**Pandemic complicates job hunt for college graduates**

Just a few months ago, the U.S. economy was thriving and the job market seemed wide open for college seniors such as Jake Elton, who graduates this month from the College of William & Mary with a business degree specializing in finance.

Like many college seniors, Elton, who is from Roanoke, said he started doing job interviews with multiple companies last fall. He landed a job with a software company in Northern Virginia, with hopes of working there and building experience for a few years before going back to school to earn an MBA.

He was supposed to start working later this summer. But then the coronavirus pandemic hit, throwing the U.S. economy into its worst spiral at least since the Great Recession.

About two weeks ago, Elton got a call from a recruiter for the company that hired him.

"When the phone call started, I knew where it was going," said Elton, 22. His job offer had been rescinded.

So Elton, who had hoped to take some time to travel this summer before starting work, found himself back in the job hunt.

He's not alone, as many other soon-to-be college graduates say they are having a tough time finding jobs with so many businesses being shut down from the pandemic.

Career service professionals at universities in the Richmond region and throughout Virginia say they have seen some companies pulling back on offers, especially for internships, while other businesses are delaying their hiring for a few weeks or months waiting for the economy to turn around.

"Securing career opportunities has become more challenging but not impossible for this year's college graduates," said Joseph Lyons, senior director for Virginia State University's Academic Center for Excellence and Career Services. "Companies are still hiring even if it includes delayed or virtual start dates. Graduates have to be flexible and creative in their job search."

Katybeth Lee, director of business career services at Virginia Commonwealth University, said the good news is that employers are still hiring. "Of course, it depends on the industry. Some industries like hospitality and tourism have been hit hard. Others have seen a bump, like groceries."

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The job hunt this spring has been difficult, frustrating and challenging, graduates say.

"I don't actually know anyone who has gotten a job during the outbreak," said Caroline Ryan, who is graduating from James Madison University with degrees in communications and dance.

Ryan, who is from Hanover County, said she was looking for communications jobs in the arts or higher education, but several job or internship opportunities were canceled.

On Wednesday, however, Ryan said she landed an internship position in communications for Burkwood Swim & Racquet Club in Hanover. While it is an unpaid internship, Ryan said she is glad to get a job to build her professional qualifications.

W&M's Elton said he is using online tools and connections made through internships to look for other jobs.

"I am in the interview stage with a couple of companies, but no firm offers yet," he said.

"It is obviously tough and not ideal. There are less places hiring than usual, but you still have to get to work and find some positives and adjust if you want to end up finding something," Elton said.

"I have found that there are a lot of firms that are rescinding offers, but there are also some firms that are actively hiring even more because they are getting more work," Elton said. "It is really about connecting with the companies that are hiring more."

Meriwether Bryant, a Midlothian resident who is graduating from the University of Virginia with a degree in global studies and a minor in environmental science, said she started looking for jobs last fall and was hoping to get a position with a nonprofit or in environmental consulting.

"Then everything happened, and I would say I get two to five emails a day of positions being canceled," Bryant said. "I applied for a lot of internships over the summer and those were the first ones to be canceled."

Now, Bryant said she is looking for jobs outside her field of study.

"I am trying to look at this as an opportunity to push myself outside of my boundaries, like maybe going outside of Richmond and moving to another state," she said. "It has been difficult. I am now second-guessing my career path. I have a lot of worry about underemployment and competing with people who have a lot more experience than I do when all this is over."

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The National Association of Colleges and Employers, an organization that tracks the job market for graduates, is conducting regular surveys of its members to gauge the job market for graduates.

Based on the most recent survey of its members, the organization said about 22% of employers are revoking offers to interns, while about 4.4% of employers are revoking offers to full-time recruits. Both of these figures have grown over the past month, the group said.

"It doesn't sound like much, but it is going up, which is the bad thing," said Edwin Koc, the organization's director of research.

Koc cautioned that the survey is conducted among the organization's 439 member companies, which are in multiple industries, but "we do not have a strong representation in hospitality and entertainment, and those are areas that are being hit extremely hard by the virus situation."

During the height of the last economic recession, about 9% of employers revoked offers for graduates in the Class of 2009, Koc said.

So this downturn has not reached that level yet, but about 19% of employers in the most recent survey remain undecided about their hiring plans.

Before the coronavirus outbreak, "it was going to be a fairly decent year for college hiring," Koc said.

After all, the U.S. was in the 11th year of an economic expansion - the longest on record - as college seniors were heading into their final year.

