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American Recovery & Reinvestment Act - What it means for Workforce Investment

On February 17, 2009, President Barack Obama signed into law the **American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA)**. The Act is the single largest spending act in the Nation's history.

Designed to hopefully get the nation "back on track" and to help those hardest hit by the poor economy, PA CareerLink office and Workforce Investment Agencies, in general, will be greatly affected by the Act's provisions.

The Act provides almost **\$4 billion for Workforce Investment Act (WIA) programs and \$400 million for Wagner-Peyser (Employment Service) programs** including: \$1.25 billion for WIA dislocated worker programs; \$500 million for WIA adult worker programs; \$1.2 billion for WIA youth programs (including summer jobs). Since WIA and Wagner-Peyser funds support CareerLink programs, the Act is very significant and will provide much needed support to the population of unemployed workers we serve everyday.

Of the \$400 million appropriated for Employment Service funding, \$250 million will be reserved for "reemployment services" linking Unemployment Insurance (UI) claimants to job training. Funds will also be dedicated to increasing staffing levels in CareerLinks. UI benefits are increased by \$25 per week and extended by 33 weeks. ARRA also includes \$7 billion in funds to modernize the UI system.

Trade Adjustment Assistance is another area affected. **ARRA expands the Trade Adjustment Act** to include a wider range of workers, including employees in service industries. In addition, training allocations to the States are increased from \$220 million to \$575 million, with \$86 million annually for to the States for administration of the program and case management services for covered workers. **CareerLink offices provide the coordination of Trade Act benefits for approved workers.**

ARRA funds are now available for distribution to the States. **CareerLink offices look forward to the increase of funding and how it will allow us to better serve our customers.**

Rapid Response— “Here to Help—Surviving a Layoff” Events

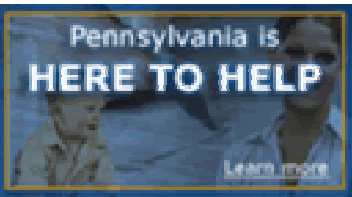
The PA Dept. of Labor & Industry offers an **early intervention service** that assists workers and employers affected by layoffs, plant closures, or natural disasters. The service, called **Rapid Response**, provides access to an array of Pennsylvania’s resources and services to help transition workers into reemployment.

As of February 2009, there were approx. 483,000 unemployed individuals in PA. With so many individuals out of work, Rapid Response Coordination Services has been extremely busy. Rapid Response activities are triggered when the Dept. of Labor & Industry learns of a planned closing or layoff either by receiving a WARN (Worker Adjustment and Retraining Notice) Act notice, through the media, or through contacts in the local area. Normally, when such notices are received, a Rapid Response Coordinator will contact the company’s representatives and organize a 2-hour presentation for the affected workers.

However, with unemployment rates steadily climbing, **Governor Rendell and State Workforce officials asked local areas to organize “Here to Help” events in every county over the next two months.** Similar to Rapid Response events held at specific companies, the “Here to Help” events would be larger, more community oriented, and open to the public and their families for an extended period of time. The event is designed to provide assistance to those who may not have had the benefit of a company specific Rapid Response event.

The **Monroe County CareerLink and Poconos WIB recently held their “Here to Help” event at Northampton Community College in Tannersville.** The event ran from **10 AM - 3 PM and included 22 agencies.** Information was provided to attendees on a wide range of subjects including: job search assistance, adult education, energy assistance, health care, insurance options, unemployment compensation, social security, employee benefits, and much more. The event was a great success and we were able to provide assistance to approx. 175 - 200 people.

Future “Here to Help” events are being planned in the coming weeks in Carbon, Wayne, and Pike counties. To see a complete list of area events, visit: <http://www.dli.state.pa.us/landi/cwp/view.asp?a=3&q=251933>



Governor Rendell and State Workforce officials asked local areas to organize “Here to Help” events in every county over the next two months.

If you are an employer and anticipate downsizing or closure, please contact our Rapid Response Coordinator, Richard Parry, at riparry@state.pa.us or 717-877-3564. The more quickly Rapid Response activities are begun, the more time is available for workers to overcome their fears and begin their reentry into the workforce. For the employer, starting Rapid Response activities quickly can help mitigate the negativity of layoffs by assisting affected workers, maintaining a good company profile in the community, improving workers morale and maintaining productivity.



