Unemployment Insurance: Keeping the Promise Today and Tomorrow

True Reformer Building
1200 U Street, NW
Washington, DC 20009

Monday December 5, 2011

9-6 Registration

9-12 Legal Services Network Meeting (Location 1st Floor Conference Room)

1-1:30 Welcome (Location: Auditorium)

Christine Owens, Executive Director, NELP
NELP Unemployment Insurance Team

1:30 – 2:30 Plenary: Why Unemployment Matters (Location: Auditorium)
In this opening session, an activist, a pollster and a journalist discuss the implications of prolonged levels of high unemployment on life in the United States. With unemployment rates not expected to drop to pre-recession levels for several years, what is the likely toll on our economy, on young workers and retirement-age workers, on politics, on social trends and on our nation’s future? This panel will offer insights from three very distinct and informed perspectives.

Christine Owens, NELP Executive Director (Moderator)

Guy Molyneux, Partner and Senior Vice President, Peter D. Hart Research Associates

Karen Nussbaum, Executive Director of Working America, Community Affiliate of the AFL-CIO

Don Peck, Features Editor, Atlantic Monthly and Author, Pinched: How the Great Recession Has Narrowed Our Futures and What We Can Do About It. (Invited)

2:30 – 2:45 Break

2:45 – 4:00 Workshop: Defending your State UI program – Responding to Proposals to Cut Benefits (Location: Auditorium)

In 2011, ten states enacted laws to cut unemployment insurance (UI) benefits including cuts to the duration of benefits, reductions in weekly benefit amounts, restrictions in eligibility, and even barriers to filing unemployment claims. In addition, many other state legislators introduced unsuccessful legislation that would have subjected UI claimants to drug testing, mandatory community service, and other requirements that ignore the profound and lasting impact of the economic downturn on jobless workers ability to find new work. As the national UI financing crisis persists, many worker advocates can expect similar efforts to erode their state UI programs in 2012. This session will equip advocates with the information they need to evaluate anti-claimant proposals and to defend their state’s UI program in this harsh legislative and political climate.

Rick McHugh, Senior Staff Attorney, NELP (Moderator)
An unprecedented feature of the Great Recession and its aftermath is the record-breaking levels of long-term unemployment: not only have spells of joblessness reached record highs, but long-term unemployment has affected more people than ever before: about 6 million of the unemployed have been out of work for six months or longer. Such severe unemployment is paired with unique challenges and barriers in getting back to work, and states need to adopt targeted approaches to facilitate reemployment – and prevent further layoffs – in order to curb these trends. This workshop will discuss strategies aimed at addressing barriers to reemployment, such as weakened ties to the labor market; employers’ negative perceptions regarding skills atrophy and relevance of experience; and discrimination by employers who refuse to hire unemployed workers. Panelists will also discuss workforce strategies that can prevent further layoffs and minimize the number of newly unemployed, for whom there is a significant chance of experiencing long durations of joblessness.

Christine Riordan, Policy Analyst, NELP (Moderator)

LaDonna Pavetti, Vice President for Family Income Support Policy, Center on Budget and Policy Priorities

Neil Ridley, Senior Policy Analyst, Center on Law & Social Policy

Deborah Chalfie, Senior Legislative Representative, AARP

George Wentworth, Senior Staff Attorney, NELP

4:00 - 5:15

Plenary: State Administrator Round Table (Location: Auditorium)

In this informal session, State Labor officials talk about the major issues confronting the unemployment insurance programs in their states. Panelists will answer questions about the practical realities of administering a UI program and will offer their views on extension programs and current federal program and legislative initiatives.

George Wentworth, Staff Attorney, NELP (Moderator)

Maydad Cohen, (MA), Chief of Staff, Massachusetts Department of Labor & Workforce Development

Julie Squire (MD), Assistant Secretary of Unemployment Insurance, Maryland Department of Labor, Licensing & Regulation

Ellen Golombek, Executive Director, Colorado Department of Labor & Employment

Joel Sacks, Assistant Commissioner, Washington Employment Security Department

6:30-9:00 Dinner and Awards Ceremony (L’Enfant Plaza Hotel – 480 L’Enfant Plaza SW, Washington, DC)

Tuesday December 6, 2011

8:30 – 9:45 Breakfast Plenary: The Federal Landscape of Unemployment Insurance Challenges and Priorities (Location: Auditorium)

The unemployment insurance program is in crisis, which poses historic challenges for Congress and the Executive Branch to preserve benefits for the long-term unemployed, restore the fiscal integrity of the state programs, and defend against organized attacks against state and federal benefits. This session features a discussion of the latest federal UI developments in Congress and the priorities for action on the broad range of critical UI issues.
9:45 – 10:30 **NELP’s Recovery Agenda: Filling the Good Jobs Deficit: An Economic Recovery Agenda for Our States and Cities** *(Location: Auditorium)*

The impact of the Great Recession, and the largely jobless recovery to date, has created a jobs deficit that currently stands at of over 11 million jobs. Even worse, the meager employment growth experienced in the last two years has been most heavily concentrated in low-wage occupations, for which wages have declined as well. With the hiring outlook tepid at best, and Congressional action on jobs stymied by partisan interests, states and cities can address the good jobs deficit by enacting measures to create jobs and maintain good job standards while simultaneously preserving and expanding measures that will help alleviate the economic pain of further job loss and sustained, severe unemployment. This plenary will present NELP’s recent report, *Filling the Good Jobs Deficit*, identify necessary components of policies aimed at promoting true economic recovery for workers, and feature state and local examples of initiatives and policies that are creating good jobs in local communities.