A poll of members before the outbreak indicated a 6.5% increase in job offers for new graduates compared with last year.

Many employers made job offers to college seniors in the fall before graduation, Koc said.

"If you are in the group that got job offers, you are probably OK," he said. "But you may be delayed in terms of starting a job."

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Erika Neal, a political science major and senior class president at Virginia State University, said she started looking for jobs last August.

She interviewed for a job with Walmart's e-commerce business in October and accepted a job as a category specialist in December. A native of Henrico County, Neal is moving to California to start work in June.

"I was really fortunate to have a job offer and accepted it prior to the pandemic," Neal said. The job is in a specialty - e-commerce - that has been in high demand since the pandemic started because of online shopping. "There is a lot of work to be done in that space," she said.

In the meantime, Neal has been helping other seniors on their job searches. Given how the pandemic has disrupted business and in-person interviews, "it is really confusing," she said. "There are just so many moving parts that we can't see from the outside, for people who are looking to get jobs as a student."

"Particularly for students of historically black colleges and universities, it is more challenging," she said. "They may not have all the resources to go online and apply for a job. A lot of seniors might just walk into an office and talk to a receptionist. A lot of those offices are closed now, and seniors have to go online.

"Another thing college seniors can relate to is juggling between school work and interviews and classes," she said. "Balancing the college experience online with finding a job is definitely an obstacle."

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While some seniors were able to get jobs before the pandemic, about half of the students from a typical senior class do not start looking for a job until graduation is near, said Koc from the National Association of Colleges and Employers.

New graduates might take service jobs in retail, restaurants or hospitality until they find a job that fits their career goals, and 30% to 40% of college graduates start out working in jobs that do not require a college degree, he said.

"They are going into a market for the summer that is probably not going to be very good, if there are any jobs at all," he said.

Typically, the most readily available jobs for new college graduates are in food service, but that sector has been hobbled by pandemic-related closures.

"It is going to be a very difficult summer for a lot of new college graduates," he said. "They are going to struggle mightily in terms of getting a job or job offer."

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Some large employers in the Richmond area that have closed offices and shifted employees to remote work say they are still hiring college graduates but are delaying start dates for some new hires.

For instance, Henrico-based Altria Group Inc. is still hiring recent college graduates and "the numbers this year are consistent with previous years," a spokesman said.

The nation's largest tobacco company is "slightly delaying the start date for some of the new hires," who will work in its sales force, to later in the summer. The company also is bringing on 182 summer interns from across the U.S. in June, including some new graduates.

"With our ongoing focus on employee health and safety during the COVID-19 pandemic, these internships will be done remotely this year," spokesman Steven Callahan said.

Financial services giant Capital One Financial Corp., the Richmond region's largest private employer, said it is still hiring graduates but is prioritizing roles that are most critical to servicing customers while "temporarily pausing recruitment for certain other roles."

The company also has shifted its summer internship program to remote work.

Frank Allen, director of employer relations for the University of Richmond, said he, too, has noticed that most student job offers are not being revoked but some are being delayed.

Allen said there have been some instances where employers have retracted offers that students had not accepted yet.

"The impact on the economy is so uncertain at this point, and the impact on specific organizations is not clear yet," he said.

Given the uncertainty around the duration of the pandemic, Allen said he is concerned about job offers a year from now for the Class of 2021, when the economic fallout is likely to be more clear and may have affected more industries.

"I think the economic impact will certainly be more known, and it will potentially be greater than it is now," he said.

Beth Chancy, UR's associate director of career services and a career adviser, said she has talked with students about reframing their expectations for the job search in the immediate future.

"We have talked about thinking of life in the short term versus the long term in terms of what is possible right now, and focusing on those businesses that currently are hiring right now," Chancy said.

"We've also talked about focusing on what they can control right now - getting all of their job search materials ready right now, getting their applications ready, and working on building relationships."

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Trip Gilmore, a senior at Hampden-Sydney College majoring in business economics and physics, said he was able to secure a job as a business analyst for Virginia Green Lawn Care.

Gilmore, who is from Newport News, previously had worked for two summers as an intern for the Henrico-based company.

"I'm very lucky, and I am beyond thankful that I have this," Gilmore said of the job, which involves visiting the company's branch offices to help improve business processes.

"A couple of my friends have gotten jobs," he said. "But a lot of them are having a tough time, as expected."

