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Unemployed New Hampshire residents now have two options to maintain eligibility for unemployment benefits — they can continue to look for work, or they can try to start their own business.

Gov. Maggie Hassan signed Senate Bill 143 into law on Thursday, authorizing a

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Center for entrepreneurial training, business counseling and technical assistance.

“This will allow workers who are likely to exhaust their benefits to have access to the resources and training they need to establish a business and become self-employed,” Hassan said.

The Small Business Development Center is an outreach program of the University of New Hampshire's Peter T. Paul College of Business and Economics in cooperation with the U.S. Small Business Administration, state Department of Resources and Economic Development, the University of New Hampshire and the private sector

The new initiative builds on the existing New Hampshire Working program, a three-part jobs program enacted in 2010 to help workers stay at work, return to work and get ready to work.

“Senate Bill 143 aims to build on that success by adding a fourth component, the Pathway to Work,” said Hassan.

To participate in the program, an unemployed worker must be eligible to receive regular unemployment compensation; be permanently laid off from a previous job; be identified as likely to exhaust regular unemployment compensation; must be engaged on a full-time basis in setting up a business and becoming self-employed; and must have at least 18 weeks of unemployment insurance benefits available.

The program allows eligible participants to continue to receive their unemployment benefits while working full time to start their businesses. It provides financial support while they access the resources, information and training they need to get their businesses off the ground.

Residents accepted into the program do not have to meet the state's job search requirements, would not be penalized for refusal to accept work and would not have

to worry about disqualifying income from self-employment.

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