

# ODJFS: An Opportunity Agency Focused On Ohio's Recovery

July 2020

The past 16 weeks have been challenging for all Ohioans, including the business community. As Ohio's opportunity agency, the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS) has worked tirelessly to support employers, workers, families and children hit hard by the economic impact of COVID-19.

## STRENGTHENING WORKFORCE SUPPORT

### Federal Dislocated Worker Grant

Ohio received an \$8.5 million federal Employment Recovery National Dislocated Worker Grant to help reemploy Ohioans who lost their jobs as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and to help employers rebuild their workforces. The agency will distribute the funding to Ohio's local workforce areas and work in partnership with them to provide outreach to employers and services to individuals who were laid off permanently or temporarily as a result of the pandemic. Allowable services will include paid work experience, on-the-job training, customized training, skills upgrading and supportive services, in addition to personal protective equipment and other supplies needed to ensure the health and safety of participants.

OHIO RECEIVED AN

**\$8.5  
MILLION**

FEDERAL  
EMPLOYMENT  
RECOVERY NATIONAL  
DISLOCATED  
WORKER GRANT  
TO HELP REEMPLOY  
OHIOANS

Individuals can visit [OhioMeansJobs.com](#) or contact their local OhioMeansJobs center to find and apply for job openings, take skill and career interest assessments, create or improve their resumes, and practice interviewing. Employers can contact their nearest OhioMeansJobs center to get help finding skilled candidates for jobs, screening resumes, learning about federally funded tax credits or training programs, and more.

### Federal Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) Program

The TAA program provides benefits and support to workers who become unemployed or risk job loss due to impacts of foreign trade. Our Trade Delivery Team has developed and implemented an electronic assessment to gather critical information about Ohioans' knowledge, skills and abilities before determining their options for returning to employment under the TAA. Previously, this one-on-one assessment was conducted in person or by phone. Now, as soon as the ODJFS Office of Workforce Development receives a list from an employer of workers certified under TAA, staff can email the assessment to everyone on the list, along with a brief letter of introduction. Within 72 hours of people completing the assessment, trade staff will schedule a follow-up call.

## Implementing the SharedWork Ohio Program

As you may know, SharedWork Ohio is a voluntary layoff aversion program. It allows workers to remain employed and employers to retain trained staff during times of reduced business activity. Under the SharedWork Ohio program, participating employers agree to reduce the affected employees' hours, between 10% and 50%, for up to 52 weeks. In return, those employees receive SharedWork compensation, which is a prorated unemployment benefit. Since March 15, ODJFS approved 1,680 SharedWork Ohio plans for 909 employers, which has benefited 46,352 participating employees. In addition, as the result of an executive order issued on July 2 by Governor Mike DeWine, Ohio employers will not be charged for SharedWork Ohio benefits paid to employees.

## Helping employees return to work

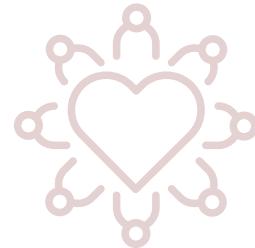
As businesses began reopening their doors in compliance with the Responsible RestartOhio requirements, employees and employers have raised questions about their rights in a new environment. We have worked to explain to employers and employees the following:

- Returning to work during the pandemic is a delicate balance of gradually reopening the economy while providing safe working environments.
- ODJFS is required by law to ensure that unemployment benefits are issued in accordance with established eligibility requirements. We must investigate claims involving individuals who quit work without good cause and/or who refuse offers of work without good cause.
- We first encourage employers to engage in dialogue with an employee who expresses reluctance to return to work about the measures that employers are taking to help employees feel safe.
- It's our expectation that, in most situations, employers and employees will be able to work together to ensure a safe environment for employees to return to work.
- The ODJFS process for determining whether to deny unemployment benefits for a refusal to return to work existed prior to the pandemic. The analysis centers on whether good cause exists for refusing an offer of suitable work. That determination involves multiple factors: prior training and work experience, wages and benefits, travel distance, shift and hours, health and physical fitness, and health and safety.
- On June 16, the governor signed an executive order that establishes additional criteria for evaluating whether good cause exists for refusing an offer of suitable work. As a part of the process, facts will be sought from both the employer and employee, and each party will have an opportunity to appeal the decision to the Unemployment Compensation Review Commission.

SINCE MARCH 15,  
ODJFS APPROVED

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**OHIO**  
**PLANS FOR**

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## STABILIZING UNEMPLOYED OHIOANS

Much of our work has focused on ensuring that Ohioans who qualify for unemployment benefits receive them. The number of initial jobless claims filed in Ohio over the last 16 weeks stands at more than 1.4 million, an amount that exceeds the combined total from the last three years. To date, we have paid nearly \$5 billion in unemployment compensation to more than 738,000 Ohioans related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Although the rate of unemployment filings is slowing, we continue to deploy aggressive strategies to serve the historic numbers of Ohioans who are temporarily out of work. We have enlisted the support of some of the best in the business through our relationships with Amazon Web Services, IBM, Deloitte Consulting, CBTS, Direct Interactions and Robert Half. We vastly expanded our IT capabilities, call center staff and claims specialists, and today more than 94% of all claims filed have been processed. The only pending claims are either those with complexities that require more attention, or new claims that have just come in.

ODJFS' Rapid Response team developed a toolkit to help employers, unemployed workers and workforce partners navigate resources available to them during the pandemic. The toolkit explains how to file for unemployment benefits, what the law requires regarding WARN notices, and information about Trade Adjustment Assistance, SharedWork Ohio and other programs.

Thank you for partnering with us to ensure that Ohioans receive the help they need during this time. We look forward to working in tandem with you, our business partners. Rest assured, our team will do everything possible to serve the pressing needs of Ohio businesses as they restart their operations.

With gratitude,



Kimberly Hall  
Director, Ohio Department of Job and Family Services

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