"If I have any words of advice, I would strongly encourage anybody to take advantage of their college's career center if they can," as well as reaching out to alumni to make connections, he said. "My college has an amazing career center and team. I don't know where I would be without them."

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Carson Pinney, a senior at Washington & Lee University who is from Richmond, is majoring in business with a minor in mass communications. Pinney said she has applied for dozens of jobs over the past few months but has seen most of them vanish as the pandemic has taken its toll.

"I assume they are pulling them because they cannot afford to hire new recruits," she said.

Pinney said she feels most sorry for people who have lost jobs.

"It is a horrible situation, and it is out of our control," she said. "The last recession was man-made. This recession has not been man-made. It is biologically made by a natural disaster. Of course I want it to end as soon as possible, but I know it is not going to happen for some time."

"It has been eye-opening for me," she said. "There are millions of other people on the planet who are in the same position as me. It makes me feel not as alone, and grateful for going to an amazing college and having the tools to get a great job, which I hope to get eventually."

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**In severe downturn, some Richmond-area startups thrive, some pivot, others wait and hope**

The coronavirus pandemic forced the founders of Brandefy out of their office in downtown Richmond and even stranded one of the startup company's employees overseas, but it hasn't stopped the venture from forging ahead with its business plans.

In fact, during the pandemic, the Richmond-based startup has seen a lot more consumer interest in its technology service - a website and mobile app that enables shoppers to compare prices and ingredients of skin care and cosmetic products.

"We have seen a huge increase in engagement," said Meg Pryde, Brandefy's CEO. She and Carolyn Kochard were friends in undergraduate school at the University of Virginia before co-founding the business in 2017.

Brandefy is one example of a local startup company that has grasped at opportunities emerging from the pandemic.

Some startup companies are pivoting their business models to meet challenges presented by the pandemic, while others have been pushed into more of a "wait-and-see" mode, hoping for the economy to recover over the next few months or year.

The coronavirus has resulted in a severe hit to local startups such as FarmRaiser, which runs a website where fundraiser organizers can connect with local farmers or makers of other products to sell for fundraising events; and DineGigs, a startup that develops human resources management technology tools for restaurants.

Some businesses, such as the educational technology company Trilogy Mentors, have seen a big spike in demand because of the closing of schools, while others such as The Shed, which runs an online platform for rentals of various products such as tools and sporting goods, have adjusted their business models.

"A couple of folks just had the right product for this type of time, who are just thriving," said Richard Wintsch, executive director of Startup Virginia, a business incubator in Richmond's Shockoe Bottom that has about 80 startup companies as members and a large network of business mentors.

Startup Virginia provides mentoring and office space for new companies, but it was forced to close those offices when the pandemic hit Virginia. Its member companies are now working remotely from home but still receiving mentoring services.

"I would say the majority of them, being entrepreneurs, often see things as an opportunity and see how to do things differently and how to adjust to a new normal," Wintsch said. "Does that new normal allow them pursue something else or switch to a new model? We have some that are definitely doing that."

Others have been more severely impacted and have hit pause on business plans or are holding on until the economy can recover.

"Our role throughout all of this is that we support each one with their own unique difficulties or challenges or opportunities," Wintsch said.

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Brandefy hit 80,000 user sessions on its app and website in April, its highest-ever number of online interactions and an increase of about 15% over the prior month.

"We have seen those increases month-to-month ever since the pandemic hit," Pryde said. "With this pandemic, consumers are really looking for alternative options that are more affordable."

Some of the largest beauty products retailers have been forced to close their brick-and-mortar stores or have reduced store hours, driving demand for online bargain shopping, Pryde said.

"There is a need for consumers to find those alternatives," she said. "They can use our app to find those alternatives from their couch."

To generate additional revenue during the pandemic, the company also has started a subscription box program this summer in which customers can get a box of skin care products delivered to them.

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DineGigs, a local startup founded in 2017 by Duncan Parker, a former restaurant manager and financial adviser, also has been hit hard by the impact of the coronavirus on its main customer base: the restaurant industry.

The startup created an online platform designed to make it easier and faster for restaurants to hire and onboard workers and for professionals in the industry to apply for jobs. By late last year, the startup had signed up about 100 restaurants and hotels in Virginia to use its service.

Then the coronavirus essentially shut down much of the restaurant and hospitality industry nationwide. "It is pretty brutal out there," Parker said.

"I fear we are going to lose more than half of our restaurants before this is all said and done," said Parker, adding that he fears many hospitality industry workers will leave the state to find jobs unless more is done to help businesses reopen. "It is scary looking forward, because we don't know how many restaurants are going to survive all this."