New COBRA Requirements for Employers

U.S. Department of Labor
Employee Benefits Security Administration
February 26, 2009

The **American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA)** provides for **premium reductions and additional election opportunities for health benefits under the Consolidated Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1985, commonly called COBRA.** Eligible individuals pay only 35 percent of their COBRA premiums and the remaining 65 percent is reimbursed to the coverage provider through a tax credit. The premium reduction applies to periods of health coverage beginning on or after February 17, 2009 and lasts for up to nine months.

COBRA gives workers who lose their jobs, and thus their health benefits, the right to purchase group health coverage provided by the plan under certain circumstances.

If the employer continues to offer a group health plan, the employee and his/her family can retain their group health coverage for up to 18 months by paying group rates. The COBRA premium may be higher than what the individual was paying while employed but generally the cost is lower than that for private, individual health insurance coverage.

The plan administrator must notify affected employees of their right to elect COBRA. The employee and his/her family each have 60 days to elect the COBRA coverage, otherwise they lose all rights to COBRA benefits.

Special COBRA Election Opportunity: Individuals involuntarily terminated from September 1, 2008 through February 16, 2009 who did not elect COBRA when it was first offered OR who did elect COBRA, but are no longer enrolled (for example because they were unable to continue paying the premium) have a new election opportunity. This election period begins on February 17, 2009 and ends 60 days after the plan provides the required notice. This special election period does not extend the period of COBRA continuation coverage beyond the original maximum period (generally 18 months from the employee's involuntary termination). COBRA coverage elected in this special election period begins with the first period of coverage beginning on or after February 17, 2009.

Note: COBRA generally does not apply to plans sponsored by employers with less than 20 employees. Many States have similar requirements for small plans providing benefits through an insurance company. The premium reduction is available for plans covered by these State laws.

The employer or plan sponsor advances the 65% of the insurance cost, which is then subsidized by the federal government through a credit against the employment tax obligation of the employer (or plan sponsor, if applicable). The COBRA provisions are effective immediately.

Visit <http://pna.informz.net/> and search for "COBRA" for the entire article. Or, visit, <http://www.dol.gov/ebsa/cobra.html> for more information and a complete Fact Sheet.



"Eligible individuals pay only 35% of their COBRA premiums and the remaining 65% is reimbursed to the coverage provider through a tax credit."

The Employee Benefits Security Administration (EBSA) is committed to educating and assisting the 150 million Americans covered by more than 679,000 private retirement plans, 2.5 million health plans, and similar numbers of other welfare benefit plans; as well as plan sponsors and members of the employee benefits community.

News and Events...

PBJ Sponsors Carbon EXPO

The Pocono Business Journal will once again sponsor the Carbon County Chamber of Commerce Expo on April 15 and 16, from 3 PM to 8 PM at Penn's Peak in Jim Thorpe.

For more information, call 610-379-5000.



CAREER Quest

The 7th Annual CAREER Quest—A Job Fair and More!—will be held on April 14, 2009 At Fernwood Resort in Bushkill.

The Event will run from 10 AM - 4 PM. If you are Looking for Employees or Your Next Job...THIS IS THE PLACE TO BE!

Employers---we have a few booths left, so if you'd like to register, hurry and call 570-620-2958.

Pennsylvania
CareerLink
MONROE COUNTY



**Commonwealth Workforce
Development System**

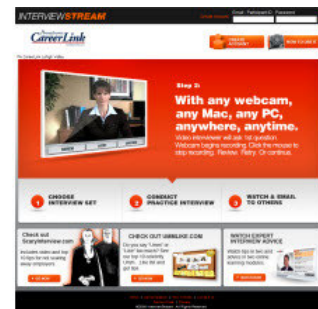
www.cwds.state.pa.us

The Commonwealth Workforce Development System is getting upgraded on May 11th, 2009!

Enhancements will be made to both Job Seeker functions and Employer Functions!

COMING SOON!!!

CareerLink Employers will be able to access **INTERVIEW STREAM** to conduct "Virtual Job Fairs" - Watch Job Seekers' interviews from the comfort of your office!



Pocono Mountains Hospitality Scholarship Golf Tournament 2009

PA CareerLink Monroe County and the Pocono Mountains Visitors Bureau are hosting a Golf Tournament at Skytop Lodge on July 1st, 2009.

Interested in Sponsorship Packages or golfing in the tournament?

Contact John Casella at 570-620-2960
Proceeds from this fundraiser will benefit local students who will be entering post-secondary education in the field of Hospitality and Tourism.