

UI Story Blurbs

Morgan Rose, Denver

I am a Lyft driver who is facing eviction on June 1st. Before this crisis began, I was already struggling to pay my many bills, including car payments, insurance, rent, utilities, and more. My car is facing repossession right now, which is the only thing keeping me connected to a source of income. As a driver, I talk to many people from all over Denver and Colorado more generally, and everyone is scared. No one knows what to do about this crisis, especially since it's having such an effect on all of our financials.

Luckily I was approved for Pandemic Unemployment Insurance because of the federal CARES act, but what am I supposed to do after that runs out? The expansion of the Colorado HELP Order allows 1099 workers to seek unemployment insurance, this needs to be made law so that even if the emergency rules end people like me can still receive the help we need.

Jake, Ft Collins

I am a former worker of Ku Cha House of Tea. Our workplace like many others closed with the governor's orders of Safer at Home and we were all placed on furlough without pay. All six employees were all able to get on unemployment. When we found out we would be going back to work, the employees were concerned for our safety. Other than offering to put up a sneeze guard, our employer seemed to want us to return to work in relatively similar working conditions as before the pandemic. Additionally, there are two employees who are immunocompromised, so we asked what precautions would be taken.

We raised our concerns to our employer and they were denied and dismissed. When we stated that the working conditions proposed did not seem safe and asked to discuss the safety measures further— as well as continuing the furlough— the entire staff was fired.

Because of this retribution, I cannot pay my rent this month. I cannot buy groceries this month. A law such as this would protect other people from having to be in the situation I am in. I was forced to choose between my job and my health, and because I felt my health was at risk, I spoke up. Most of us want to go back to work, but we want to do it safely with the assurance that doing so will not endanger us, our customers, and our communities. It is imperative that this bill and bills like it that advocate for worker safety get passed. Because if workers aren't safe, no one is safe.

Lisa, Aurora

I live in Aurora Colorado and for 4 years. I have worked as an Amazon delivery driver. Towards the beginning of the crisis there were little to no precautions being taken at Amazon. Workers were standing close to one another, when we would go get the carts that were filled with packages, all the drivers would be standing on top of one another with no social distancing being followed.

They started enforcing people wearing masks and gloves and taking peoples temperature, however even these new protocols weren't working or being enforced. This lack of regulations and health and safety protocols worried me. I live and take care of my 70-year-old mother who is already sick. Shortly after this I had to stop working there.

Thankfully with the expansion of the Colorado HELP Order I have been able to apply and qualify for unemployment insurance. I don't know what I'm going to do if this expansion of unemployment goes away. Will I be kicked off unemployment and be forced to go back to work at an unsafe job? Will I have to go back to work and put the health of my mother at risk? Please codify the expansion of unemployment insurance to include individuals living with vulnerable populations so I don't have to put my mother in harms way. Please codify the expansion of unemployment eligibility to 1099 workers so myself and my colleagues at Amazon and uber are able to receive the help we need.

Kai, Denver

COVID-19 has impacted my household severely. At the beginning of the pandemic, my roommate and partner both effectively lost their jobs, my partner having her hours cut to 5 a week, and my roommate being cut entirely. We had an extremely difficult time getting them on unemployment initially, but after we got them on unemployment, it helped. However, none of us are able to leave the house because of my compromised immune system.

I unfortunately had to leave my job because I became unable to work due to my severe mental illnesses and somewhat associated physical disabilities. I worry about our small family every day. I know that I am not capable of work, but I want to, so badly, especially now.

I worry that once the emergency rules expire my partner who is still working some hours, will be kicked off UI completely, SB20-207 would expand the work share program allowing her to work some hours and remain on unemployment. This bill would also implore the CDLE to study and create programs for people who are not eligible for UI making sure that myself and my roommates can survive.



