and the individual shows:

- 24 a. That, at the time of leaving, the individual, their minor child who is in
 25 their legally recognized custody, their parent, or any other member of
 26 the individual's immediate family was experiencing a disability or
 27 health condition.
- 28 b. The individual had notified the employer of the disability or health
 29 condition prior to leaving.
- 30 c. The individual's reason for leaving was directly related to the disability
 31 or health condition.
- 32 d. The individual's employer did not offer alternate work, or the
 33 alternative work offered did not pay minimum wage or at least
 34 eighty-five percent (85%) of the individual's wage, whichever is
 35 greater.

36 (4) Undue family hardship. – Arises when an individual leaves work or is unable
 37 to accept a particular shift because the individual needs to provide care for (i)
 38 a minor child under 14 years of age who is in the legally recognized custody
 39 of the individual or (ii) a parent or other immediate family member with a
 40 disability or serious health condition and no other care option is available.

41 (5) Spousal relocation. – Leaving work to accompany the claimant's spouse to a
 42 new place of residence where the spouse has secured work in a location that
 43 is too far removed for the claimant reasonably to continue to work."

44 **SECTION 4.1.(a) Forgive Overpayment Through Division Error. – G.S. 96-18(g)(2)**

45 reads as rewritten:

46 "(2) Any person who has received any sum as benefits under this Chapter by reason
 47 of the nondisclosure or misrepresentation by ~~him~~ the person or by another of
 48 a material fact (irrespective of whether ~~such~~ the nondisclosure or
 49 misrepresentation was known or fraudulent) or has been paid benefits to which
 50 ~~he~~ the person was not entitled for any reason (~~including~~ except errors on the

1 part of any representative of the Division) shall be liable to repay such sum to
2 the Division as provided in subdivision (3) of this subsection."

3 **SECTION 4.1.(b) Noncharge Overpayment.** – G.S. 96-18.1 reads as rewritten:

4 "**§ 96-18.1. Attachment and garnishment of fraudulent ~~overpayment~~ overpayment;**
5 **noncharging and forgiveness of nonfraudulent overpayment.**

6 (a) Applicability. – ~~This section applies~~ Subsections (a) through (d) of this section apply
7 to an individual who has been provided notice of a determination or an appeals decision finding
8 that the individual, or another individual acting in the individual's behalf and with the individual's
9 knowledge, has knowingly done one or more of the following to obtain or increase a benefit or
10 other payment under this Chapter:

11 ...

12 (e) Nonfraudulent Overpayment. – No benefit charges shall be made to the account of
13 any employer where benefits are paid as the result of a decision by the Division if the decision
14 to pay benefits is ultimately reversed; nor shall the benefits paid be deemed to constitute an
15 overpayment under G.S. 96-18(g)(2)."

16 **SECTION 5.1.** Chapter 96 of the General Statutes is amended by adding a new
17 Article to read:

18 "Article 6.

19 "Short-Time Compensation Program.

20 "**§ 96-45. Definitions.**

21 The following definitions apply in this Article:

- 22 (1) Affected unit. – A specific plant, department, shift, or other definable unit of
23 an employing unit that has at least two employees to which an approved
24 short-time compensation plan applies.
- 25 (2) Approved short-time compensation plan. – A plan that is approved by the
26 Division as provided by this Article.
- 27 (3) Health and retirement benefits. – Employer-provided health benefits and
28 retirement benefits under a defined benefit pension plan as defined in section
29 414(j) of the Internal Revenue Code, contributions under a defined
30 contribution plan as defined in section 414(i) of the Internal Revenue Code,
31 or that are incidents of employment in addition to the cash remuneration
32 earned.
- 33 (4) Program. – Short-time compensation program established pursuant to this
34 Article.
- 35 (5) Short-time compensation. – The unemployment benefits payable to
36 employees in an affected unit under an approved short-time compensation
37 plan, as distinguished from the unemployment benefits otherwise payable
38 under the unemployment compensation provisions of State law.
- 39 (6) Short-time compensation plan. – A plan submitted by an employer for
40 approval by an affected unit of the employer to avert layoffs.
- 41 (7) Unemployment compensation. – The unemployment benefits payable under
42 this Article other than short-time compensation and includes any amounts
43 payable pursuant to an agreement under any federal law providing for
44 compensation, assistance, or allowances with respect to unemployment.
- 45 (8) Usual weekly hours of work. – The usual hours of work for full-time or
46 part-time employees in the affected unit when that unit is operating on its
47 regular basis, not to exceed 40 hours and not including hours of overtime
48 work.

