

Ottawa Journal: Bill C-316 receives royal assent

On June 26, Bill C-316 received Royal Assent and levelled the playing field so that convicted criminals will no longer have longer qualifying and benefit periods than law-abiding Canadians.

Employment Insurance (EI) eligibility is calculated based on the number of insurable hours worked by the claimant in the previous 52 weeks from the date of job loss. Generally speaking, all benefits must be taken within 52 weeks following the date of job loss. Benefits not taken within this period lapse once the 52-week period has expired. However, there are a limited number of exemptions which allow for the extension of either the qualification period or the benefit period.

In the past, claimants had their EI qualifying and/or benefit periods extended, beyond the usual 52 weeks, for each week they were confined in a jail, penitentiary, or similar institution.

If they worked enough hours in the 52 weeks before they were incarcerated, they would then qualify for benefits after their release from jail. However, for law-abiding claimants who decided to take a year off to be with their families and then returned to their jobs, they would be required to work enough hours to re-qualify for benefits. If they suffered a job loss before accumulating enough hours to re-qualify for benefits, they would not receive benefits. Our Government viewed this as unfair and sought change. Effective June 30, 2013, persons who are incarcerated and found guilty of an offence for which they are being detained will no longer be able to benefit from these extensions.

Individuals who are not found guilty of the charges for which they were detained will continue to benefit from the extensions as provided under the current provisions. To do so, they will have to wait for the outcome of their judicial proceedings before requesting an extension of their qualifying or benefit period.

The EI program is meant to support Canadians who lose their jobs through no fault of their own while they look for work or upgrade their skills. It was unfair that convicted felons received preferential treatment compared to hard-working, law-abiding citizens when applying for EI benefits. Thanks to the hard work of our Government, this change will ensure that all Canadians must satisfy the same criteria when applying for EI.

By David Tilson, MP