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Dept. of Labor Launches Federal Program Adding Extra \$600 to Weekly Unemployment Pay of VI Beneficiaries; Program for Gig Workers and Self-Employed Still Pending

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The Virgin Islands Department of Labor (D.O.L.) said Thursday morning that it has launched the Federal Pandemic Unemployment Compensation (FPUC) program, which provides an additional \$600 dollars per week in benefits to those who are eligible.

"We are happy to announce with the implementation of Federal Pandemic Unemployment Compensation (FPUC) program under the CARES Act, today VIDOL has issued over \$8.5 million dollars in payments to Virgin Islands residents," said Labor Commissioner Gary Malloy. "This represents over 3,000 checks for the largest one day check run within the Virgin Islands

Department of Labor's Unemployment Insurance program. This will assist in the re-stabilization of the Virgin Islands economy."

These payments are the start of the FPUC program in the Virgin Islands, D.O.L said. The program period runs from April 4, 2020 to July 31, 2020.

The FPUC marks the second program that the Labor department has administered under the CARES Act, the first program being the waiver of the waiting week, the department further stated. The waiting week is the first week of a claimant's claim for which this claimant is eligible for unemployment benefits but not paid these benefits. The Labor department did not say whether the waiting week waiver was a painstaking process that demanded arduous work, or a simple request made to the federal government.

The next program to be launched is the Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA) program, which includes the self-employed, independent contractors, taxi drivers, gig workers and other individuals who would not normally qualify for regular unemployment insurance benefits. PUA will assist those who are directly impacted by the coronavirus in at least one of the ten COVID-19-related areas. The department did not give a timeline in its latest release relative to when the program would become available. [Two weeks ago](#), Mr. Malloy told the Consortium that the funds could have seen a rollout last week, though it wasn't a guarantee.

D.O.L. said it has received over 8,000 applications. "We are diligently processing the applications and converting them into claims, processing continued weekly claims, and issuing checks daily. In addition, VIDOL acknowledges that many individuals have not received assistance to date. The Department is working feverishly to ensure that only those who are eligible to receive benefits do so but in a more timely fashion," the release said.

The public is invited to contact its call center which can be accessed 24/7, at telephone number: 1-877-374-0356 for assistance with filling out the online application.