

**SENATE . . . . . No. 1014**

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**The Commonwealth of Massachusetts**

PRESENTED BY:

***Bruce E. Tarr***

*To the Honorable Senate and House of Representatives of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts in General Court assembled:*

The undersigned legislators and/or citizens respectfully petition for the adoption of the accompanying bill:

**An Act improving unemployment insurance.**

PETITION OF:

NAME:

*Bruce E. Tarr*  
*Benjamin Swan*

DISTRICT/ADDRESS:

*First Essex and Middlesex*  
*11th Hampden*

**SENATE . . . . . No. 1014**

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By Mr. Tarr, a petition (accompanied by bill, Senate, No. 1014) of Bruce E. Tarr for legislation to improve unemployment insurance. Labor and Workforce Development.

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[SIMILAR MATTER FILED IN PREVIOUS SESSION  
SEE SENATE, NO. 895 OF 2013-2014.]

**The Commonwealth of Massachusetts**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**In the One Hundred and Eighty-Ninth General Court  
(2015-2016)**  
\_\_\_\_\_

An Act improving unemployment insurance.

*Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives in General Court assembled, and by the authority of the same, as follows:*

1           SECTION 1. Subsection (i) of section 14 of chapter 151A, as appearing in the 2014  
2 Official Edition, is hereby amended by striking out paragraph (1) and inserting in place thereof  
3 the following paragraph:

4           With respect to calendar years beginning on or after January 1, 2014, the experience rate  
5 of an employer qualifying therefore under subsection (b) shall be the rate which appears in the  
6 column headed by the unemployment compensation reserve percentage as of the applicable  
7 computation date and on the line with the applicable employer account reserve percentage as set  
8 forth in the experience rate table:

9           SECTION 2. Paragraph (2) of subsection (i) of section 14 of said chapter 151A is hereby  
10 repealed.

11 SECTION 3. Paragraph (a) of Section 24 of said chapter 151A is hereby amended by  
12 striking out in its entirety said paragraph and inserting in place thereof a new paragraph:

13 (a) Have been paid wages in the base period amounting to at least forty times the weekly  
14 benefit rate; provided, however, that for the period beginning on January first, nineteen hundred  
15 and ninety-five the individual has been paid wages in at least two quarters of the base period  
16 amounting to at least thirty times the weekly benefit rate; provided, further, that said amount  
17 shall be increased annually proportionately, rounding to the nearest one hundred dollars, to any  
18 increases which have occurred during the prior calendar year in the minimum wage as set forth  
19 in section one of chapter one hundred and fifty-one; and, provided further, that any such increase  
20 shall be effective beginning on the first Sunday in January.

21 SECTION 4. Paragraph 1 of subsection (e) of section 25 of chapter 151A, as appearing  
22 in the 2014 Official Edition, is hereby amended by inserting after the word “misdemeanor”, in  
23 lines 122 and 123, the following words:-

24 (3) , or a continuation without a finding or an admission of sufficient facts to such a  
25 felony or misdemeanor..

26 SECTION 5. Section 30 of said chapter 151A is hereby amended by striking out  
27 subsection (a) in its entirety and inserting in place thereof the following subsection:

28 (a) Except as provided in subsection (b), the total benefits which an unemployed  
29 individual may receive during his benefit year shall be an amount equal to thirty-six percent of  
30 his wages in the base period, or an amount equal to thirty times his benefit rate, whichever is  
31 less, plus dependency benefits payable under section 29; provided, that if in any month the  
32 average state-wide unemployment rate for the prior 6 months, as determined by the United States

33 Department of Labor, is equal to or below 5.1 percent, the total benefits which an unemployed  
34 individual who then files a claim may receive during his benefit year shall be an amount equal to  
35 36 per cent of his wages in the base period or an amount equal to 26 times his benefit rate,  
36 whichever is less, plus dependency benefits payable under said section 29. If such amount  
37 includes a fractional part of a dollar, it shall be rounded to the next lower full dollar amount

38 SECTION 6. Said section 30 of chapter 151A is hereby amended by adding the  
39 following:-

40 (d) Notwithstanding the provisions of subsection (a), in any period that is not an extended  
41 benefit period as defined by section 30A, an individual's rights to receive regular benefits under  
42 this chapter for any week in excess of 26 times the individual's weekly benefit amount, plus  
43 dependency benefits payable under section 29, shall be dependent on the individual's  
44 participation in an unpaid internship program approved by the commissioner. For each week in  
45 excess of said time, up to 30 weeks, in order to receive the corresponding benefits for that week  
46 the individual shall complete a week in such program. Approved participation in such program  
47 shall not result in a decrease in an individual's regular benefits.