49 "**§ 96-46. Application to participate in short-time compensation program.**

50 (a) An employer that wishes to participate in the Program shall submit to the Division a
51 signed, written short-time compensation plan for approval. The Division shall develop an

1 application form to request approval of a plan and an approval process. The application shall
2 include:

- 3 (1) The affected unit or units covered by the plan, including the number of
4 full-time or part-time workers in the unit, identification of each individual
5 employee in the affected unit by name, social security number, and the
6 employer's unemployment tax account number, and any other information
7 required by the Division to identify plan participants.
- 8 (2) A description of how workers in the affected unit will be notified of the
9 employer's participation in the plan if the application is approved, including
10 how the employer will notify those workers in a collective bargaining unit, as
11 well as any workers in the affected unit who are not in a collective bargaining
12 unit. If the employer will not provide advance notice to workers in the affected
13 unit, the employer shall explain in a statement in the application why it is not
14 feasible to provide the notice.
- 15 (3) A requirement that the employer identify the usual weekly hours of work for
16 employees in the affected unit and the specific percentage by which their
17 hours will be reduced during all weeks covered by the plan. An application
18 shall specify the overall work reduction for which a short-time compensation
19 application may be approved, which shall be not less than ten percent (10%)
20 and not more than sixty percent (60%) of the usual work hours during that
21 period. If the plan includes any week for which the employer regularly
22 provides no work due to a holiday or other plant closing, then the week shall
23 be identified in the application. Notwithstanding the other provisions of this
24 subdivision, an employer shall be allowed some weeks of complete plant
25 shutdown in appropriate industries or given certain modes of operation.
- 26 (4) Certification by the employer that, if the employer provides health benefits
27 and retirement benefits to any employee whose usual weekly hours of work
28 are reduced under the Program, the benefits will continue to be provided to
29 employees participating in the Program under the same terms and conditions
30 as though the usual weekly hours of the employee had not been reduced or to
31 the same extent as other employees not participating in the Program. For
32 defined benefit retirement plans, the hours that are reduced under the plan
33 shall be credited for purposes of participation, vesting, and accrual of benefits
34 as though the usual weekly hours of work had not been reduced. The dollar
35 amount of employer contributions to a defined contribution plan that are based
36 on a percentage of compensation may be less due to the reduction in the
37 employee's compensation. However, an application may contain the required
38 certification when a reduction in health and retirement benefits scheduled to
39 occur during the duration of the plan will be applicable equally to employees
40 who are not participating in the Program and to those employees who are
41 participating.
- 42 (5) Certification by the employer that the aggregate reduction in work hours is in
43 lieu of layoffs, whether temporary or permanent layoffs or both.
- 44 (6) Agreement by the employer to (i) furnish reports to the Division relating to
45 the proper conduct of the plan, (ii) allow the Division access to all records
46 necessary to approve or disapprove the plan application and, after approval of
47 the plan, monitor and evaluate the plan, and (iii) follow any other directives
48 the Division deems necessary for the agency to implement the plan and that
49 are consistent with the requirements for plan applications.

- 1 (7) Certification by the employer that participation in the plan and its
2 implementation is consistent with the employer's obligations under applicable
3 federal and State laws.
- 4 (8) Certification by the employer that any affected bargaining unit agrees with the
5 plan.
- 6 (9) The effective date and duration of the plan, which shall expire no later than
7 the end of the twelfth full calendar month after the effective date.
- 8 (10) Any other provision added to the application by the Division that the U.S.
9 Secretary of Labor determines to be appropriate for the purpose of this
10 Program.

11 (b) Regarding employers in appropriate industries or that have certain modes of
12 operation, and only if the employer demonstrates good cause, the Division may allow flexibility
13 in the application process in cases where it is reasonable not to require specific dates and hours
14 in the application, notwithstanding the provisions of subsection (a) of this section.

15 **"§ 96-47. Approval and disapproval of plan.**

16 The Division shall approve or disapprove a short-time compensation plan in writing within
17 30 days of its receipt and promptly communicate the decision to the employer. A decision
18 disapproving the plan shall clearly identify the reasons for the disapproval. The disapproval shall
19 be final, but the employer shall be allowed to submit another plan for approval not earlier than
20 90 days from the date of the disapproval.

