

Q&A: Background Actors and Extras

We get a lot of questions about working as a background actor/extra in Florida, Alabama and Puerto Rico. There is a lot of confusion and many myths about this subject. We hope the following helps answer most of your questions.

Q: *Is work as a background actor or extra covered under SAG-AFTRA contracts?*

A: Most of our contracts have some coverage for background actors or extras. For our contracts covering theatrical films and primetime dramatic television programs and commercials, the coverage is only in specific geographic areas and is limited to a specific number of performers working each day.

Q: *Do Florida, Alabama and Puerto Rico have these geographic zones?*

A: Florida, Alabama and Puerto Rico are not covered by any of the background actor zones in the SAG-AFTRA contract that covers theatrical films and primetime dramatic television programs. There is a 100-mile zone from the center of Miami, Orlando and San Juan covering extras in television commercials. Commercial producers are required to place up to a maximum of 45 performers on a SAG-AFTRA contract per commercial for each day of production.

Q: *Can I work in Florida, Alabama and Puerto Rico as a background actor if we do not have a theatrical or primetime dramatic television programs background zone in those states?*

A: You can work as a background actor on these productions if they are signed to a SAG-AFTRA contract, and you will not be in violation of the Rule One and No Contract No Work rules. Before deciding to do this work, you need to be aware that SAG-AFTRA will not be able to assist you if a problem arises. Since we do not have a zone, the contractual provisions would not extend to your work, and you are on your own if you have a problem with your payment, working conditions, etc. It is also important to keep in mind that your earnings will not be reported to the AFTRA Health and Retirement Funds or the SAG Pension and Health plans.

Q: *Which areas have this zone coverage for theatrical and primetime dramatic television programs?*

A: The West Coast has six background actor zones: Hawaii, Las Vegas, Los Angeles, Sacramento, San Diego and San Francisco. There is a 300-mile zone around New York that also encompasses major East Coast cities such as Boston, Philadelphia and Washington, D.C. We do not have zones beyond these areas for theatrical films and primetime dramatic television programs, so other major production centers such as Louisiana, Georgia, Illinois, New Mexico, North Carolina and Texas also do not have background coverage for theatrical films and primetime dramatic television programs.

Q: *Does the lack of background coverage have something to do with so-called "right-to-work" laws?*

A: No, the location of the zones has nothing to do with these laws. The zones in these contracts were determined through bargaining and have nothing to do with specific laws in any state.

Q: *How do we achieve background coverage for theatrical films and primetime dramatic television programs? Can staff do this?*

A: Coverage can only be achieved through bargaining when these contracts are being negotiated. Neither staff nor your elected officials can unilaterally achieve background jurisdiction beyond the currently established zones.

Q: *Why do we have coverage in commercials and not for theatrical and primetime dramatic television programs?*

A: These are different contracts bargained with different industry groups. There is much greater coverage for extras under the Commercials Contract than the contracts covering theatrical films and dramatic television.

Q: *Does background actor work on theatrical films and primetime dramatic television program produced in Alabama, Florida and Puerto Rico establish SAG-AFTRA membership eligibility for non-members?*

A: No, since it is not covered work, it does not establish eligibility.

Q: *If I choose to work as a background actor in a theatrical film or primetime dramatic television program, what happens if I get a dialogue or stunt upgrade?*

A: You should be provided with a SAG-AFTRA employment contract and covered under the contract. If you are not, please contact SAG-AFTRA immediately, so we can determine whether a claim should be filed. The contract provides a strict 90-day limit for filing upgrade claims. You should never wait until the film is released, as we will be unable to file a claim after 90 days.

Q: *If I work on a commercial as an extra, what do I get paid?*

A: For commercials produced under the National 2013 Commercials Contract, the minimum rate is \$342.40 for a buyout. If you are represented by a talent agent, they must pay an additional 10 percent to cover the agency fee on commercial extra work.

Q: *Can a member work "over the numbers" as a commercial extra if the 45 covered extra roles are already filled?*

A: No, it is a violation of SAG-AFTRA rules to accept such "over the numbers" work.

Q: *If a commercial is being produced outside of the 100-mile zones, may I take such non-covered extra work?*

A: Yes, you may work outside the zone as a commercial extra but the same considerations apply regarding lack of contractual protection as when you work locally as a background actor on theatrical or primetime dramatic television programs.

Q: *Except for commercials, are there any instances where work as a background actor is covered by SAG-AFTRA in Alabama, Florida and Puerto Rico?*

A: There is coverage for certain non-dramatic programs, programs made for The CW Network and corporate/educational productions. There is also an infrequently used incentive in the Modified Low Budget Agreement which allows producers to adjust their budget if they employ background actors under contract. If you have questions about coverage and whether you can do specific work and remain in compliance with SAG-AFTRA rules, please contact the union office.

Q: *I still have questions about working as a background actor. What do I do?*

A: Call 855-SAG-AFTRA (855-724-2387) or email miami@sagaftra.org and a staff member will answer your questions.