Testimony Prepared for Delivery in Support of SB20-207 – Unemployment Insurance (Hansen & Winter) to the Senate Finance Committee on June 1, 2020 by Sarah Barnes, Manager of Special Policy Initiatives at the Colorado Children's Campaign

- Madam Chair and members of the committee, my name is Sarah Barnes and I am the Manager of Special Policy Initiatives at the Colorado Children's Campaign. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today in support of Senate Bill 207, and thank you to Senators Hansen and Winter for your leadership on this policy.
- The Children's Campaign supports Senate Bill 207 because making sure that families have the supports they need to be economically secure, especially during this time of extreme crisis and uncertainty, is critical for kids' well-being and healthy development.
- Senate Bill 207 would ensure that parents can receive unemployment supports if they are unable to return to work during this health and economic crisis, including in situations where they don't have access to safe child care or school for their children.
- All Colorado families want to provide for the basic needs of their children. However, policies and practices have created and maintained inequitable opportunities for some families. Before the COVID-19 pandemic began, nearly 150,000 kids in Colorado were experiencing poverty. For a family of four, this means an annual income of \$25,100.
- And right now, we are in the midst of an unprecedented time in our state and country. The economic stress faced by families as a result of the COVID-19 outbreak, is even more acute. Particularly during this time of crisis, we must ensure that families have the supports they need to be economically secure, especially those who are already facing multiple obstacles to security and opportunity.
- We urge your support of Senate Bill 207. Thank you.

Contact: Sarah Barnes at the Colorado Children's Campaign, sarahb@coloradokids.org or 303-520-9978

Thank you madame chair and to the committee for hearing my testimony today in support of SB20-207. My name is Morgan Royal and I am the Campaigns Director at New Era Colorado. We are a local nonpartisan, nonprofit organization that works to mobilize and empower a new generation to participate in our democracy and make Colorado a better place for everyone.

Young people, especially young people of color and low-income folks, are facing heightened financial insecurity right now. Young people are the most likely to have entry-level positions or vulnerable part-time jobs that have been the most impacted by the current global pandemic and the resulting economic crisis. Over 450,000 Coloradans had filed for unemployment insurance as of May 9th, and SB20-207 would help young people who are experiencing record levels of unemployment find the stability they need to get through the economic crises and avoid lasting, long-term impacts on their financial health and wellbeing. This bill would ensure that workers are not facing retribution for unsafe working conditions in the middle of a global pandemic by further clarifying "good cause" for quitting to include situations where an individual needs to care for a sick or quarantined family member or for a child whose school is closed due to a public health emergency.

Record unemployment claims coupled with immense student debt burden is a recipe for disaster amongst Colorado's young people. In our state, more than 761,000 people are working to pay back over \$27.7 billion in student loan debt, and this burden is especially high for rural Coloradans and communities of color. Before the pandemic, this debt was holding our generation back from starting businesses, buying homes, starting families, building savings, and contributing to the economy. Now, young people are facing even more uncertainty over how they are going to recover financially and it's extremely unclear what the future will hold for an entire generation of people who will feel the compounded weight of this economic crisis for years to come.

This public health crisis is going to have lasting impacts on our state and our economy and during this pandemic we're seeing how young people are struggling to make monthly payments, keep themselves afloat, they've been laid off, and are filing for unemployment at high rates. In a crisis like this one, debt collection and garnishment should be suspended so that borrowers and consumers can recover and so that as a state we can mitigate further long-term harm during our economic recovery.

The impacts of this crisis are going to extend beyond the measures that are currently in place and we need to take action in order to provide these protections. I strongly urge you to vote yes on Senate Bill 207. Thank you so much for your time and for being here today.

Hello members of the committee. Thank you for taking the opportunity to hear testimony on this important piece of legislation.

My name is Isis Osborne, I'm an economic justice community organizer with Colorado People's Alliance, and I want to encourage everyone here to support SB20-207.

