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SC Misses Federal Aid For The Unemployed

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Thousands of South Carolina's unemployed will miss out on additional benefits after state officials failed to take the steps necessary to secure them. Unemployed residents could have received an addit...

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Thousands of South Carolina's unemployed will miss out on additional benefits after state officials failed to take the steps necessary to secure them. Unemployed residents could have received an additional seven weeks of emergency benefits, from federal stimulus money, if lawmakers had passed a law to temporarily change the index used to count the number of people out of work. WJBF News Channel 6's SC Capitol reporter, Robert Kittle, and Joseph Kasko, have more.

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Columbia, SC — Thousands of South Carolina's unemployed will miss out on additional benefits after state officials failed to take the steps necessary to secure them.

Unemployed residents could have received an additional seven weeks of emergency benefits, from federal stimulus money, if lawmakers had passed a law to temporarily change the index used to count the number of people out of work.

The change would have brought the additional benefits by recognizing the state's actual unemployment rate, which is one of the highest in the nation at 11.5%.

According to the state's Employment Security Commission, 113,000 South Carolinians have already exhausted their state and federal benefits and an additional 6,900 residents will exhaust their benefits this weekend.

Now many people are wondering why no legislation was enacted and who is responsible for the error.

House Labor, Commerce and Industry Committee Chairman Bill Sandifer says lawmakers were never made aware that action was needed.

"Nobody ever informed us that that fund existed or that there was an opportunity to apply for those benefits whatsoever," says Sandifer.

However, Sue Berkowitz with the Appleseed Legal Justice Center, an advocacy group for the poor, says her office told lawmakers about the need to extend the benefits, but that it likely got lost in the shuffle.

"They have so many issues that are thrown at them and it's hard for them to separate this piece of unemployment insurance from another piece of unemployment insurance versus the fight between the governor and the legislature," says Berkowitz.

"And then you had that whole fight over whether we were going to be able to get the stimulus dollars. It just fell between the cracks."

Employment Security Commission Deputy Executive Director Allen Larson says he thinks both his agency and lawmakers are partly to blame for the error.

Larson says it probably got overlooked in the fight over whether the state would take federal stimulus money.

"I'm not sure, you know, really, who dropped the ball here because I know that it was discussed and we had a lot of discussions with all aspects of the recovery funds."

Larson says his agency may not have made it clear what would happen if lawmakers didn't act.

It's still not too late for South Carolina to receive the additional money, but lawmakers would have to call a special session to correct the mistake.

Lt. Governor Andre Bauer is already calling on lawmakers to return to the State House and make the necessary changes.

However, it's unclear if lawmakers will return because of the cost of a special session to the state.

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