



STATE OF CALIFORNIA
Franchise Tax Board

New Employment Credit Report

Economic and Statistical Research Bureau

Published March 2017



New Employment Credit Report

This report is intended to fulfill the Franchise Tax Board's obligation under the Revenue & Taxation Code sections 17053.73 and 23626 to annually report by March 1, to the Joint Legislative Budget Committee, under these sections for the most recent fiscal year, the total amount of the credits claimed, a comparison of the total dollar amount of credits claimed under this section with respect to the department's estimate, and identify options for increasing annual claims of the credit so as to meet estimated amounts.

Prepared by the Staff of the
Franchise Tax Board
STATE OF CALIFORNIA

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New Employment Credit

Chapters 69 and 70 of the Statutes of 2013 (AB 93 and SB 90 respectively) created a New Hiring Tax Credit (also known as the New Employment Credit (NEC)) to employers operative for taxable years beginning on or after January 1, 2014 and before January 1, 2021. To obtain a credit a qualified taxpayer must:

- Hire a qualified full-time employee on or after January 1, 2014,
- Pay qualified wages attributable to work performed by the qualified full-time employee in a Designated Geographic Area,
- Receive a Tentative Credit Reservation from the Franchise Tax Board (FTB) (within 30 days of complying with the Employment Development Department (EDD) new hire reporting requirement) for that qualified full-time employee, and
- In addition, a qualified taxpayer must annually certify each qualified employee.

The credit is based on 35 percent of qualified wages, or wages between 150 percent and 350 percent of minimum wage. The wage range will increase over time due to increases in the minimum wage rate.

In order to generate an allowable credit, the qualified taxpayer must have a net increase in its total number of full-time employees working in California, when compared to its base year both based on annual full-time equivalents.

A qualified taxpayer:

- Is an employer engaged in a trade or business within a Designated Geographic Area.
- Is not engaged in any excluded businesses, including temporary help services, retail trades, those primarily in food services, alcoholic beverage places, theater companies, dinner theaters, casinos, and casino hotels unless the business is considered a small business.
- Is not engaged in a sexually-oriented business.
- Hires an individual that is a qualified full-time employee that works at least an average of 35 hours per week and meets other specified wage requirements.

A qualified employee:

- Is unemployed for the six months immediately preceding employment,
- Is a veteran who has not been employed since separation from service,
- Is a recipient of the federal earned income tax credit for the previous taxable year, or
- Is an ex-offender immediately preceding employment.

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Over the past few years the FTB has publicized the availability of the NEC via various outreach efforts including the following:

- Made presentations at eighty tax practitioner events in 2015 and an additional seventy events in 2016.
- Distributing informational brochures at nearly ninety small business fairs throughout the State in 2015 and nearly seventy more small business seminars in 2016.
- Continuing to publish articles in the FTB's Tax News online newsletter.
- During 2016, worked with the State Treasurer's office to include the NEC in their California Business Incentive Gateway (C-BIG) portal.
- Implementation and maintenance of an interactive website with "Quick Facts" and FAQs, as well as online mapping, reservation, and employment certification tools.

FTB Statutory Reporting Requirements

The FTB is required to provide an annual report, by no later than March 1, to the Joint Legislative Budget Committee which includes the following:

- The total dollar amount of the credits claimed under this section with respect to the relevant fiscal year.
- A comparison of the total dollar amount of credits claimed under this section with respect to that fiscal year with the department's estimate with respect to that same fiscal year.
- Should the total dollar amount of credits claimed for the fiscal year be less than the estimate for that fiscal year, the report shall identify options for increasing annual claims of the credit so as to meet estimated amounts.

The information presented in this report is based on 2014 and 2015 return data processed as of January 2017.

Data Observations

In the March 1, 2016 NEC Report, with return data available at the time of that report, the FTB reported that \$3.9 million of NECs were claimed for the 2014 tax year. This amount may decrease significantly during the return validation process. Based on return data available at the time of the current report, \$1.7 million of NECs were claimed for the 2015 tax year. These totals are well short of initial program estimates. With two tax years of data available it does not appear that the program has a balance of incentives to induce desired taxpayer behavior given the program's complexity. The FTB believes the following factors may be curtailing the use of NECs in the short term:

- Complexity: The credit reservation process is new to the hiring credit field and it is believed that many small businesses may not be aware of this requirement. Additionally, there are multiple standards a qualified employer and a qualified employee must meet in order for the employer to qualify to claim the credit. New programs are often associated with more frequent taxpayer return errors.

