

GET THE UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS WHILE YOU WORK



Many of the unemployed Americans would love to get new skills, but can't afford to lose their unemployment benefits. Many employers would like to hire new people, but can't afford to spend time-consuming months to train new employees. The New Jersey Assembly is set to reconsider a bill that would kill both of these birds with just one stone. The Associate Press reports that the proposal would allow employers who have a job vacancy to train individuals for up to 24 hours a week for six weeks without having to pay them, and with no obligation to hire. The new trainees could continue collecting unemployment benefits during this time, as well as up to a \$100 per week stipend for transportation, childcare and other job-related costs. This plan was actually vetoed back in February by Gov. Chris Christie, because it came as a part of legislation that had a combined estimated cost of over \$600 million. By itself, the job-training bill had more modest projected cost to New Jersey taxpayers of \$3 million per year. The program was modeled off of a plan in Georgia, "Georgia Works," which has actually existed since 2003 and garnered bipartisan support. President Obama highlighted the plan in his September jobs speech and integrated the idea into his proposed jobs bill. According to the Georgia Department of Labor, over 30,000 unemployed Georgians have participated in the program so far. Participation almost doubled in 2009 to over 2,000 trainees, and then it soared to more than 14,000 trainees in 2010 when the program briefly extended eligibility to the jobless who were not receiving any unemployment benefits. Between the years 2003 and 2008, an average 40 percent of trainees were hired by the training employer. Although, the average has dropped in the past three years to an average 14 percent. Some have claimed that the Georgia Works program is not an entirely effective way to deal with the country's job crisis because it is not teaching most of the trainees' meaningful skills, or rewarding them with a middle class salary. A vast majority of the trainees work clerical jobs, and at least 70 percent of the trainees who were hired between the end of 2009 and the end of 2010 ended up in low-wage and low-skill roles--janitors, hotel clerks, maids, drivers, and restaurant workers--all according to a review done by the Center for Economic and Policy Research, a progressive think tank. Only a very small section graduated to secure middle class jobs, such as social worker or auto repair, and these are jobs that require way more than a month or two of on-the-job training. The government has been subsidizing the new hires in other ways, to compensate for the shaken confidence of the private sector. Many of the county employment boards around the country use federal funds to pay up to 90 percent of an individual's salary for the first few months of their employment. If the company is satisfied with the person's performance, then they may hire them full time.

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