



Rosalin Acosta, Secretary
Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development

Mary Lou Sudders, Secretary,
Executive Office of Health and Human Services

August 18, 2021, by email

Dear Secretary Acosta and Secretary Sudders:

As statewide and regional anti-hunger advocates, we appreciate the steps the Baker Administration has taken to continue critical pandemic unemployment programs over the past few months. Thank you! However, we are concerned about the impending loss of unemployment benefits for hundreds of thousands of Massachusetts residents.

With the end of Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA) and Pandemic Emergency Unemployment Compensation (PEUC), an estimated **314,097 MA workers will lose all of their unemployment benefits as of the week ending September 4.**¹ An additional group will face the loss of FPUC and MEUC. This unemployment “cliff” will put low-income families in an extremely difficult financial position, especially for those who are currently unable to re-enter the workforce due to lack of child care (especially for nights and weekends), concerns about the Delta variant, or ongoing health effects from COVID.² We have been hearing about these concerns from families and individuals we serve across the state.

We write to request that EOLWD and the Department of Unemployment Assistance (DUA) take prompt steps to ensure that residents losing PUA and PEUC are informed about other benefits that are available, including SNAP, TAFDC cash assistance for families, and emergency food. TAFDC benefits, in particular, are a critical benefit for families with minor children who will have no or very low income after unemployment benefits end.

According to DUA, about 111,000 PUA claimants have received the dependent allowance (meaning they have at least one child). While TAFDC benefits are substantially lower than unemployment benefits, TAFDC provides an economic bridge. TAFDC connects families to free childcare for those able to locate a childcare slot. TAFDC also connects parents to DTA’s Employment Services Program. Connecting families to SNAP, TAFDC, and emergency food may help diminish the economic fallout from losing unemployment benefits.

¹ The Century Foundation, “7.5 Million Workers Face Devastating Unemployment Benefits Cliff This Labor Day”, <https://tcf.org/content/report/7-5-million-workers-face-devastating-unemployment-benefits-cliff-labor-day/?session=1>

² The Boston Opportunity Agenda and the Boston Foundation, “Boston’s Child-Care Supply Crisis, The Continued Impact of a Pandemic,” July 2021 <https://www.bostonopportunityagenda.org/reports/2021/jul/child-care-supply-crisis-brief>

We urge EOLWD and DUA to work in partnership with EOHHS and DTA to:

- Share information directly with all residents losing PUA and PEUC about DTA benefits and emergency food resources – via paper notices, text messages/emails, robocalls, and other available outreach methods. We would be happy to suggest text. Communicate this information in multiple languages to equitably provide information for Limited English Proficient residents.
- Provide information about SNAP and TAFDC, including DTACConnect.com, as part of the alerts about the end of pandemic related unemployment benefits on the DUA Mass.gov website. This information should be posted on the PUA, PEUC, FPUC, and MEUC pages as well as on DUA’s unemployment benefit portals.

The four Massachusetts food banks, Project Bread and MLRI - along with our local Legal Services programs - stand ready to assist families with this impending cliff. All four Massachusetts food banks have sufficient TEFAP/MEFAP and donated food resources to meet a likely increase in demand when these benefits sunset. However, we cannot meet non-food needs such as rent or utilities. We encourage the Baker Administration to robustly close participation gaps and connect the low-income households hurt by this cliff with the DTA benefits for which they are eligible.

We would appreciate hearing back from EOLWD and EOHHS at your earliest convenience given the urgency of this situation. Please contact Vicky Negus with your response: vnegus@mlri.org

Sincerely,

Pat Baker, Vicky Negus for the Massachusetts Law Reform Institute

Erin McAleer for Project Bread

Laura Sylvester, Christina Maxwell for The Food Bank of Western Massachusetts

Catherine Lynn for The Greater Boston Food Bank

Amy Pessia for Merrimack Valley Food Bank

Jean McMurray for the Worcester County Food Bank

cc. Commissioner Amy Kershaw, DTA

Director Richard Jeffers, DUA