Before I became a full-time organizer with COPA, I was working as a host, busser, and food runner in a popular Capitol Hill restaurant. Were I still employed there, I would be in the same boat as many of my friends and contemporaries - short on income and facing the impossible decision to return to a high-risk work environment during a global pandemic.

As soon as this pandemic hit, restaurants, hotels, bars, and coffee shops were the first to let go of the people who constituted their labor. Some had even been acting before the state was officially shut down to whittle down peoples' hours in an attempt to save money as the collective situation became more precarious. This obviously had a great impact on people's lives and finances, especially in the service industry, where much of their income is dependent on tips - AKA the kindness of strangers. Despite their hardship, workers persevered and attempted to file for unemployment insurance, as per the guidance of the Colorado Department of Labor and Employment.

Unemployment insurance has recently become one of the most important lifelines in the state, as is the case for many states across the country during this crisis. But that department's systems were not equipped to handle the sheer amount of people applying for benefits in recent months. They are beginning to update their systems now, but this alone has not been enough. Long wait times and impossible labyrinths of bureaucracy continue to be a problem for many workers today.

For many, UI is the only viable option for income right now. Others, have been able to return to work or will be doing so soon but at greatly reduced hours, and in the service industry in particular, the hours may be similar but the number of folks they will serve will be greatly reduced due to health and safety measures. This is why increasing the income disregard as is proposed in SB 207 is so important. This change will allow for workers to get back to work while earning less income but still have some supplemental income through UI.

Many other kinds of workers are still excluded from any type of support. Over 70,813 claims have been filed thus far for the Pandemic Unemployment Assistance for independent contractors, highlighting the need for this type of support to be continued after it is set to expire in the coming weeks. Having the CDLE study how we all can support this type of worker in the future is another helpful step proposed in SB 207.

Another issue faced by workers is ensuing that they are actually classified correctly to qualify for benefits they are due. SB 207 works to improve this by making long overdue updates to the definitions of employers and employees, putting UI in line with other areas of the law.

I ask that legislators act quickly, decisively, and in a bold way to do what is best for workers in Colorado by strengthening our unemployment insurance and voting yes on this bill.

Thank you for your time.

Isis Osborne, isis@coloradopeoplesalliance.org

Sources for statistics used:

- <https://www.thedenverchannel.com/news/coronavirus/colorado-initial-unemployment-claims-drop-for-6th-straight-week-but-record-benefit-payments-continue>
- <https://coloradosun.com/2020/05/28/colorado-unemployment-calls-holds-wait-callbacks/>
<https://www.thedenverchannel.com/news/coronavirus/nearly-500k-coloradans-filed-for-unemployment-since-late-march-but-initial-claims-continue-to-fall>

Colorado Jobs With Justice supports SB 20-207: Strengthening Unemployment Insurance (UI).

Colorado Jobs With Justice is a long- term, formal coalition of labor, community, faith, and student and youth organizations that come together to advance worker's rights and social justice through building sustained relationships and taking direct action to create concrete change in the lives of working families. As working families we need to strengthen our unemployment insurance.

As we have experienced recently, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, 450,000 Coloradans filed for unemployment. Many people lost their source of income as well as their benefits and it is important that people are able to stay employed in a time of crisis. Our members are actively seeking employment in safe conditions to them because they wish to work and are scared of losing their benefits. In addition, many of our members are also misclassified on construction jobs and cannot receive UI benefits and do not have a source of income for rent, bills, or food. SB 20-207 would allow our members to be employed with the company they have been working with, not fear losing their benefits, and provide financial support to misclassified workers.

Many of our members are essential workers, they are construction workers, grocery store workers, healthcare workers, janitors, postal service workers, and have continued to work during the pandemic. Many of them feared for their health and their families but could not afford to lose their income or benefits. When workers start returning back to work we will face more situations where workers will need to take care of a family member, child, or care for themselves if they are "vulnerable individuals." SB 20-207 will ensure a worker is able to take care of themselves or their families in a state of a public health emergency.

