

Hogan signs law protecting federal workers affected by shutdown

Posted by [Alan Van Wormer](#) On 03/27/2019

ANNAPOLIS, MD – On March 26, Governor Larry Hogan signed the bipartisan Federal Shutdown Paycheck Protection Act (HB 336/SB 391) to protect Marylanders from the impact of federal inaction.

Governor Hogan was joined by Senate President Thomas V. Mike Miller and Speaker Pro Tem Adrienne Jones.

More than 170,000 Marylanders were affected by the 2018-2019 partial federal government shutdown. At 35 days, it was the longest shutdown of the federal government in the nation's history, and highlighted the immediate concerns of working Marylanders during times of financial hardship.

"The shutdown's impact on Maryland's federal workers was beyond staggering, and we want to make sure they don't have to experience this kind of hardship again," said Governor Hogan. "Hundreds of thousands of Maryland families experienced difficulty putting food on the table and fuel in their vehicles, as well as paying their mortgages, rent, and utility bills. Throughout the shutdown, our administration worked tirelessly to support these workers, and this legislation fulfills that commitment."

Administration Efforts to Help Workers During The Shutdown

In January, Governor Hogan announced state multi-agency efforts to help federal workers who were affected by the ongoing partial government shutdown. The initiative was announced at Baltimore/Washington International Thurgood Marshall Airport, where the governor greeted federal workers from the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) and Federal Bureau of Investigation, as well as Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) air traffic controllers.

As part of the announcement, the Maryland Department of Transportation Maryland Transit Administration (MDOT MTA) offered free transit for federal employees. The Maryland Department of Human Services issued February Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) in mid-January to assist the more than 650,000 recipients in Maryland. Additionally, both the airport and the Department of General Services led food drives to support affected workers.

On January 28, Governor Hogan sent a letter to Secretary of the U.S. Department of Labor Alexander Acosta to request the U.S. Department of Labor provide federal funds for reimbursement of unemployment insurance benefits be paid to essential personnel required to work without pay and for any administrative costs associated with paying those benefits. Governor Hogan also asked the U.S. Department of Labor to work with Congress on advancing legislation to provide the regulatory flexibility necessary to enable Maryland to provide unemployment insurance benefits to essential personnel who were working without pay.

The governor also directed the Maryland Department of Labor, Licensing and Regulation's Division of Unemployment Insurance to adopt measures to efficiently handle the increase in unemployment insurance claims stemming from the partial federal government shutdown. A standalone internet application was created to streamline the application process for furloughed employees, while call center hours were extended and dedicated phone lines were set aside exclusively for federal employees impacted by the shutdown.

The Federal Shutdown Paycheck Protection Act

The Federal Shutdown Paycheck Protection Act authorizes the governor to transfer funds from the Catastrophic Event Account to the Federal Government Shutdown Employees Assistance Loan Fund to provide no-interest loans to federal employees working in Maryland without pay because of a full or partial government shutdown.

The Federal Shutdown Paycheck Protection Act establishes a loan fund for federal workers deemed "essential," requiring them to work without pay during periods of shutdown. Current unemployment insurance law, mandated by the federal government, precludes these workers from receiving unemployment insurance benefits under these circumstances. As a result, essential personnel are forced to work without pay while continuing to incur the costs of commuting to work and maintaining the daily necessities of life for themselves and their dependents.

Prevented by federal law, Maryland was unable to assist essential workers through the unemployment insurance fund. Attempts to sway the U.S. Department of Labor to waive existing unemployment insurance eligibility criteria or work with Congress to advance legislation to provide the regulatory flexibility necessary to enable Maryland to provide unemployment insurance benefits to essential personnel were denied.

"This piece of legislation exemplifies the power of bipartisanship in achieving real results for Marylanders," said Governor Hogan. "Working across the aisle, we have crafted historical legislation that creates a solution for a problem not of our making, but one that profoundly affects our friends, families, and neighbors."

The Maryland Department of Labor will administer the fund and shall determine repayment procedures, including repayment timelines.

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