

Testimony Presented by Christopher Geyer  
Boilermaker Union Local 13  
Senate Labor & Industry Committee Hearing  
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My name is Christopher Geyer and I am 57 year old Union member. I am a part of the Boilermaker Union Local 13, out of Philadelphia. I am here today to try and help bring some light to the problem with the Pennsylvania Unemployment Compensation system. Specifically the law changes which make it impossible to receive benefits. This law is devastating to those of us who work in the Trades focused on Construction.

I am on my 4<sup>th</sup> appeal for benefits at this time. I have not worked or received any compensation since the end of April, 2015. My work is seasonal and has been the entire 30 years I have been in the business.

I am told that now I must meet 49 ½ % in 3 quarters to meet my highest quarter. This is almost impossible. I am also told that my wages counted are based on when they are received, not when they are earned. Which also impedes on my ability to be eligible.

It is obvious that these law changes are designed to prohibit the collection of unemployment compensation, not to make it more efficient. I am also told that these changes were designed to lower a deficit in the U.C. system, due to Federal Extensions during the economic down turn.

For the record I am almost destitute. I have exhausted all my savings trying to carry us through slow periods. I cannot pay my bills and am dire straits for my line of work. With power plants shutting down, and refineries doing less repairs. Unemployment Compensation is more important to us than ever. I am not alone in the wake of these U.C. changes. It has hurt union and non-union employers and employees alike. Employers are dealing with high turnover and the costs of training because of laid off employees needing to seek other employment. Employees in the trades, that are able, are switching careers and starting from scratch.

I am almost at the end of my career. My pension and health benefits are tied up in the Boilermakers. Switching would be suicide for my retirement and my family. After 30 years I cannot, at 57, rededicate myself to new career.

This law change has placed an unfair burden on those of us who work the trades, construction, and seasonal. You have required us to pay, along with our employers, into a system we cannot benefit from. How is this even remotely fair? You have placed the burden of the deficit on the backs of the very people Unemployment Compensation was designed to help.

I have been in contact with several legislative offices and the stories I get are unbelievable. As follows, these are actual answers I have been given to my questions regarding the law changes.

“Most don’t think this is a big deal. “

“We didn’t realize how many people it effected.”

“You are a union employee who makes, in 6 months, what most make in a year. Budget your money!”  
“The amount you pay in is tiny compared to your employer, so I wouldn’t complain.”

This is the mind set of our *elected* officials.

I understand that some aspects of this law were brought up in committee last year, the topic was tabled, and never revisited.

Who has decided that we, those of us who work for a living, aren’t important enough to consider? Is it the same people who report that the unemployment rate? It doesn’t take a genius to realize that when you don’t receive U.C. Benefits, you are not counted. This allows the percentage of people unemployed to look artificially lower. We all understand this false impression gets some elected officials a pat on the back.

You must realize that this is a big deal. I know you understand that there are jobs that are seasonal, and pensions and careers are based on them. We need you to acknowledge that every solution can’t be based on the backs of the working people.

We are the same people who elected you, to stand up for us, to voice our concerns, to protect us. These decisions do not effect things like “date night”, they effect mortgage payments, grocery shopping, doctor visits. These laws are not only impeding our ability to give back to the economy, they are affecting our ability to survive without welfare.

Walking in our shoes, the decision to change back the law would not be a hard choice. Please recognize that you, those we trusted enough to place in the positions you are in, have put us in a very desperate situation. Please take the honorable road and represent your working class citizens. Help us.