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- Taxpayers are continuing to utilize other credits: For instance, the enterprise zone hiring credit was targeted to be replaced in part by the NEC. Taxpayers who have both credits available to claim in a tax year will tend to claim the enterprise zone credits first as they will be phased out sooner.
- Claiming without a reservation: There is some evidence that of those claiming the NEC, not all made reservations and thus were not qualified to take the credit.

Should these and other unknown issues be playing a role in dampening NEC use, there could be an increase in NECs claimed in the next few years as taxpayers work through these growing pains.

Credits Claimed: Estimates and Actual

At the time AB 93 was chaptered, the FTB had released estimates that \$22 million in credits would be claimed for the 2014 tax year and \$69 million for 2015 tax year. As of the date of this report, taxpayers have reported \$3.9 million in credits claimed on 2014 tax year returns and \$1.7 million claimed on 2015 tax year returns. The 2015 totals do not include all fiscal year filers.

Based on preliminary reviews of credits claimed, there are indications that an additional amount of these credits, in both tax years, may be disallowed. For instance, there are indications that on some returns claiming the NEC some tax preparer software had inadvertently claimed the NEC in lieu of other credits in error. The FTB is working to identify this and other subsequent credit claimed adjustments to returns.

Options for Increasing Annual Credits Claimed

Statute stipulates that if the total dollar amount of credits claimed for the fiscal year is less than the estimate for that fiscal year, this report should identify options for increasing annual claims of the credit to meet estimated amounts. Although specific reasons for the shortfall in credits claimed versus estimates are not readily available, the FTB has identified program features where changes might encourage taxpayers to utilize the program above current levels:

- Change geographic limitations: Current law stipulates that Designated Geographic Areas are census tracts that have the highest unemployment and highest poverty in the State, former Enterprise Zones (EZs), and former Local Agency Military Base Recovery Areas (LAMBRAs). Expanding this requirement to include areas that currently do not qualify would increase credit use.
- Change eligibility requirements: Under current law there are various qualifying restrictions for the hired employee in order for the employer to qualify for the credit. Reducing some or all of these restrictions will increase credit use by expanding the program to allow credit for additional new hires.

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- Change range of wages qualifying: Under current law qualified wages are that portion of wages paid or incurred that exceed 150 percent of minimum wage but do not exceed 350 percent of minimum wage. In a pilot area, qualified wages are wages paid or incurred that exceed \$10 an hour, but do not exceed 350 percent of minimum wage. As of January 1, 2017, the minimum wage ranges are \$15 and \$35 for employers with 25 or fewer employees who are required to pay \$10 per hour, and \$15.75 and \$36.75 for employers with 26 or more employees with minimum wage requirements of \$10.50 an hour. Expanding the range of wages that qualify for the credit would promote credit use. For instance, similar to the pilot areas, the wage range might be expanded by dropping the 150 percent of minimum wage requirement by allowing wages exceeding the current minimum wage to qualify.
- Drop reservation requirement (or streamline reservations): Under current law an employer must receive a Tentative Credit Reservation from the FTB within 30 days of complying with the EDD new hire reporting requirement to qualify an employee for the credit. Even after disallowing a number of first year NEC claims for not having made a reservation, the FTB did not see the number of reservations increase in the subsequent year. Relaxing some or all of the reservations requirements might increase participation. An alternative could be to require that the credit claim be filed on a timely original return. This would reduce complexity while preventing retroactive claiming of the credit.
- Expand to additional business types: Under current law the employer may not be engaged in any excluded businesses, including temporary help services, retail trades, those primarily in food services, alcoholic beverage places, theater companies, dinner theaters, casinos, and casino hotels unless the business is considered a small business. The employer may not be engaged in a sexually-oriented business. Reducing the list of excluded business types would widen the pool of potential program participants.
- Change the credit percentage: The current credit is based on 35 percent of qualified wages. Increasing the credit percentage would naturally increase the amount of credits claimed.

As the Legislature considers options for increasing claims under the NEC program, it may wish to keep in mind the credit's goal of incentivizing net new hiring and avoid some of the windfall provisions that were contained in the prior EZ Hiring Credit. Under the EZ program, a net addition in employment was not required of the employer, credit was available to types of businesses unlikely to be incentivized by the credit, and taxpayers could take advantage of the credit as an afterthought if it hired an eligible employee—regardless of whether the employer was aware of the credit at the time of hire.