

California work-search requirements comes amid glut of open jobs



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Photo by: Gerald Labrador

A help-wanted sign in the bathroom of Tajima in Kearny Mesa

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SAN DIEGO (KGTV) — In less than three weeks, a reinvigorated EDD will start requiring those on unemployment to actively seek work in order to remain eligible for weekly payments. The move comes as restaurants and hotels remain desperate for workers.

Mov Kim put his restaurant's help-wanted sign in a place no one could miss it - on the wall next to the toilet.

“It's right there and it works all the time,” said Kim, general manager of Tajima in San Diego's Kearny Mesa area.

With the state reopening, he's hoping that sign, or internet ads, get him at least five more good workers.

“We could set up five interviews,” he said. “We'd be lucky if one comes.”

That same struggle, happening in restaurants and hotels across San Diego, San Luis Obispo and Bakersfield, as workers have either left, retrained, or remain out of the workforce. Through September 7, their weekly unemployment checks are boosted by \$300 in federal stimulus.

The state Employment Development Department is sending those checks, processing 22 million claims in the pandemic. The agency has been ripped often for keeping Californians on hold for hours or ignoring them altogether. In January, amid a shut down order, it cut off 1.4 million claims on suspicion of fraud

Things, however, are different today.

“There are thousands of jobs open out there, but do it now, don't wait until Sept. (7), when the \$300 supplement ends and all at once there's a tsunami of people going back to work,” said Phil Blair, CEO of Manpower San Diego, a staffing agency.

The EDD has since hired thousands of new workers. Starting July 11, unemployment recipients will need to certify they looked for work, a requirement lifted when the pandemic hit. Those who don't certify will need to interview to get their money. The EDD says examples of looking for work include applying for jobs, registering on search sites, and participating in training.

But the jobs available may simply not be good enough. Brandon Taylor recently took a position at a Little Italy restaurant, on the requirement he'd get full-time hours. He believes others can also be selective in their searches.

“In some situations maybe they're getting more from unemployment than they used to, so they don't want to settle for working really hard at a place that doesn't treat them very well or doesn't give them a flexible schedule just to make not as much money as they were getting,” said Taylor, an Ocean Beach resident.

On that front, restaurants and hotels have been offering higher wages and recruitment bonuses, including Tajima.

"If other restaurants within this vicinity are doing it and we're not, we're going to be at the bottom of the stick and we don't want to, we want to be at least in the middle or upper," he said.

Meanwhile, unemployment in San Diego County remains at 6.4 percent, in Bakersfield 10.1 percent, and in San Luis Obispo 5.2 percent.