

## CoP Email Update\_4.3.2020

Today's email will be relatively brief, but we wanted to inform all Commonwealth members of today's many developments.

### **Reported Commonwealth Pay Freezes:**

We've seen the Governor's announcement regarding the pay freezes of approximately 9,000 state employees. As per the announcement, those members whose offices are completely closed, and who are not able to telework, will be asked to use their remaining leave balance beginning April 11th. We believe that the number of members may be around 500. When that leave balance expires, members should immediately apply for unemployment compensation. However, the Commonwealth will continue to pay their health benefits as outlined below. We are working with the Commonwealth to identify ways to ensure that these members can find other public employment as quickly as possible.

Please see this list of frequently asked questions from the [Office of Administration for more information](https://www.oa.pa.gov/covidleave/Pages/office-closure.aspx): <https://www.oa.pa.gov/covidleave/Pages/office-closure.aspx>

### **DHS:**

In terms of the leave selection agreement for CAOs, if paid office closures do not get extended beyond next Friday, April 10, it would terminate the main staggering provision in agreement. We're already working towards addressing this situation and updates will come as soon as possible.

Additionally, as we reported yesterday, the Department of Human Services has expanded its CAO teleworking pilot to include an additional 80+ caseworkers. We've asked them to rapidly accelerate the teleworking program to minimize the number of members physically working in offices and are working diligently to make this a reality.

We urge you to let DHS know that you are ready and willing to telework.

Read some of the press coverage SEIU 668 has garnered in the last week on these matters here:

<https://www.penncapital-star.com/working-the-economy/i-just-dont-want-to-infect-anyone-in-the-office-as-case-total-grows-human-service-workers-say-they-cant-use-covid-19-leave-offered-to-other-state-employees/>

As well as an article featuring DHS Health & Safety Chair Cheryl Little here:

[https://www.ncnewsonline.com/coronavirus/county-assistance-workers-allege-unsafe-conditions-dhs-responds/article\\_f5be9320-75ae-11ea-9241-a32cfeec01a9.html?fbclid=IwAR1Jgk4PymfDb\\_p3FIO8uSFxmKiGaNX0Q6-fm7WeJS6A70953HnQsVB5PxM#utm\\_campaign=blox&utm\\_source=facebook&utm\\_medium=social](https://www.ncnewsonline.com/coronavirus/county-assistance-workers-allege-unsafe-conditions-dhs-responds/article_f5be9320-75ae-11ea-9241-a32cfeec01a9.html?fbclid=IwAR1Jgk4PymfDb_p3FIO8uSFxmKiGaNX0Q6-fm7WeJS6A70953HnQsVB5PxM#utm_campaign=blox&utm_source=facebook&utm_medium=social)

### **UC:**

Claims continue to rise each day. We received word today that tomorrow, April 4th, the Department of Labor and Industry will post a public announcement looking for Intermittent Intake Interviewers to help handle the influx of claims.

Since March 17, our members have helped to issue over 356,000 unemployment compensation checks totaling nearly \$120 million and have answered over 37,000 emails. Currently, we have

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just over 500 members working in UC, and for the brunt of the pandemic the work was mostly being handled by workers who volunteered.

### **DOC:**

In conversations with the Commonwealth, we've been told that N-95 masks are only for medical, transport, reception, and discharge, in Corrections facilities due to the short supply. The DOC indicated that they will be providing three cloth masks per employee, as they become available.

You may or may not have seen a memo concerning the system-wide quarantine as of March 29th at 10am. We've been told that the quarantine includes the following safety measures in all SCIs:

- Inmates are to be fed in their cells;
- Programming will take place in the cells;
- Small group sizes will be no more than 8;
- In between groups, cells will be sanitized;
- Staff will be preparing all meals, rather than inmates

If management at your facility are violating these policies, reach out to your Steward or Business Agent immediately.

### **BDD:**

The Commonwealth is working to ensure that all of our BDD members are able to telework, provided that they have access to high-speed internet at home. Members have been directed to take their Commonwealth desktops home and are being provided remote support to them up.

### **Other Updates:**

Please be aware that as of this afternoon, the Governor and Department of Health have recommended wearing masks whenever you leave the house. The Commonwealth will be issuing masks next week at most, if not all, work sites. If you have a mask at home, we urge you to wear it until one is provided; cloth and items like bandannas have been noted as acceptable alternatives by DOH.

Learn more about universal masking now: <https://www.pa.gov/guides/responding-to-covid-19/#UniversalMasking>

Based on the Federal Act, essential employees classified as "emergency responders" can be carved out of a number of the benefits that are being provided, including the leave benefits. The definition that COPA provides (which will show up on further correspondence here) is accurate. We've received notice that some counties are doing this.

The Commonwealth is allowing most essential staff to tap into benefits under most of the federally-permissible standards. This includes two weeks of leave under specific circumstances. This FAQ is for applicable benefits for workers that continue to work or telework: <https://www.oa.pa.gov/covidleave/Pages/working-teleworking.aspx>

Some workers who are our members are being notified that they're considered emergency responders under the definition in the Federal Act. This includes our members in the Department of Corrections, but may include others. They'll also be able to access leave benefits, but, unfortunately, the Federal Act provides that management may deny leave for this class of employees for the following reason:

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*"e. The employee is caring for a son or daughter of such employee if the school or place of care of the son or daughter has been closed, or the childcare provider of such son or daughter is unavailable, due to COVID-19 precautions;"*

That appears to be the main leave denial for our emergency responders that doesn't apply to other workers. We'll continue to research and monitor, but the FAQ for details is here: <https://www.oa.pa.gov/covidleave/Pages/health-care-providers.aspx>

### **Next Week's Actions:**

We thank you for your continuing efforts to put pressure on the Commonwealth to rapidly address our ongoing worker health and safety issues. We've been continuing to field calls from reporters who have been covering these issues and speaking out about the challenges our members are facing. We will continue to share articles via the website and our private Facebook group.

We are also actively working with the SEIU PA State Council to amplify the legislative package being introduced by House and Senate Democrats to ensure that workers receive the compensation, safety measures, and protections they need to weather this crisis.

Next Monday, this package of bills, collectively known as the American Working Family Relief Action Plan will be introduced at a press conference that will be live-streamed [here](#) at 11am on Monday, April 6th. (Link here: <https://www.facebook.com/PaSenateDems/>)

In addition to the State Council's legislative work, Local 668 will be holding a press conference featuring members who can speak to worker safety issues on our collective behalf, on Tuesday. We will also hold a roundtable discussion with legislators on Thursday. We will be calling on the General Assembly as well as employers to implement better, more inclusive, policies to protect our members.

We will be sharing registration information for members who are interested in participating in this event early next week. Please keep in mind that our Zoom platform is limited in number of participants, so if you're interested please register as soon as that event becomes live.

We ask that you continue to take all necessary measures in accordance with your contract to keep yourself safe.

### **Useful Links:**

[SEIU 668 COVID-19 Website](http://www.seiu668.org/covid19/)

<http://www.seiu668.org/covid19/>

[Sign Up to Receive SEIU 668 Emails](http://bit.ly/contactinfo668)

<http://bit.ly/contactinfo668>

[Join our private Together We Rise! Facebook Group](https://www.facebook.com/groups/SEIU668TogetherWeRise/)

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/SEIU668TogetherWeRise/>

[PA Department of Health](https://www.health.pa.gov/Pages/default.aspx)

<https://www.health.pa.gov/Pages/default.aspx>

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[PA Unemployment Compensation Claims Statistics](https://www.uc.pa.gov/COVID-19/Pages/UC-Claim-Statistics.aspx)

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