Parker said the pandemic has taken his startup "back to square one."

"We had a strong three-year plan going into this," he said. "Now, the timeline has stretched out. We are looking at a five- to 10-year plan now."

The crisis also has made it harder to raise capital, Parker said - "the exception being maybe if you were already in due diligence with investors."

Fortunately, Parker said his startup was already operating in a lean, low-cost manner. "I am thankful that expenses are low, overhead is low, and we can hang on for a year or two."

"Our goal right now is to just hunker down and weather the storm and keep our eyes on the future," he said.

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FarmRaiser had just established an office in the Startup Virginia building in Richmond in March when the pandemic disrupted everything.

The company, founded by Northern Virginia resident Mark Abbott in 2015, has a website and platform that enable schools, Scout troops and other organizations to raise funds by connecting them with local suppliers of various products, ranging from farm-raised fruits and vegetables to coffee, artisan cheese and honey. The suppliers share the proceeds of sales with the fundraising group. FarmRaiser also shares a small portion of the proceeds.

Abbott, the CEO, said the goal was "to replace cookies and candies and junk food in fundraisers with products that are made and grown locally."

The company, which has aided fundraising programs in more than 40 states, established a presence in Virginia in 2019 with a network of about 50 product suppliers in the state. This year, it opened a Startup Virginia office led by Lauren Smith, the startup's co-founder and "chief cultivator."

When the pandemic hit, though, schools closed and fundraising campaigns started to dry up, hitting revenue for the company and its suppliers.

"We went from what would typically happen at this time of year - $15,000 to $20,000 a day in transactions - to $500 in transactions," Abbott said. "This was going to be our biggest quarter ever until COVID happened."

So FarmRaiser has found itself in survival mode, but not without hope.

In late May, the company, which has three employees, was approved for a loan from the federal Paycheck Protection Program, which Congress passed to support small businesses during the downturn.

The loan was for just under $30,000, and the company also was approved for a federal economic disaster loan to help keep it operating during the downturn.

"The rules for spending are complex and not well-suited for our business, as the only eligible expense we have is payroll, but we'd be out of cash without it so we are making it work," Abbott said.

With its typical business model on hold, the company has begun a campaign on its website FarmRaiser.com in which people can buy food baskets supplied by local farmers and food producers to donate to food banks.

"Pretty much as soon as COVID-19 happened, we knew that farmers were in for extraordinarily hard times," Smith said. "We also knew this would affect food insecure communities. We quickly wanted to take advantage of our amazing local resources, our local food networks and relationships with food banks to move as many goods as possible and have farmers be paid for that food at a good price."

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Trilogy Mentors developed technology in the burgeoning "EdTech," or educational technology, industry, which aims to use online and digital services to improve tutoring and other education services.

The Richmond-based startup, founded by John Failla in 2015, developed an online platform that matches K-12 students with academic tutors and mentors based on a student's particular needs. One of its key goals is to enable tutors to communicate with students across distances without having to meet in person.

After Trilogy Mentors, which is also a member of Startup Virginia, received $835,000 from investors last year, it pivoted its business model to work with existing tutoring companies across the country to use its platform to enable easier interactions between tutors and students.

Since the coronavirus shut down schools across the country, "we got hit with a wave of demand," for online tutoring services, Failla said.

The number of weekly tutoring sessions using the Trilogy Mentors platform has grown about 1,000% in the past few months, Failla said. He sees it as a rapid acceleration of what had been a slow but steady trend toward more people using online education.

"At the same time, we have given out thousands of dollars in grants and deferred sales to tutoring partners," Failla said. "We view this opportunity as a rare moment when we can build lifelong loyalty with these tutoring partners."

Previously, Failla said he expected it would take five years for even 50% of tutoring to shift online versus in-person. Now, that shift is happening much faster.

While Failla expects some return to normal teacher and student interactions when the virus subsides, "education will never fully go back to the way it was, and that is just a fact of the matter of what has happened," he said. "A lot of [tutoring] groups were forced to go online, and they are now seeing additional value in what is happening online."

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AnswersNow has seen a similar rise in demand for its online service during the pandemic.

The Richmond-based startup, founded by Jeff Beck, a licensed clinical social worker, and Adam Dreyfus, director of the Sarah Dooley Center for Autism at St. Joseph's Villa, provides an online, digital platform that matches parents of children with autism to licensed clinicians who can offer on-demand counseling.

