



## National Employment Law Project

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### **OBAMA PLAN REMOVES HURDLES TO EDUCATION FOR JOBLESS WORKERS COLLECTING UNEMPLOYMENT**

#### **National Employment Law Project Says States Can Improve Unemployed Workers' Career Opportunities by Continuing Benefits for Jobless Workers Engaged in Education and Training**

Washington, DC – With a proposal that would greatly expand education and job training opportunities for unemployed workers trying to reenter the workforce, President Obama today called for a significant shift in the criteria that determine unemployment benefit eligibility.

As the President stated, unemployment insurance “should offer folks educational opportunities they wouldn’t otherwise have, and give them the measurable and differentiated skills they need to not just get through these hard times, but to get ahead when the economy comes back.”

Commending the President’s shift from how programs that coordinate unemployment benefits with education and training typically work, the National Employment Law Project (NELP) [issued a report](#), showing that despite federal law barring states from denying unemployment benefits to jobless workers in “state-approved training,” many states only allow limited access to benefits for workers enrolled in a discrete range of programs.

The following statement can be attributed to **Maurice Emsellem, NELP Policy Co-Director**:

“In a time when unemployment is at near-unprecedented levels, with long durations of joblessness and substantial job loss— and with the federal government picking up the tab for 20 to 53 weeks of extended jobless benefits for the long-term unemployed, it is critical that states adopt this change to give workers the chance to develop skills that will help them find sustained work and stay afloat while they do so.

“After the stimulus package gave states critical resources— under the Workforce Investment Act and the Pell Grant program— to create more affordable access to basic training and higher education for millions of Americans, today, the President has directed the federal government to issue new guidelines encouraging states and colleges to remove an unrealistic obstacle to

delivering that assistance to the unemployed workers who have the most immediate need for training.

“Reducing the costs of education and training is only half of the solution to increase unemployed workers’ opportunities to improve their skills: jobless workers also need income support for themselves and their families while participating in training or attending community college. States can better support workers by also easing restrictions most impose when determining whether to continue unemployment benefits for jobless workers engaged in training and education programs.

“With many narrowly interpreting eligibility and creating other restrictions, states are acting inconsistently with the goal of helping unemployed workers to move into better jobs that will secure and strengthen their incomes and reduce future unemployment claims. Moreover, these restrictive interpretations often work at odds with federally-funded workforce development and training programs. Jobless workers qualify for federally-funded training but are unable to get the income support they need under the states’ unemployment programs to realistically be able to afford to join the programs.

“Simply put, states need to change their rules— or interpret them broadly— to give jobless workers access to opportunities to improve their skills and advance their careers. By more expansively interpreting the “state-approved training” criterion, states can allow their unemployed workers to take advantage of all of the nation’s education, training and income support systems, further the unemployment insurance goal of giving jobless workers what they need to find better jobs, and promote a better match of workers’ skills and the jobs available in our ever-changing economy.”

The President’s directive instructs the Labor and Education Departments to issue new guidelines strongly encouraging states and colleges to increase access to benefits for thousands of jobless workers, including unemployed workers seeking Pell grants. The goal of the initiative is to make it easier for unemployed workers to gain access to community college and other more long-term education and training programs during this period of high and prolonged unemployment.

In addition, the President directed the states to issue a letter to all workers collecting benefits describing their state options to receive education and training while collecting benefits. The Labor and Education Departments have teamed up coordinate this initiative, described in more detail on a new website ([www.opportunity.gov](http://www.opportunity.gov) ).

Click here to view NELP’s report at <http://www.nelp.org/page/-/UI/UITraining2009.pdf> documenting the model state unemployment insurance policies to help maximize access to education and training.

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