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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Community college instructors who lost classes should apply for unemployment benefits ASAP

According to Colo. Dept. of Labor and Employment (CDLE) Chief of Staff Daniel Chase, part-time and full-time faculty teaching in the Colorado Community College System (CCCS) who have lost one or more classes Fall 2020 semester should be eligible to receive partial unemployment benefits, and should apply as soon as possible. In May, CCCS Chancellor Joe Garcia announced the System would not contest unemployment benefits for instructors who applied for them during the Summer 2020 semester. Similarly, he has given the green light for instructors who seek unemployment benefits for Fall 2020, as many community college classes were cut. Those cuts stem from the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on CCCS enrollment.

“All of our instructors, full-time and part-time, are critical to our ability to serve students and all deserve to be treated fairly under Colorado’s employment laws,” said Garcia.

Chase addressed those attending the Friday, Oct. 2, Faculty Unemployment Zoom event hosted by the Colorado Conference of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP). Chase explained in detail how the CDLE calculates benefits for part-time, W-2 workers such as instructors in the CCCS, whose course loads differ widely semester to semester. The calculation is nuanced, taking into consideration an instructor’s current and past course load, income from other employment, and any previously awarded unemployment benefit. Briefly, the calculation is predicated on CCCS income from four of the previous calendar quarters. The CDLE averages the highest weekly CCCS income during that time, then assigns a benefit 55% of that figure. The CDLE also calculates a total benefit per year, per applicant. While the

instructor's unemployment benefit may be modest, its designation may signify payments through federal programs created to help workers stay afloat during the COVID-19 pandemic.

For example, CCCS instructors who have lost classes may qualify for the federal Low Wage Assistance (LWA) program of an additional \$300/week for weeks ending Aug. 1st through Sept. 5th, 2020. As is the case with regular unemployment, the LWA can be assigned retroactively to the initial unemployment date but has limited funding, so is on a first-come, first-served basis. Upon completion of the online application for regular unemployment through CDLE, applicants can take a few more minutes to complete the LWA application. For CCCS instructors who have lost classes, the initial unemployment date would be the start of the Fall 2020 semester. The CDLE has extended the deadline for LWA certification to Oct. 10, 2020.

Also, most types of workers who were laid off from their regular jobs must register at one of the Colorado Workforce Centers for job-hunt help and must apply for at least three jobs per week. Chase explained how CCCS instructors who are teaching at least one class during the Fall 2020 semester may not be required to do this, as they may qualify for "job-attached" unemployment while still teaching for the CCCS.

Part-time faculty who applied for unemployment in late August may have been dissuaded from pursuing the benefit because the application process was unclear and because it was difficult to get a call back to answer questions. Those problems have been addressed; the forms rewritten, the CDLE website vastly improved, and a Virtual Assistant installed to field questions. Chase urges those who were initially put off by the process to try again now, before Oct. 10, especially. The CDLE unemployment division, he explained, has since March seen its workload skyrocket from an average of 2,000 claims per week to a high in April of 105,000 per week. Accordingly, the state agency has been working furiously to streamline the unemployment application and certification processes to meet the needs of all types of Colorado workers, including gig, contract, and part-time faculty.

To apply for unemployment benefits online visit the CDLE Unemployment Division web page: <https://cdle.colorado.gov/unemployment/new-claimant>

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