

April 28, 2021

Senator Eric Pratt
Chair, Jobs and Economic Growth Finance and Policy
3219 Minnesota Senate Building
St. Paul, Minnesota 55155

Representative Mohamud Noor
Chair, Workforce and Business Development Finance and Policy
379 State Office Building
St. Paul, Minnesota 55155

RE: Unemployment Insurance Benefits for Seniors and Secondary School
Students

Dear Chair Pratt, Chair Noor, and Conferees:

The undersigned groups of businesses, senior and youth organizations want to thank you for acknowledging and seeking to repeal the unfair laws that prohibit seniors and secondary school students from receiving critical Unemployment Insurance (UI) benefits in your respective Omnibus Jobs Bills. UI benefits are a lifeline for struggling workers.

However, we are opposed to delaying the repeal of these laws until the UI trust fund has a surplus of \$750 million as proposed in the Senate bill. This approach fails to address the crisis at hand and the financial struggles seniors and students have suffered as a result of the economic fallout from the COVID pandemic.

Under this proposal, seniors and secondary students may have to wait several years *or even longer* to be eligible for UI benefits. This is unacceptable. Seniors and students laid off during the economic crisis can't wait that long for financial relief.

These laws are from eras when high school students were rarely in the labor force and retirement savings were robust enough to support older adults. Neither reflect today's realities for young and old, especially those in low income and often racially diverse communities.

In our modern economy, high school students and seniors are frequently forced to work to support themselves and their families. We have heard countless stories of workers young and old (some who testified before you) who rely on their wages to:

- Pay for basic needs like rent, food, and utilities;
- Afford lifesaving prescription drugs and even chemotherapy treatment; and
- Finance their own or their children's college educations

While we understand the concerns around the deficit in the UI Trust Fund and the impact on employers, it is important to note that these workers' employers have already paid into the UI system on their behalf and, therefore, should have a right to these benefits when they're facing unprecedented financial hardship. Right now, the benefits

that these younger and older employees work to earn subsidize UI benefits for other workers.

That's why it's only right that high school students and Social Security recipients be eligible for UI if they meet the same guidelines and rules as their co-workers. Provisions in the House and Senate bills would simply prevent them from being denied strictly because they are in high school or receive social security.

Repealing these laws but making workers wait years to collect benefits is not enough. This is an issue of fairness. Workers should not be treated differently from other workers simply because of their age. Without these benefits, students and seniors alike are having a difficult time making ends meet.

In light of this crisis, we urge you to adopt the House position and make the repeal of these laws effective promptly.

Sincerely,

AARP Minnesota

Youthprise

All Elders United for Justice

Bridgemakers

Center for School Change

Children's Defense Fund – Minnesota

Legal Services Advocacy Project

Minneapolis Regional Chamber

Minneapolis Regional Retiree Council

Minnesota State Retiree Council, AFL-CIO

Minnesota Youth Council

People for PSEO

Sundance Family Foundation