

December 20, 2013

Re: Restore Federal Emergency Unemployment Insurance Benefits

Dear Senator:

The National Women's Law Center appreciates that the recently passed budget agreement will blunt the impact of the sequester during the remainder of fiscal year 2014, but we are deeply concerned that Congress failed to renew unemployment insurance benefits for the long-term unemployed. We urge you to make extending this vital program your first priority when Congress returns from its recess.

The federal emergency unemployment insurance program expires on December 28, immediately terminating assistance for 1.3 million jobless workers and their families during the holiday season. If Congress does not reauthorize the program in the new year, another 3.6 million workers will lose access to benefits by the end of 2014.

Failing to continue federal unemployment insurance for the long-term jobless would be utterly unprecedented given the current state of the economy. As of November 2013, nearly 4.1 million jobless workers had been searching for work for six months or more, a number that remains near record highs. During the past 50 years, Congress has not allowed federal emergency unemployment benefits to expire when the share of jobless workers who were unemployed after 26 weeks was above 23.1 percent – and the current share of jobless workers who are long-term unemployed is 37.3 percent. While the national unemployment rate has declined over the past year, it remains far higher than the 5.6 percent rate in June 2008, when President Bush signed a new federal emergency unemployment insurance program into law. Unemployment rates for vulnerable groups – including single mothers and women and men of color – remain well above the rates they experienced when the recession began. And Congress has already scaled back the number of weeks of benefits workers can receive.

Allowing benefits to expire while unemployment remains very high would not only cut off a lifeline to jobless workers and their families; it would also slow economic growth by forcing millions of households to further restrict their consumption, reducing demand throughout the economy. As a result, the labor market would lose 200,000 to 310,000 jobs in 2014, based on estimates from the Congressional Budget Office, the Council of Economic Advisers, and the Economic Policy Institute.

Due in large part to federally funded benefits, unemployment insurance kept over 1.7 million people, including 655,000 women and 446,000 children, from falling into poverty in 2012. Women, their families, and the economy cannot afford to lose the crucial support that these benefits provide. Please act to renew the federal emergency unemployment insurance program in 2014 without any further delay.

Sincerely,
Joan Entmacher



Vice President, Family Economic Security

Julie Vogtman



Senior Counsel, Family Economic Security