21 **"§ 96-48. Effective date and duration of plan.**

22 A short-time compensation plan shall be effective on the date that is mutually agreed upon
23 by the employer and the Division, which shall be specified in the notice of approval to the
24 employer. The plan shall expire on the date specified in the notice of approval, which shall be
25 either the date at the end of the twelfth full calendar month after its effective date or an earlier
26 date mutually agreed upon by the employer and the Division. However, if a short-time
27 compensation plan is revoked under G.S. 96-44, the plan shall terminate on the date specified in
28 the Division's written order of revocation. An employer may terminate a plan at any time upon
29 written notice to the Division. Upon receipt of notice from the employer, the Division shall
30 promptly notify each member of the affected unit of the termination date. An employer may
31 submit a new application to participate in another plan at any time after the expiration or
32 termination date.

33 **"§ 96-49. Revocation of approval of plan.**

34 (a) The Division may revoke approval of a short-time compensation plan for good cause
35 at any time. The revocation order shall be in writing and shall specify the reasons for the
36 revocation and the date the revocation is effective. The Division shall state clearly the reasons
37 for the revocation.

38 (b) The Division may periodically review the operation of each employer's plan to assure
39 that no good cause exists for revocation of the approval of the plan. Good cause shall include,
40 but not be limited to, failure to comply with the assurances given in the plan, unreasonable
41 revision of productivity standards for the affected unit, conduct or occurrences tending to defeat
42 the intent and effective operation of the plan, and violation of any criteria on which approval of
43 the plan was based.

44 **"§ 96-50. Modification of approved plan.**

45 (a) An employer may request a modification of an approved plan by filing a written
46 request to the Division. The request shall identify the specific provisions proposed to be modified
47 and provide an explanation of why the proposed modification is appropriate for the plan. The
48 Division shall approve or disapprove the proposed modification in writing within 30 days of
49 receipt and promptly communicate the decision to the employer.

50 (b) The Division, in its discretion, may approve a request for modification of the plan
51 based on conditions that have changed since the plan was approved, provided that the

1 modification is consistent with and supports the purposes for which the plan was initially
2 approved. A modification shall not extend the expiration date of the original plan, and the
3 Division shall promptly notify the employer whether the plan modification has been approved
4 and, if approved, the effective date of modification.

5 (c) An employer is not required to request approval of a plan modification if the change
6 is not substantial, but the employer shall report every change to the plan to the Division promptly
7 and in writing. The Division may terminate an employer's plan if the employer fails to meet this
8 reporting requirement. If the Division determines that the reported change is substantial, the
9 Division shall require the employer to request a modification to the plan.

10 (d) The Division shall use its best efforts to provide for timely and flexible modifications.
11 The provisions of this section shall be liberally construed so as to provide the most flexibility for
12 employers and the Division in order to carry out the purposes of this Article.

13 **"§ 96-51. Eligibility for short-time compensation.**

14 An individual is eligible to receive short-time compensation with respect to any week only if
15 the individual is monetarily eligible for unemployment compensation, not otherwise disqualified
16 for unemployment compensation, and:

17 (1) During the week, the individual is employed as a member of an affected unit
18 under an approved short-time compensation plan, which was approved prior
19 to that week, and the plan is in effect with respect to the week for which
20 short-time compensation is claimed;

21 (2) Notwithstanding any other provisions of this Chapter relating to availability
22 for work and actively seeking work, the individual is available for the
23 individual's usual hours of work with the short-time compensation employer,
24 which may include, for purposes of this section, participating in training to
25 enhance job skills that is approved by the Division as employer-sponsored
26 training or training funded under the Workforce Investment Act of 1998; and

27 (3) Notwithstanding any other provision of law, an individual covered by a plan
28 is deemed unemployed in any week during the duration of the plan if the
29 individual's remuneration as an employee in an affected unit is reduced based
30 on a reduction of the individual's usual weekly hours of work under an
31 approved short-time compensation plan.

32 **"§ 96-52. Benefits.**

33 (a) The short-time compensation weekly benefit amount shall be the product of the
34 regular weekly unemployment compensation amount for a week of total unemployment
35 multiplied by the percentage of reduction in the individual's usual weekly hours of work.