Anastasia Christman, Senior Policy Analyst, NELP
Christine Riordan, Policy Analyst, NELP
Brian Lombardozzi, Senior Policy Analyst, Blue Green Alliance
Carol Regan, Government Affairs Director, PHI

10:30 -11:00 **Keynote Address: The Honorable Rosa DeLauro, Representative of the 3rd Congressional District of Connecticut** *(Location: Auditorium)*

11:00 -11:15 **Break**

11:15-12:30 **Workshop: The $38 Billion Question: What States and the Federal Government can do to Rescue Insolvent UI Programs** *(Location: Auditorium)*

An unprecedented 26 states are borrowing $38 billion from the federal government to pay UI benefits. The Great Recession exposed in stunning fashion the weak financing principles underlying the majority of state UI programs. Several states have responded by lowering UI payments and limiting the number of workers who are eligible. This session will feature UI experts who will discuss the implications of massive state borrowing for unemployed workers, businesses, and state budgets, as well as what states and the federal government can do to stabilize state trust fund finances. Speakers will also discuss the factors leading to the underfunding of benefits and what some states did right to avoid borrowing.

Rick McHugh, Senior Staff Attorney, NELP (Moderator)
Doug Holmes, President, UWC Strategic Services
Michael Leachman, Director of State Fiscal Research, Center on Budget & Policy Priorities
Mike Miller, USDOL, Lead Actuary, Office of Unemployment Insurance
Wayne Vroman, Economist, Labor, Human Services and Population Center, Urban Institute
Workshop: Strategies to Support Families Confronting the End of their Unemployment Benefits  
(*Location 1st Floor Conference Room*)

Four years into the most severe economic decline since the Great Depression, millions of workers and their families have reached the end of the economic lifeline provided by their federal unemployment benefits. This session profiles the leading strategies adopted by state UI agencies, social service programs and state advocates to provide additional income support and employment opportunities targeting the exceptional needs of the long-term unemployed.

Maurice Emsellem, Policy Co-Director, NELP (Moderator)

Joseph Carbone, President and Chief Executive Officer, The WorkPlace

Rebecca Dixon, Policy Analyst, NELP

Sandi Vito, Director, 1199SEIU Training & Upgrading Fund

Pat Baker, Senior Policy Advocate, Massachusetts Law Reform Institute

12:30-1:30  **Lunch**

1:30-2:45  **Workshop: Anatomy of Effective State UI Campaigns – Case Study: Pennsylvania 2011** (*Location: Auditorium*)

An examination of the forces, players, campaign components and techniques that led to the defeat of HB 916 in the Republican-controlled Pennsylvania House of Representatives. The panelists -- key participants in the campaign -- will share information on the coordination of a successful coalition effort including: building and connecting the coalition; advocacy and lobbying; grassroots activism; communications, media and messaging; online mobilization and legislative targeting; email and social media engagement; insights into potential leverage in difficult political landscapes.

Mike Evangelist, Policy Analyst, NELP (Moderator)

Richard Bloomingdale, President Pennsylvania AFL-CIO

Sharon Dietrich, Managing Attorney for Public Benefits and Employment, Community Legal Services (Philadelphia)

Mitch Hirsch, Web and Campaign Associate, NELP

**Workshop: Making the Case: Preserving Strong State UI Programs through Research** (*Location 1st Floor Conference Room*)

The 2012 state legislative sessions will pose new challenges for unemployed workers and their allies, as lawmakers seek more ways to cut unemployment insurance (UI) programs. This session will equip participants with practical research and communications tools to demonstrate why strong UI programs are critical for workers and our economy. It will include an overview of the key measures and data sources on UI benefits and financing. Next participants will learn how to replicate national work on the program's role as an economic stabilizer at state levels. In addition, participants will hear evidence debunking claims overstating the disincentive effect of UI. Finally, a national news reporter who covers the unemployment crisis will discuss stories that provoked the strongest response from readers, so that advocates may hone their messaging.

Rebecca Dixon, Policy Analyst (Moderator)

Arthur Delaney, Reporter, Huffington Post

Claire McKenna, Policy Analyst, NELP

Rob Pavosevich, USDOL, Economist, Office of Unemployment Insurance, Division of Fiscal and Actuarial Services
Heidi Shierholz, Economist, Economic Policy Institute

2:45-3:00  **Break**

3:00-4:15  **Workshop: Forging a Fair and Balanced State Response to UI Overpayments** *(Location: Auditorium)*

Congress, the Obama Administration and the states have imposed significant new mandates on unemployed workers to recover overpaid unemployment benefits. This session will include an overview of the federal initiative, while presenting a balanced approach to preserving the integrity of the UI program that features strategies to protect workers unfairly caught up in overpayment proceedings and to hold employers and their agents accountable for their role denying benefits to deserving workers.

Claire McKenna, Policy Analyst NELP (Moderator)

Maurice Emsellem, Policy Co-Director, NELP

Gay Gilbert, Administrator, USDOL, Employment & Training Administration, Office of Workforce Security

Susan Nofi-Bendici, Deputy Director, New Haven Legal Assistance

**Workshop: Access & Eligibility: UI Advocacy at the Agency Level** *(Location 1st Floor Conference Room)*

Successful unemployment insurance advocacy requires diligence in dealing with a wide range of problems confronting clients once they enter the UI system. In this workshop, experienced worker advocates will outline strategies for (1) effectively advocating before your state UI agency, including best practices on building and maintaining coalitions, (2) challenging state laws and rules that limit claimant access to benefits, and (3) insuring that your state utilizes a debit card that does not penalize UI claimants.

George Wentworth, Senior Staff Attorney, NELP (Moderator)

Richard Blum, Staff Attorney, New York Legal Aid Society

Val Greenfield, Senior Staff Attorney, Florida Legal Services

Monica Halas, Lead Attorney Greater Boston Legal Services

Lauren Saunders, Managing Attorney, National Consumer Law Center

4:15-4:30  **Closing**