



Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

June 14, 2021

Commissioner Robert Asaro-Angelo
NJ Department of Labor and Workforce Development
1 John Fitch Plaza
Trenton, NJ 08625

Dear Commissioner Asaro-Angelo,

New Jersey has made incredible strides crushing the COVID-19 pandemic in recent months. Now, more than fifty percent of the State's population is fully vaccinated, while infection rates continue to fall. As a result, restrictions on social distancing and mandatory masking have been safely lifted and most daily activities, including schools, have fully resumed. I am pleased to see New Jersey families and businesses returning to normal life.

While continuing to address the health crisis, we also need to address the factors contributing to the economic crisis, including equipping businesses to be successful in a post-COVID economy. After losing hundreds of thousands of jobs during the darkest months of the pandemic, with a peak unemployment rate of 16.6 percent, New Jersey has now recovered 388,400 jobs and the U.S. Department of Labor's latest unemployment report shows that the unemployment rate for the State has decreased to 7.5 percent.¹

The rapid turnaround in New Jersey's economic conditions was helped by the five bipartisan COVID-19 relief packages signed into law, including the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021 (P.L. 116-260) and the American Rescue Plan Act (P.L. 117-2). These bills afforded significant fiscal relief to the American people, small businesses, and restaurants, helping prevent economic devastation for many. They also provided the resources that enabled the Biden Administration's swift deployment of COVID-19 vaccines to the American people, with the Governor's stewardship and the leadership of those at the local levels.

These resources were even more effective than originally predicted, as President Biden had initially aimed to administer 100 million COVID-19 vaccine doses in his first 100 days in office, and instead, public health officials reached 200 million vaccine doses administered with a week to spare on that deadline. Now, according to the CDC, more than 309,322,545 vaccine doses have been administered,² and the New Jersey Department of Health has reported 9,176,545 have been administered in the state.³ The federal government also provided more than 153,261 Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) loans to assist small businesses in the state,⁴ as well as support for food security and for the unemployed.

Despite our great progress, far too many people are still out of work, and more must be done to get our economy back to where it was pre-pandemic. It is essential to connect unemployed workers with businesses in need and encourage workers to return to the workplace, not only to re-energize New Jersey businesses, but also to help families with good-paying jobs.

¹ <https://www.bls.gov/eag/eag.nj.htm>

² <https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/>

³ https://www.nj.gov/health/cd/topics/covid2019_dashboard.shtml

⁴ <https://www.sba.gov/document/report-paycheck-protection-program-weekly-reports-2021>

At the same time, returning to work does not mean that the financial and logistical challenges stemming from the pandemic have ended. To help in this transition, the State should consider implementing a back-to-work incentive program, which would award \$500 bonuses to workers who are currently receiving unemployment benefits to return to work by August 1, 2021 and maintain employment through at least September 1, 2021. There would obviously be savings to the State as people leave the unemployment rolls. Per the American Rescue Plan, these back-to-work incentives may be funded through the Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds, of which the State will receive \$6.2 billion in federal funding. The Treasury Department has said back-to-work incentives are eligible expenses,⁵ although I recognize that instituting such a program would obviously take time. This one-time incentive would offer support to New Jersey residents as they re-enter the workforce, setting them up for success in our post-COVID world. The NJ Department of Labor and Workforce Development should also continue to enforce the requirement that workers who are receiving unemployment benefits are actively searching for work, and enhance the New Jersey Department of Labor and Workforce Development's career services system, so that those able to fill available jobs have adequate resources to assist in their search.

Thank you again for your hard work and leadership during this difficult time. I look forward to continuing to work with you as we address the recovery from this crisis.

Sincerely,



Josh Gottheimer
MEMBER OF CONGRESS

⁵ <https://home.treasury.gov/system/files/136/SLFRPFAQ.pdf>