36 (b) An individual may be eligible for short-time compensation or unemployment
37 compensation, as appropriate, except that no individual shall be:

38 (1) Eligible for combined benefits in any benefit year in an amount more than the
39 maximum entitlement established for regular unemployment compensation;
40 and

41 (2) Paid short-time compensation benefits for more than 52 weeks under a plan.

42 (c) The short-time compensation paid to an individual shall be deducted from the
43 maximum entitlement amount of regular unemployment compensation established for the
44 individual's benefit year.

45 (d) Provisions applicable to unemployment compensation claimants shall apply to
46 short-time compensation claimants to the extent that they are not inconsistent with the Program's
47 provisions. An individual who files an initial claim for short-time compensation benefits shall
48 receive a monetary determination.

49 (e) The following provisions apply to individuals who work for both a short-time
50 compensation employer and another employer during weeks covered by the approved short-time
51 compensation plan:

- 1 (1) If combined hours of work in a week for both employers do not result in a
2 reduction of at least ten percent (10%) or, if higher, the minimum percentage
3 of reduction required to be eligible for a short-time compensation benefit as
4 provided in this Article, of the usual weekly hours of work with the short-time
5 employer, the individual shall not be entitled to benefits under these short-time
6 compensation provisions.
- 7 (2) If the combined hours of work for both employers results in a reduction equal
8 to or greater than ten percent (10%) or, if higher, the minimum percentage
9 reduction required to be eligible for a short-time compensation employer, the
10 short-time compensation benefit amount payable to the individual is reduced
11 for that week and is determined by multiplying the weekly unemployment
12 benefit amount for a week of total unemployment by the percentage by which
13 the combined hours of work have been reduced by ten percent (10%) or, if
14 higher, the minimum percentage reduction required to be eligible for a
15 short-time compensation benefit as provided in this Article, or more of the
16 individual's usual weekly hours of work. A week for which benefits are paid
17 under this subdivision shall be reported as a week of short-time compensation.
- 18 (3) If an individual worked the reduced percentage of the usual weekly hours of
19 work for the short-time compensation employer and is available for all of his
20 or her usual hours of work with the short-time compensation employer, and
21 the individual did not work any hours for the other employer, either because
22 of the lack of work with that employer or because the individual is excused
23 from work with the other employer, the individual shall be eligible for
24 short-time compensation for that week. The benefit amount for the week shall
25 be calculated as provided in subsection (a) of this section.

26 (f) An individual who is not provided any work during a week by the short-time
27 compensation employer, or any other employer, and who is otherwise eligible for unemployment
28 compensation shall be eligible for the amount of regular unemployment compensation to which
29 the individual would otherwise be eligible.

30 (g) An individual who is not provided any work by the short-time compensation
31 employer during a week, but who works for another employer and is otherwise eligible, may be
32 paid unemployment compensation for that week subject to the disqualifying income or other
33 provision applicable to claims for regular compensation.

34 **"§ 96-53. Charging short-time compensation benefits.**

35 Short-time compensation shall be charged to employers' experience rating accounts in the
36 same manner as unemployment compensation is charged under this Chapter. Employers liable
37 for payments in lieu of contributions shall have short-time compensation attributed to service in
38 their employ in the same manner as unemployment compensation is attributed.

39 **"§ 96-54. Extended benefits.**

40 An individual who has received all of the short-time compensation or combined
41 unemployment compensation and short-time compensation available in a benefit year shall be
42 considered an exhaustee for purposes of extended benefits, and if otherwise eligible under those
43 provisions, shall be eligible to receive extended benefits.

44 **"§ 96-55. Severability.**

45 If any provision of this Article is found by the U.S. Department of Labor to be in violation of
46 federal law, the finding shall render the provision of this Article inoperative, but the finding shall
47 not invalidate the remaining provisions of this Article and is confined in its operation to the
48 specific provision found to be in violation of federal law."

49 **SECTION 6.1.** Effective Dates. – Unless otherwise provided, this act is effective
50 when it becomes law, with:

- 1 (1) Sections 1.1, 2.1, and 3.1 of this act applying to claims for unemployment
2 insurance benefits filed on or after that date.
- 3 (2) Section 4.1 of this act applying to nonfraudulent overpayments pending
4 before, or accruing on or after, that date.
- 5 (3) Section 5.1 of this act becoming effective 60 days from the effective date of
6 this act and applying retroactively to claims arising, and to plans submitted,
7 on or after April 15, 2023.