

NEWS RELEASE



STATE OF ALABAMA
Department of Industrial Relations
News For Immediate Release
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INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS INTRODUCES AL VANTAGE DEBIT CARD FOR UNEMPLOYMENT CLAIMANTS

MONTGOMERY, ALABAMA, November 17, 2006 The Alabama Department of Industrial Relations has introduced a new debit card for the payment of weekly unemployment compensation benefits.

“This is another way the state is using technology to improve services and save taxpayer dollars at the same time,” says Governor Bob Riley. “We are modernizing our unemployment insurance system, which makes it more cost-effective and efficient.”

Phyllis Kennedy, Industrial Relations director, says new claims filers who do not choose the direct deposit option for payments will, instead, receive a *MasterCard* debit card called AL Vantage.

“Each unemployed worker in Alabama may still have benefits deposited into their personal bank account, but Industrial Relations will discontinue to issue paper checks for new claims filers,” says Kennedy. “Claimants currently receiving unemployment checks by mail will also be given the option to switch to the AL Vantage *MasterCard*.”

Use of the AL Vantage *MasterCard* will reduce postage and the administrative costs associated with printing checks.

“Industrial Relations spends approximately \$1 per payment to print and mail a check for unemployment insurance benefits,” says James A. Webb, Unemployment Compensation Division director. “During Fiscal Year 2006, our agency issued 833,205 paper checks to the state’s unemployment recipients.”

AL Vantage, which was launched on November 7, will also eliminate the costly check-cashing fees that some individuals incur, as well as minimize the potential for identity theft. Alabama is among only eight states to offer debit cards to claimants.

An Alabama Unemployment Telephone Call Center support line will be available for unemployed workers to request information or receive assistance if a card is lost or stolen. Additional help will be offered through an online Internet inquiry for confirmation of payments, balances and other transactions.

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Industrial Relations is an umbrella organization of State government which administers: the State Employment Service, Unemployment Insurance, Workers’ Compensation, and Labor Market Information. Smaller programs also administered include Abandoned Mine Land Reclamation, Mine Safety and Inspection, and Surface Mining of Non-Fuel Minerals. For more information on DIR visit the Web site: <http://dir.alabama.gov/>.