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State Action Could Add Twenty Weeks of Unemployment Benefits for Jobless West Virginians

More than 6,100 jobless workers in West Virginia will run out of unemployment benefits by the end of 2009, according to estimates from the National Employment Law Project. Of these workers, nearly 4,000 are expected to lose their benefits by the end of September. Their job prospects remain gloomy, as the state's unemployment rate has more than doubled since January.

"The recession is taking a steep toll on West Virginia's working families," said Paul Miller, Policy Analyst at the West Virginia Center on Budget and Policy. "The national unemployment rate doubled over an eighteen-month period, but it took West Virginia only five months to see its unemployment rate increase two-fold."

The Center released a policy brief today that details the problem and one possible remedy. West Virginia could provide additional help to jobless workers under provisions of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA). States with high unemployment rates may provide up to 20 more weeks of "Extended Benefits," fully paid by the federal government. These would kick in when a worker remains jobless after exhausting other unemployment benefits.

All that West Virginia needs to do to take advantage of these federal funds is for the Legislature to enact a temporary change in the state's trigger for Extended Benefits. Doing so will generate an estimated \$33.6 million for West Virginia's workers and economy.

"Nearly one in ten of our neighbors is out of work," said Miller. "Extended Benefits would ease their hardship, be a boost to local businesses, and would cost the state nothing. This is a policy choice where everyone wins."

The West Virginia Center on Budget and Policy is a policy research organization that is nonpartisan, nonprofit, and statewide. It focuses on how policy decisions affect all West Virginians, especially low- and moderate-income families. The full policy brief, "Policy Change Would Extend Unemployment Benefits for Jobless West Virginians," can be viewed and downloaded at www.wvpolicy.org.