UC Newsletter

Pennsylvania
Department of Labor & Industry

10/08/2024

Employers: Do you have questions about using Secure File Transfer Protocol (SFTP) to report new hires to the Pennsylvania New Hire Reporting Program?
We have the answers.

New hire reporting is required by state and federal law and saves employers money by identifying and reducing fraud in public workforce programs. Here are some common questions employers often have about submitting their new hires using Secure File Transfer Protocol (SFTP).

Question: How do I report my new hires using SFTP?

Answer: Submission of new hire data using SFTP requires the employer to register with the Program (to receive login username and password information for the Department of Labor & Industry's SFTP server), by first requesting to use this method of reporting. At the Program website under "Secure File Transfer," press the "Request Credentials" link and contact Program Customer Service at (888) PAHIRES or (888)724–4737 (or by email at RA-LI-CWDS-NewHire@pa.gov) to start the registration process.

Note, to enhance security and confidentiality in using SFTP credentials, the Pennsylvania New Hire Reporting program is making changes to this process by which employers receive and use their login credentials, depending upon whether they are brand new users of SFTP, or existing employers using SFTP. Employers who have never reported before using SFTP will "test" the feasibility of the new process by using the login credentials they are initially provided to first login successfully to a UAT (user acceptance testing) site, before being given a second set of actual Production username and password credentials to proceed with routine reporting. In addition, employers who currently use SFTP to report their new hires will be provided a new IP address to use to login and report their data.

For both types of employers, however, user passwords will need to be updated every 120 days on a routine basis, to maintain security and confidentiality. For additional details about these changes to the SFTP process, please contact Program Customer Service for more information.

Important Note: registering to receive SFTP login credentials is not the same process as registering with PA CareerLink® to receive Employer Keystone ID Credentials, and login credentials are not interchangeable between websites (i.e., SFTP credentials cannot be used to access an employer's homepage within PA CareerLink®, and Keystone ID Credentials cannot be used to access the FTP server at the FTP IP address).

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NL-UC NEWS LETTER

Question: If I am a payroll service provider reporting new hires using SFTP, may I share my SFTP server login credentials with my employer-clients?

Answer: No! To ensure the new hire data that you as an employer (or payroll service company reporting on behalf of employers) report through SFTP remain secure and confidential, it is critical that the security and confidentiality of your SFTP login credentials (i.e., username and password) be maintained. Only the authorized person associated with your account at the time it was created may use these credentials to report new hires via SFTP. Never share SFTP login credentials with unauthorized persons, including representatives of your employer-clients—doing so is a serious breach of data security and confidentiality, is in violation of Commonwealth of Pennsylvania Information Technology policies (including Management Directive 205.34, dated 09/07/2022) and could lead to the loss, corruption, or theft of the sensitive information associated with your account. SFTP login credentials that are being shared or used by unauthorized persons must be deactivated immediately, and new secure login credentials must be requested from PA New Hire Reporting Program staff.

Question: If an employer uses a third-party payroll service to report their new hire information using SFTP, should the same report also be submitted by the employer directly to the Pennsylvania through New Hire Reporting Program?

Answer: No. For those employers who use the services of a third-party payroll service to report their new hire information by SFTP, there is no need for the employer to also submit the same report directly to the Pennsylvania New Hire Reporting Program. However, should such employers wish to verify that their new hire employees are being reported timely and correctly by the third-party payroll service, they are encouraged to verify the status of their new hire information by contacting Program Customer Service.

Question: What other methods of reporting new hires besides SFTP are available to me as an employer?

Answer: Besides SFTP, employers may securely and safely report their new hire to the Program through the website, located at:

https://www.pacareerlink.pa.gov/jponline/Common/LandingPage/ReportNewHires.

Once there, employers may choose:

- Secure file upload of a file (in .xls, .xlsx, .xml and .txt [tab-delimited or fixed-width] file format ONLY), under the "Upload a File…Start Reporting" tile; or

- Secure data entry of up to fifty (50) new hire records at one time (per web session) under the "Enter Manually… Start Reporting" tile.

Question: Where do I go for more information?

Answer: Have more questions? Our friendly and knowledgeable Program Customer Service will do their best to answer your new hire reporting questions, and make the reporting process easy for both employers and payroll providers. Phone us at: (888)-PAHIRES or (888) 724-4737, email us at RA-LI-CWDS-NewHire@pa.gov, or visit the Pennsylvania New Hire Reporting Program website at the url listed above.

UC EMPLOYER RESOURCE CENTER UPDATES

COMING SOON
PHONE MESSAGE CHANGES
1-833-728-2367

Our UC Employer Resource Center is available to assist employers by phone or email. We recently updated some information providing clarification for employers @ www.uc.pa.gov.

Coming soon you will also notice some changes in our menu when calling our staff. Please listen to the messages carefully before making a selection. These changes are all part of our effort to provide better customer service to all employers offering unemployment claims and benefits information in one location.

Please click this link of our updated Employer-Quick-Guide to determine which option you should select, or you may email us your question to ucemployerhelp@pa.gov.

