Mass Layoff Statistics (MLS) is a federal-state cooperative program that collects reports on mass layoff actions, which are defined as 50 or more workers being separated from their jobs. Mass layoff events in the state of New Mexico for first quarter 2009 resulted in a 3,704-person increase to the unemployed population. The first quarter 2010 MLS data, however, present an unexpected result, decreasing by more than 2,500 over the year. Based on both the first quarter 2009 and second quarter 2010 counts, one would expect a much higher first quarter 2010 total. A closer look at the initial unemployment insurance claims data provides an explanation for this variation in MLS initial claims counts.

The Program to Measure Insured Unemployed Statistics (PROMIS) is a database and query tool that provides initial claims inputs for the MLS program, which means that MLS data are a sample of PROMIS data. (A sample is a subset of a population in statistics lingo.) Reviewing the data side by side confirms that the first quarter 2010 MLS count represents a departure from the trend observed in total initial unemployment claims data. The reasoning is simple. MLS data display only those initial unemployment claims that result from events of 50 or more workers being separated from a single business unit. From this we can infer that there were fewer mass layoff instances but not significantly fewer initial unemployment events, indicative of a large number of 49 or fewer layoff instances.