48 SECTION 7. Section 38 of said chapter 151A of the General Laws, as so appearing, is  
49 hereby amended by inserting after the word "information.", in line 20, the following sentence:-

50 If the employer responds within 10 days after such notice was mailed, the commissioner  
51 shall have a final determination of the matter within 30 days, unless good cause exists, in which  
52 case the commissioner shall send written notice to both the claimant and the employer that good  
53 cause exists for the matter not to be decided within 30 days; provided, however, that said written  
54 notice explains such good cause.

55 SECTION 8. Said section 38 of said chapter 151A of the General Laws, as so appearing,  
56 is hereby further amended by inserting after the word “cause”, in line 26, the following words:-

57 ;and provided further, however, that the commissioner or an authorized representative  
58 shall not determine the matter on the available information and shall further investigate the claim  
59 if the claimant has previously received benefits under this chapter while employed by said  
60 employer the previous calendar year or in any 2 of the previous 5 calendar years, as provided for  
61 in the second paragraph of subsection (a) of section 39.

62 SECTION 9. Subsection (a) of section 39 of said chapter 151A of the General Laws, as  
63 so appearing, is hereby amended by adding the following paragraph:-

64 The commissioner or an authorized representative shall, in consultation with the state  
65 advisory council provided for in section 9N of chapter 23, investigate any claim in which the  
66 claimant has previously received benefits under this chapter in the previous calendar year or in  
67 any 2 of the previous 5 calendar years; provided, however, that said investigation shall occur  
68 only if the claimant was employed by the employer against which said claimant is currently  
69 making the claim. Said investigation shall ensure the claimant is fully entitled to benefits under  
70 this chapter, and shall include, but not be limited to, an analysis of whether the unemployment is  
71 a result of a factual disruption of employment or rather a regular or seasonal method by the  
72 claimant to unlawfully generate income. The commissioner or an authorized representative shall  
73 represent the interests of the agency at a hearing if cause exists to suspect the claimant in not  
74 lawfully entitled to benefits.

75 SECTION 10. Subsection (a) of section 62A of said chapter 151A of the General Laws,  
76 as so appearing, is hereby amended by adding the following paragraph:-

77           The department shall yearly conduct not less than 1 public hearing to seek the input of  
78 Massachusetts employers. Not less than 20 days prior to a public hearing the commissioner shall  
79 conspicuously post notice of the time and location of the hearing on its website and send notice,  
80 electronically or otherwise, to every employer with an account with the department; the  
81 Massachusetts and Greater Boston Chambers of Commerce; the Massachusetts Tax Payers  
82 Association, Associated Industries of Massachusetts, and the National Federal of Independent  
83 Businesses.

84           SECTION 11. Notwithstanding any general or special law to the contrary, the  
85 commissioner, as defined in section 1 of chapter 151A, shall establish a program through which  
86 in-state employers may offer unpaid internships or job training to individuals receiving state  
87 unemployment benefits and an approval process for the inclusion of any business in such  
88 program; provided, however, that said program shall allow for employers to begin formal  
89 employment with an individual for not more than 1 week while the individual receives  
90 unemployment benefits. The purpose of this program shall be to maximize opportunities for  
91 worker training and establish connections between businesses and the state workforce.”

