



UNEMPLOYMENT COMPENSATION AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

What is it?

In 2003, D.C. Councilmember Catania introduced the “Unemployment Compensation and Domestic Violence Amendment Act of 2003.” It allows domestic violence victims who lose their jobs as a result of the violence to apply for unemployment compensation. The bill was passed into law in June 2004.

Who is covered by the new law?

Nationwide, hundreds of thousands of people are physically beaten by their intimate partners each year, impacting their ability to obtain and maintain employment. Studies have shown that 96% of employed domestic violence victims experience problems at work related to the abuse. In addition, 30% of victims lose their jobs due to domestic violence.¹

The new law allows victims of domestic violence to apply for unemployment compensation when they quit or are fired from a job because of reasons related to the violence. The following are typical scenarios where the law will come into play:

- Abusers often refuse to allow domestic violence victims to get to work on time. Now, if a domestic violence victim is fired because of excessive absences or tardiness, she will be able to apply for unemployment benefits.
- Some domestic violence victims work with the abuser. A victim who quits her job because she needs to go into hiding to keep her children and herself safe can now apply for unemployment benefits.
- Abusers sometimes exert control by repeatedly calling their victims at work—distracting the victim and other workers, and leading to decreased productivity. If a woman is fired in those circumstances, the new law allows her to apply for unemployment benefits.
- Domestic violence victims who quit their jobs because their abusers know where they work (making the victims unsafe there) also will have access to unemployment compensation benefits.

¹ See [A Portrait of Women & Girls in the Washington Metropolitan Area](#), The Washington Area Women’s Foundation, at 60 (2003).

What changes does the law make?

Now, as a result of the “Unemployment Compensation and Domestic Violence Amendment Act of 2003,” domestic violence victims have additional avenues for receiving unemployment compensation. If they lose their jobs as a result of the violence, they can apply for unemployment benefits.

What is involved in applying for benefits?

Domestic violence victims will fill out the same paperwork that other applicants for unemployment benefits fill out. In addition, they will need to offer some sort of proof that they are victims of domestic violence.

What are acceptable forms of proof?

Any of the following documents will satisfy the proof requirement.

1. A police report or record;
2. A court record, such as a Temporary Protection Order or Civil Protection Order;
3. A governmental agency record, such as a report from Child Services; or
4. A written statement affirming that the victim has sought services from one of the following:
 - a. Shelter official;
 - b. Social worker;
 - c. Counselor;
 - d. Therapist;
 - e. Attorney;
 - f. Medical doctor; or
 - g. Cleric

Who pays for the benefits?

Unlike other states, the D.C. law provides that any benefits paid out will not be charged to the employer. Instead, the money will come from the District’s general funds.

Where can I find the law?

The law is available on-line through the D.C. Council’s website. You can go directly there through this link: <http://www.dccouncil.washington.dc.us/images/00001/20030922161213.pdf> .

What if I have other questions?

You can contact the D.C. Employment Justice Center’s Program on Women’s Employment Rights (POWER) at (202) 828-9675 x 16.

For more information about your rights to receive unemployment compensation in D.C., come to the Workers’ Rights Clinic run by the D.C. Employment Justice Center on Wednesdays, 6:00-7:30 pm at Bread for the City NW (1525 7th Street NW, between P and Q Streets NW, near Howard University/Shaw Metro stop on the Green Line), and on Mondays, 3:00-4:30 pm at Bread for the City SE (1640 Good Hope Road SE). No appointment is necessary, and you may call (202) 828-9675 x 11 for additional information about the clinic. You can also visit the D.C. Employment Justice Center website at www.dcejc.org.

This fact sheet is intended to provide accurate, general information regarding legal rights relating to employment in Washington, D.C. Because laws and procedures frequently change, the D.C. Employment Justice Center cannot ensure that the information in this fact sheet is current nor be responsible for any use to which it is put. Do not rely on this information without consulting an attorney or the appropriate agency about your legal rights in your situation.

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