The company's website traffic has bumped up 300% during the pandemic, Beck said.

"We have seen traffic usage and everything across the board tick up," he said. "That has a lot to do with the fact that families and caregivers and their children have moved into their homes, and many of them are not able to get the services they were getting prior to the pandemic: clinic-based services and home-based services and school-based services. Many of those are very much on hold for the time being."

Beck said some insurers also are now covering - at least temporarily - the company's online services. "That has been a big shift for us, from that out-of-pocket cost to get it covered by insurers, so it is as little cost as possible for families."

"I am actually fairly optimistic," Beck said of the startup's future. "We see ourselves as an essential service for many of these families, and this [pandemic] has just exacerbated the need for that reliable, clinical expertise."

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The Shed was already pivoting its business model before the coronavirus hit. The Goochland County-based startup, founded by entrepreneurs Karen Rodgers O'Neil and Daniel Perrone, was created to take advantage of the so-called "sharing economy."

It set up warehouses in Goochland and in Denver where people could store items that they don't use often such as tools and sports equipment and rent those products to other people who need them, sharing the rental revenue with the company.

Last year, the company started to pivot its business to work with manufacturers and retailers of various products to rent those items to consumers. The company has formed partnerships with manufacturers such as Stanley Black & Decker to rent tools.

"We have 30 manufacturers that have signed agreements with our warehouses," O'Neil said. "Business has changed, and we have figured out a better way."

During the pandemic, the startup also has formed partnerships with companies such as Commonwealth Event Co. to provide tents to restaurants, country clubs and fitness centers for outdoor activities that adhere to social distancing rules.

The Shed also launched a program to help local contractors. The company received a $10,000 grant from a local bank to give 100 rental vouchers worth $100 to contractors who are getting back to business.

"We've completely reimagined the everyday product rental experience," Perrone said. "It just so happens that our rental marketplace solution comes at a time when consumers need it most due to the current pandemic and economic uncertainty. We're providing an easy alternative to buying that many desperately need."

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**'We are in terrible need of help': Unemployed workers face delays in receiving benefits**

When the coronavirus pandemic forced John Clary to close his Henrico County hair salon nearly a month ago, he did what tens of thousands of other Virginians did: He applied for unemployment insurance benefits in an effort to help keep him and his family afloat during the crisis.

"I would say our income here is 95 percent gone," said Clary, who has run the Studio in the Garden salon with his husband and business partner Dan Chapman for more than 10 years.

Not only did the salon on Peachtree Boulevard near Libbie Avenue and West Broad Street close, the pandemic has temporarily cost Clary and Chapman their part-time business providing cosmetology services to a retirement community in Williamsburg.

Clary was hoping to get some rapid financial help from the state.

Instead, Clary has received no jobless benefits. And he says he has repeatedly hit a wall trying to navigate a government system that could not quickly adjust to the emergency situation, as well as the eligibility changes.

"My mortgage is due, plus bills and utilities, plus life insurance policies," said Clary, adding that he has been able to get forbearance on some bills, but not all. "We are in terrible need of help, but I am sure I am not the only one. My heart goes out to everyone who is going through this nightmare."

Clary and other unemployed workers across Virginia say they have struggled to file for - and receive - jobless benefits because the Virginia Employment Commission, which takes applications and processes claims, has been overwhelmed with telephone calls and online filers.

In Virginia, 410,762 people have filed for benefits in the past four weeks, roughly 9% of the state's workforce. Nationwide, a staggering 22 million Americans have filed for unemployment in just four weeks.

"I know how many people need that assistance as soon as possible," Gov. Ralph Northam said Friday. "We will be able to provide back pay for those whose applications have taken longer to process."

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Independent contractors and gig economy workers may finally be able to receive unemployment benefits starting the week of April 20.

The Virginia Employment Commission is aiming to start paying the benefits to those workers, said Joyce Fogg, a VEC spokeswoman.

The funding comes from the federal government, which backed the expansion of unemployment benefits through the $2 trillion Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security, or CARES Act, passed by Congress late last month.

The law expanded for the first time unemployment benefits to a workforce classified as independent contractors or gig economy workers who traditionally have not been covered by unemployment insurance.

That meant the system faced a strain because of the expansion of benefits to cover people who were previously ineligible, such as those who are self-employed and those who are filing for benefits for the first time. Those benefits are supposed to be disbursed under a provision of the CARES Act called the Pandemic Unemployment Assistance or PUA program.