92           SECTION 12. There shall be a special commission to conduct an investigation and study  
93 of the activities and efficacy of the adjudication of unemployment insurance claims by the  
94 department of unemployment assistance under the executive office of labor and workforce  
95 development. The commission shall consist of 11 members: 2 members who shall be appointed  
96 by the state auditor, both of whom shall have experience with the adjudication of unemployment  
97 disputes, and 1 of whom shall serve as chair; 2 members of the senate, 1 of whom shall be  
98 appointed by the senate president and 1 of whom shall be appointed by the minority leader of the  
99 senate; 2 members of the house of representatives, 1 of whom shall be appointed by the speaker

100 of the house and 1 of whom shall be appointed by the minority leader of the house; the director  
101 of the department of unemployment assistance, or a designee; the president of the Massachusetts  
102 taxpayer's foundation, or a designee; the executive vice-president of the AFL-CIO, or a  
103 designee; the executive vice-president of associated industries of Massachusetts, or a designee;  
104 and the executive director of the Massachusetts municipal association, or a designee.

105         The study shall include, but not be limited to, an analysis of: (1) the number of claims  
106 received by the department quarterly since January 1, 2010 and the resulting status of all claims,  
107 including any information pertinent to the description of the status of said claims, including, but  
108 not limited to (i) the results of all initial determinations of claims, (ii) the results of any appeals  
109 resulting from said initial determination, (iii) the number of rulings reversed through the appeals  
110 and review process, (iv) the number of claims arising from the provisions of subdivisions (1)  
111 and (2) of subsection (e) of section 25 of chapter 151A, and (v) the number of claims settled in  
112 favor of the claimant and in favor of the employer; (2) the average length of time of the appeals  
113 and review process of a claim from initial determination to final disposition; (3) the procedures  
114 through which the department hires and trains new employees to implement the provisions of  
115 sections 39 through 41, inclusive, of chapter 151A, including a determination as to whether or  
116 not employment procedures have been followed pursuant to section 9K of chapter 23.

117         The study shall also include the recommendations of the commission relative to: (1)  
118 procedures through which the department may produce a quarterly report, to be posted on the  
119 department's website, of the number of active claims and the status of said claims; (2)  
120 procedures through which any current backlog of cases may be fairly and efficiently resolved  
121 and avoided in future department proceedings; (3) procedures through which oversight and  
122 quality control principles may be implemented to ensure the continuing prompt, equitable, and

123 transparent application of current law by the commissioner and the board of review; (4) a  
124 complete review of current statute and regulations relative to the implementation of chapter  
125 151A and any recommendations as to possible legislative reform and streamlined procedures,  
126 including, but not limited to, recommendations and procedures for the uniform and effective  
127 implementation of section 25 of chapter 151A.

128         The commission may request from all state agencies such information and assistance as  
129 the commission may require. The commission shall report the results of its investigation and  
130 study, together with drafts of legislation, if any, necessary to carry its recommendations into  
131 effect, by filing the same with the clerks of the senate and house of representatives, who shall  
132 forward the same to the joint committee on public health and the house and senate committees on  
133 ways and means on or before December 31, 2013.”

134         SECTION 13. Notwithstanding any general or special law to the contrary, the secretary  
135 of labor and workforce development shall convene a task force to examine the payment structure  
136 of unemployment benefits. The task force shall consist of the secretary of labor and workforce  
137 development or a designee, who shall serve as the chair; a designee of the state advisory council;  
138 a representative from the National Bureau of Economic Research; a representative of the  
139 Political Economy Research Institute at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst; and a  
140 representative of the Rappaport Institute of Greater Boston. The task force shall evaluate the  
141 payment structure of unemployment benefits in the commonwealth and the desirability of  
142 altering the payment structure to provide for lesser payments the longer a claimant remains  
143 unemployed, until termination of benefits or reemployment. Said evaluation shall include an  
144 analysis of providing an optional one-time lump sum payment within the beginning stages of  
145 unemployment; provided, however, that said payment is less than the average total payment

146 received by a claimant. The task force shall consider the impact of such a payment system on  
147 claimants, employers, the division of unemployment assistance, and on the unemployment rate  
148 and economy. The task force shall file a report of its conclusions, along with an electronic copy,  
149 including its recommendations and drafts of any legislation, if necessary, by filing the same with  
150 the clerks of the senate and house of representatives who shall forward a copy of the report to the  
151 chairs and ranking members of the joint committee on labor and workforce development within 1  
152 year of the effective date of this act.