

Gov. Evers: Signs Special Session Bill on Unemployment Insurance Modernization

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Contact: GovPress@wisconsin.gov

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Governor's special session call prompts legislative action on unemployment modernization after decade of inaction, bill first to be passed by the Legislature under a special session call of Gov. Evers

MADISON — Gov. Tony Evers today signed January 2021 Special Session Senate Bill (SB) 1, now 2021 Wisconsin Act 4, which takes a step toward modernizing Wisconsin's antiquated unemployment system after more than a decade of inaction. The bill comes after the governor announced he would be calling a [Special Session of the Legislature](#) to fix Wisconsin's broken unemployment system during his 2021 State of the State address. While SB 1 does not include any funding or a commitment from the Legislature to fund the system upgrade to completion as was proposed by Gov. Evers, the governor had previously [called](#) SB 1 "a step in the right direction." This is the first bill to have been passed by the Legislature under a special session call of the governor.

Gov. Evers signed SB 1 today and released [a video message](#) of the signing.

"The system isn't new, and the problems aren't, either. We saw these problems brought to bear during the Great Recession. We saw it again during COVID-19." Gov. Evers said in the video message. "At the end of the day, this problem could've been addressed by the previous administrations and more than a decade's worth of state legislators who knew this system was outdated and couldn't handle an economic crisis like the one this pandemic created.

"It's unfortunate that the Legislature chose to cut the funding we'd asked for to commit to upgrading our system from start to finish—because I want to be clear, this bill won't be enough to solve the problem. But after a decade of failing to act, I'm proud my special session could finally prompt the Legislature to do something on this issue. And I'm proud this bill was passed with bipartisan support. So, today, we're going to take the first step toward ensuring something like this never happens to the people of Wisconsin again."

Wisconsin's unemployment insurance system programming was developed in the early 1970s. Previous administrations and more than a decades' worth of state legislators have known this system was outdated and couldn't handle the sort economic crisis that the state experienced due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and they failed to fix it. While a [PolitiFact inquiry](#) previously found legislative action and approval would be necessary to ensure ongoing funding for the project over multiple state budgets, the Joint Finance Committee voted to eliminate the governor's proposed funding to initiate and make the first installment of payments on modernization, choosing instead to require seeking additional legislative approval down the road for funds to be released. However, the legislation passed does include waiving the one-week waiting period among other fixes to the unemployment system—measures the governor has repeatedly called on the Legislature to take up.

2021 January Special Session Senate Bill 1, now 2021 Wisconsin Act 4, is available [here](#).