

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **Stay Home, Stay Safe: Supporting New Jersey Workers during COVID-19**

*Councilman Lavarro and Northeast New Jersey Legal Services partner to inform area workers of New Jersey's unemployment system and benefits during COVID-19.*

**Jersey City, NJ, Thursday, May 14, 2020** – With COVID-19 shuttering businesses and limiting the ability for New Jerseyans to work, the unemployment rate continues to climb. For many, the sudden decrease in income means an inability to afford necessities including housing, food, and medical care. To mitigate the economic impact of area “stay at home” orders, Congress passed the CARES Act which provides additional assistance to those currently receiving New Jersey unemployment benefits, and payments to those individuals who may not be eligible for regular unemployment benefits but are not working due to COVID-19. To help understand what the new unemployment benefits landscape looks like for area residents, Councilman At-Large Rolando Lavarro and Northeast New Jersey Legal Services (NNJLS) are presenting a free webinar on Tuesday, May 19 at 2:00 PM covering New Jersey’s unemployment benefits and available assistance during the COVID-19 pandemic. Individuals interested in watching the webinar can RSVP via this Google Form link: [bit.ly/2zBtLCE](https://bit.ly/2zBtLCE)

“It’s been over two months now that Jersey City residents have been laid off as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. With over 1.1M unemployment claims in New Jersey, Jersey City likely makes up tens of thousands,” said Councilman At-Large Rolando Lavarro. “Many of our neighbors have turned to unemployment benefits for assistance, only to be placed on hold or met with website outages. We hope this webinar will serve as a resource, answering some of their questions about whether they are qualified and how to apply.”

The New Jersey Department of Labor and Workforce Development recently shared startling statistics: as of May 7, 2020—approximately seven weeks since COVID-19 hit New Jersey in mid-March—1,018,785 unemployment claims have been filed in New Jersey, by far the most ever recorded for a similar period.

Leah Ashe, Deputy Director of Northeast New Jersey Legal Services, says the cases the firm is seeing reflects the exponential unemployment spike seen statewide. From Ms. Ashe: “NNJLS has seen an increase in the number of unemployment related cases in the past month with some clients concerned about what benefits they are eligible to receive due to the impact of COVID-19, and others concerned about the long delays in the processing of their unemployment claims. We are working hard to address these concerns and provide as much advice and guidance as we can during these difficult and unprecedented times for our clients.”

Beyond the webinar, Northeast New Jersey Legal Services can provide advice and representation to eligible clients faced with federal and state public benefits issues including New Jersey unemployment benefits.

Both Councilman Lavarro and the team at NNJLS are carefully monitoring the shifting landscape and the May 19th webinar aims to answer understandable questions and concerns from the community.

**About Northeast New Jersey Legal Services:**

Northeast New Jersey Legal Services (NNJLS), with a mission to ensure equal access to justice, is a private non-profit public interest law firm that provides free legal assistance in civil matters to low-income and underserved individuals and families residing in Bergen, Hudson, and Passaic Counties, NJ. NNJLS focuses on four core areas of civil law—housing, consumer, family, and public benefits. NNJLS also has specialized programs in place to address the legal needs of veterans; seniors; survivors of domestic violence; survivors of sexual assault; students; immigrants; persons living with HIV or AIDS; individuals formerly incarcerated who now face legal barriers to re-entry; individuals experiencing homelessness; and low-income residents with federal income tax issues.

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