Pennsylvania's
SHARED-WORK
PROGRAM
**An Innovative Alternative
to Employee Layoffs**

An Innovative Alternative to Employee Layoffs – Pennsylvania's Shared-Work Program

By Alan Robinson, Shared Work Outreach Coordinator
PA Dept. of Labor & Industry

Pennsylvania's Shared-Work program is a great tool that allows an employer to temporarily reduce the work hours of a group of employees while supplementing their lost wages with partial unemployment benefits rather than laying off any employees. Employees covered by the Shared-Work Plan receive a percentage of their unemployment compensation (UC) weekly benefit amount while they work their reduced schedule, if they are otherwise eligible for UC.

Shared-Work Plans empower employers to retain a trained and qualified workforce during periods of slowdown, and quickly ramp up operations without the expense of recruiting, hiring, and training new employees. Since March 2020, more than 1050 Shared-Work Plans have been successfully put into action from employers across the Commonwealth. With changing dynamics in the modern-day workplace, Pennsylvania's Shared-Work Program may help your business in its continued success.

> "As a small company that sells winter heating oil, the Shared Work program allows us to share the work between employees during the slower, warmer months. The company benefits because it is simple to sign-up for, we save on wages and training costs, and it helps us keep our well-trained employees year after year."

> "Our employees benefit by maintaining their jobs, pay, and benefits, and enjoying some additional time off during the summer. We are thankful that this program, which we've participated in since 2016, has allowed us to avoid annual employee layoffs."

> Amy Purcell, President
> Robert E Reedy & Sons Inc.

Who Is Included In The Shared-Work Plan?

As the employer, you select which employees will be included in the Shared-Work Plan. A Plan must apply to one "affected unit" which is defined as a department, shift, or other organizational unit of two or more employees; employees must not be corporate officers. Employers may have more than one Plan if there is more than one affected unit. For example, all employees working the night shift may be one unit. All employees in the affected unit must participate; however, the Plan cannot include employees who have been employed in the affected unit for less than three months, or employees who would work 40 or more hours a week under the plan.

How Much Will The Employees' Hours Be Reduced Under The Shared-Work Plan?

Once you have identified the affected unit(s), you must select the percentage by which the employees' hours are reduced, referred to as the "reduction percentage." The employer determines the reduction percentage based on business needs, but it must be at least 20 percent and cannot exceed 40 percent of the employees' normal weekly hours. The reduction percentage must be the same for all employees participating in the Shared-Work Plan. For example, if an employee normally works 40 hours per week, and the reduction percentage is 20 percent, then the employee's hours are reduced by 20 percent and he or she would work 80 percent of 40 hours, or 32 hours per week. If an employee in the same unit works 30 hours per week, then he or she would work 80 percent of 30 hours, or 24 hours per week.

How Are Employee UC Benefits Determined Under The Plan?

For each week in the Plan, an employee receives a percentage of his or her UC weekly benefit amount (WBA) equal to the reduction percentage. For example, if the employee's WBA is $400 and the employee's hours are reduced by 20 percent under the plan, the employee would receive 20 percent of $400 (or $80) in Shared-Work UC benefits.

What Employer Qualifications Are Required For Participation?

As an employer, you are eligible to participate in Pennsylvania's Shared-Work Program if you have filed all UC tax reports and paid all amounts due under PA UC Law, have a positive reserve account balance (for contributory employers) and have paid wages for the last 12 consecutive quarters preceding the date of the application.

For more information and to view FAQs, forms, and the brochure, please visit www.uc.pa.gov/sharedwork.

UC Navigator Grant

The Pennsylvania Department of Labor & Industry (L&I) is announcing the availability of approximately $2,500,000 in American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding for the Unemployment Compensation (UC) Navigator Program Grant.

L&I will be launching a UC Navigator Program which will award competitive grants to community-based organizations (CBOs) in the Commonwealth to help workers learn about, apply for, and if eligible, receive UC benefits. The program will aid L&I in delivering timely UC benefits to workers, especially to individuals in groups that are historically underserved, marginalized, and adversely affected by persistent poverty and inequality. The Notice of Grant Availability (NGA) seeks applications to support this statewide initiative.

The department anticipates funding six projects with a maximum grant award of up to $450,000. Organizations may use these funds over the next 2.5 years, until March 31, 2025. These funds will be awarded based on a comprehensive merit evaluation of each applicant's application package. The Department intends to award at least one grant to an applicant whose service area includes a county of the second class (Allegheny) and at least one grant to an applicant whose service area includes a county of the first class (Philadelphia).

Note: Actual grant awards will be based on application submissions. The department may opt not to award any grants to a specified area based on the actual review and determination of individual submissions.

Tips to Help Us Ensure Your Forms are Sent to the Correct Address

The Department will send Form UC-45, Notice of Application and Request for Separation Information, to the address you have designated. Under some circumstances, however, this form might be sent to another address. Below are two things that will ensure that Form UC-45 is sent to the desired address:

Mandatory: Give Form UC-1609 to separating employees. Form UC-1609, Employer Information, contains your name, address and other contact information for a former employee, or an employee whose hours are reduced, to use when applying for benefits.