Another part of the federal money is for all eligible unemployed workers to receive up to an additional $600 per week in benefits for up to four months.

That money - on top of the typical weekly benefit of up to $378 - also will start flowing to laid off or furloughed workers this month, Fogg said. States are required to administer the federal unemployment benefits but many have been slow in dispersing the funds.

More states have started paying the $600 extra in unemployment aid, though many did so only this past week, The Associated Press reported. At least 32 states were slated to provide the extra federal benefits by the end of last week.

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Some self-employed and sole proprietors describe the process as confusing and frustrating at a time when they need the money the most.

Kristina New, who makes her living by running an Airbnb in Falls Church, had to shut down her business in mid-March. She applied for unemployment benefits, but like other self-employed people she got a denial notice.

"The aggravation is the federal government has said we will support people who are self-employed and gig workers through the states, but the states have not been able to update their systems to allow that," New said. "I don't really blame them. It is a programming change they have had to do, but they were not ready for it."

New received a notice from the Virginia Employment Commission that says the agency is "preparing to administer benefits under the PUA program and there will be additional steps in the application process that you will need to take before payments can begin. You have taken the first step by filing for the traditional/regular UI [unemployment insurance] program and being denied under that program."

The agency says the state is required to verify eligibility under the traditional rules for unemployment before allowing claimants to be considered for the new Pandemic Unemployment Assistance program.

People who are seeking benefits should continue filing a weekly claim even if they have been denied, the VEC's Fogg said.

"Virginia just does not have it together - you can't get anybody on the phone," said Rebecca Rae, a cosmetologist who rents a workspace in Mechanicsville.

Just like other cosmetologists, Rae had to shut down her business in mid-March. Rae applied for unemployment, but she, too, got denied as a sole proprietor.

"I appealed over a week ago," Rae said on April 14. "Nobody has called me, and I have not gotten any mail."

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Money is flowing to some unemployed people - the VEC said it paid out about $100 million in unemployment insurance benefits during the week of April 6.

Weekly benefits range from $60 to $378. For the month of March, the average weekly benefit paid was $293.90. That does not include the additional benefit of up to $600 a week that was part of the federal stimulus program, which unemployed and furloughed workers should begin receiving soon.

With its phone lines tied up by callers, the VEC said it is now hiring additional employees to work at its call centers. Its South Boston call center has added 10 workers to its staff of 41 and the call center in Grundy is adding 25 to its staff of 54. The agency also has contracted with a third-party provider to help handle call center services, Fogg said.

But laid-off workers calling the state's toll-free number to set up claims have complained they either can't get through or wait for hours on hold. The online reporting system also is showing stress.

"Some days, one spends most of the day on these websites and applications with no return mail or call to let you know if what you are doing will help," said Clary, the Henrico hair salon operator.

"At this point, I feel that both state and federal governments have made promises to help self-employed people and small businesses, but they are not able to back up those promises," he said.

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Other workers who have been furloughed or laid off from jobs also have struggled with navigating the unemployment benefits system.

Bailey Anderson was among the 15,000 employees, including about 450 in Virginia, who were furloughed by automotive retailer CarMax Inc. on April 9. "It was really devastating," Anderson said.

She said she filed for unemployment benefits as soon as she got her furlough notice.

People who receive unemployment benefits are normally required to conduct a weekly job search to remain eligible. Northam announced in March that the job search requirement would be suspended effective March 15 because the coronavirus outbreak had forced so many businesses to furlough employees.

Anderson, however, said a notice she received from the VEC indicated she would need to do a weekly job search, even though she still is expecting to go back to work at CarMax once the furlough lifts.

"I think it is misleading," Anderson said. "A lot of people's employers are saying 'don't apply for other work.'"

Fogg confirmed that the requirement to do a weekly job search has been waived, but it has still showed up in some notices people get from the VEC.

Danny Lewis, who manages an office supply company in Henrico and saw his hours cut in half because of the coronavirus, said April 14 that he had applied for reduced-hours unemployment benefits three weeks ago "and I have yet to see any money."

"I received a letter two weeks ago followed by another letter with a PIN number about a week after that," he said. "All that said, still no money has been deposited."

"The process has been frustrating to say the very least," Lewis said. "I don't think the government - be it state or federal - can sustain millions of people filing for unemployment. I don't think it is a situation that is sustainable over a period of two or three months, when right now it is not working for even one month."

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