SB 20-207 will help strengthen Colorado's Unemployment Insurance so workers are able to maintain employment and their benefits. It also allows for previously excluded workers to be able to seek unemployment. Please vote YES on Senate Bill 20-207. Thank you for your time.

In solidarity,
Colorado Jobs With Justice
Pamela Resendiz Trujano
Executive Director



SB20-207: Concerning Unemployment Insurance

Sponsors: Sens. Hansen and Winter

CFI position: SUPPORT

Thank you Mr. Chair, members of the committee, for the opportunity to submit written testimony in support of SB20-207.

My name is Kathy White and I am representing the Colorado Fiscal Institute. CFI is a nonprofit organization that advocates for sound tax, budget and economic policies that promote equity and widespread economic prosperity.

As the COVID crisis hit Colorado, forcing hundreds of thousands of Coloradans out of work in a matter of weeks, no program has been more critical in slowing the economic damage and supporting workers and their families in every part of the state than the unemployment insurance (UI) system. Unemployment insurance has, for nearly a century, been the country's first line of defense in times of economic recessions, natural disasters, and as we know now, global pandemics. Unemployment insurance provides modest wage replacement to workers who lose their jobs through no fault of their own, enabling them to continue paying for basic needs until they can return to suitable work. By allowing people to continue paying for the basics – food, rent – and boosting consumption, UI helps break the negative cycle of unemployment and economic decline. A strong UI system is essential to bolstering the economy during times of shock.

A strong UI system will be equally important for a healthy economic recovery. SB20-207 provides modest changes to Colorado's UI system that will accommodate the unique challenges we face today as a result of COVID19, build on the federal pandemic UI programs, and foster a more robust recovery. SB20-207 is the COVID19 session hat trick, providing wins for employers, workers and the state.

- The expansion of the workshare program, which allows employers to bring back workers at reduced capacity, earn income and still receive partial unemployment, will provide more tools in the toolbox for employers seeking to phase in operations safely over the next year. They can retain their trained and qualified staff while gradually adapting to the changing COVID19 environment. Workers can safely work reduced schedules for their prior employer without fear of not being able to pay their bills. UI benefits paid under the workshare program are fully funded by federal dollars.
- The change to the earnings disregard, or how much a worker can earn through work and still receive partial UI, will help workers such as hospitality workers, who may be forced to earn less during the reopening period.

- The clarification on whether an individual qualifies for UI or has legitimately refused to return to work or accept new work, will create bright lines for employers and allow workers to balance the demands of family, health and work. The eligibility requirements are based on health and safety guidelines that are tailored to the unique circumstances related to COVID19, such as not having adequate or safe childcare or caring for a vulnerable person and represent an essential modernization of UI practice.
- The study on how to create a UI program for self-employed workers, independent contractors, gig workers builds on the federal government's recognition that these actors are an essential and growing part of the economy, as evidenced by the creating of a UI-like benefit for them during the pandemic (Pandemic Unemployment Assistance). The UI system functions best *as an automatic economic stabilizer or safety net for the economy* when all workers, in every part of the country, are covered. This provision will provide a data-driven process for how to plan for the next century of economic change.
- Finally, the state benefits from the modernizations in SB20-207 because unemployment insurance benefits are what is known as *earned benefits*, and are considered taxable income. As such, the millions of dollars in federal and state unemployment insurance benefits that are being paid to workers in every part of the state generate state income taxes as well as other state local taxes that unemployed people pay as they continue to buy groceries and gas and the basics of living.

The improvements in SB20-207 are timely, modest and critical for a strong recovery for Colorado. These changes will most help resort counties that rely on tourism which have been hit with double digit unemployment, like Pitkin with 23% unemployment, and industries, like the restaurants and hotels which are posting nearly 150,000 job losses. A strong UI system that is adapted to the current landscape will help Colorado businesses, workers and the state drive a piton into the economic mountain we all must climb.

Please support SB20-207.

Thank you.