Recommended: *Enroll in SIDES.* The State Information Data Exchange System (SIDES) and SIDES E-Response are web-based systems available to employers and TPAs free of charge. They provide a secure and nationally standardized format to receive the electronic counterpart of Form UC-45 and to electronically respond to UC information requests. Please visit the SIDES page on our website for more information and to enroll in the SIDES program.

Labor & Industry Announces UC Connect, Extends Statewide Program Offering In-Person Appointments For Unemployment Compensation Claimants

03/16/2023

Harrisburg, PA – The Pennsylvania Department of Labor & Industry (L&I) today announced the extension of a successful program that enhances Pennsylvanians' access to the Unemployment Compensation (UC) system by offering in-person appointments to claimants in communities throughout the Commonwealth.

The program – newly dubbed UC Connect – has served nearly 34,000 UC claimants with in-person appointments at 58 PA CareerLink® locations since its launch in May 2022 with grant funding through the U.S. Department of Labor. UC Connect has been so popular among claimants seeking assistance that L&I has allocated staff and funding to continue the program indefinitely.

"Pennsylvania workers deserve a reliable Unemployment Compensation system that meets its obligation as a true safety net – and that starts with excellent customer service. We are choosing to continue this program not only because claimants and advocates have told us many times that they love the in-person interaction offered through UC Connect, but also because it has empowered L&I staff to engage on a deeper level with our constituents and provide the effective customer service that Pennsylvanians deserve and expect," **L&I Secretary Nancy Walker** said.

In-person services for UC claimants are designed to assist individuals who do not have proper technology, equipment, or technical skills; individuals without access to home Internet or broadband; and individuals with limited-English proficiency. To schedule an appointment, claimants should contact a PA CareerLink® center directly. In the months ahead, L&I intends to offer additional scheduling mechanisms for in-person appointments. More information about UC Connect is available on L&I's website.

The Shapiro Administration is committed to enhancing the UC system's functionality to process claims in a timely manner, optimize customer service at all levels, and bolster the system's resilience during times of low or high unemployment. To this end, the department is implementing a comprehensive strategy to augment the overall UC

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workforce and prioritize technical updates to the system. These measures will enable L&I to simultaneously resolve the pandemic backlog of claims while building a more efficient and effective system.

Here's what worker advocates and labor leaders are saying about the department's decision to continue UC Connect:

"We think it's a positive development that L&I will extend in-person Unemployment Compensation service at the Commonwealth's CareerLink locations, connecting knowledgeable UC staff with claimants in their home communities," said **Steve Catanese, president of SEIU Local 668.** "Keeping this program going will continue to provide improved access to UC services and help streamline complex claims and questions, making the process less daunting for Pennsylvanians. We look forward to continuing to work with Secretary Walker and the Shapiro-Davis Administration on further improvements to the UC system."

"Unemployment is a complex system, and many claimants struggle to understand their place in it or how to use new UC technology to file claims and appeals. Claimants often need human contact to make the system workable. That's why I am thrilled to learn that L&I will continue to offer in-person assistance at PA CareerLinks. This is a great example of the Governor and Secretary's commitment to fixing and strengthening the UC system," **said Julia Simon-Mishel, supervising attorney of the Unemployment Compensation Unit at Philadelphia Legal Assistance.**

"In-person assistance with UC claims is vital. Not only are barriers often created by the technology that is now virtually required to file applications and weekly claims – Too few UC staff are working an over-burdened telephone system, creating long wait times for claimants who can't wait indefinitely on hold. The requirements of the UC Law are complicated and can be difficult for claimants to navigate on their own," said **Sharon Dietrich, litigation director at Community Legal Services.** "Continuing the in-person assistance program that provides the best possible solution to these problems is absolutely essential, so that unemployed workers can get the funds that they are entitled to when they need them."

"The PA State Building Trades supports and applauds Secretary Walker's decision to keep in-person customer service available for helping people navigate the Unemployment Compensation system. This is a critically necessary step in strengthening an over-burdened system and hopefully this leads to full staffing of the UC centers after suffering the excessive cuts in the past," said **Robert S. Bair, president of the PA State Building Trades.**

"Many unemployed workers who struggle to navigate the online UC system can't explain themselves by telephone -- they need to show someone their papers and communicate in person. We are encouraged that L&I has the resources to continue the in-person access to UC staff at the many CareerLinks around the state for those people unable to use the online and phone systems," said **Barney Oursler, director of the Mon Valley Unemployed Committee in Pittsburgh.** "On behalf of the many unemployed workers challenged when in-person services were eliminated years ago, the Mon Valley Unemployed Committee applauds the announcement that the Shapiro Administration will continue this program to help them get the benefits they are entitled to."

For more information on the Pennsylvania Department of Labor & Industry, please visit the Department of Labor & Industry website or follow L&I on Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn.