

COVID-19 Government Relations Update for Columbus Chamber Members
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The Chamber recognizes the impact that this pandemic, and the government response to it, is having on many of our members. We are working tirelessly to help you weather this storm. We are strongly advocating on your behalf. This week, we submitted nearly 50 policy recommendations to the Governor for consideration as part of the Governor's Economic Strike Force response strategy. We successfully lobbied members of congress to establish *forgivable* loans and grants for struggling businesses, which will soon be available through the SBA and lending institutions. [A breakdown of the Third Federal Stimulus Package, the "CARES Act," can be found here.](#)

We will continue to assess your needs and work with our partners in government to propose solutions to address them. While we do not have clarity on how long these mandates will remain in place, the Governor's office has pledged to keep us updated as much as possible as they work to protect Ohioans from the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Here at the Chamber, it is our goal to sift through the influx of information and provide you with only the most pertinent. We will be hosting our first virtual event on April 16, Government Spotlight: Evaluating the Economic Impacts of COVID-19. The U.S. Chamber's senior economist will provide an analysis of the projected short and long-term impacts of COVID-19 on our economy. [Details and registration here.](#)

Here are the business updates from the last week:

Governor's Actions

In anticipation of decreased tax revenues, the Governor ordered an immediate hiring suspension and freeze on new contract services within state government, with exception to those relating to the fight against COVID-19. Cabinet directors have been instructed to immediately find budget cuts of 20 percent.

Ohio's Bureau of Workers' Compensation (BWC) system is deferring insurance premium installment payments for March, April and May until June 1, 2020. For more information, visit bwc.ohio.gov.

The Ohio Department of Insurance announced that all health insurers are required to provide the option of deferring premium payments, interest free, for up to 60 calendar days from each original premium due date. This means that employers can [defer their premium payments](#) for up to two months, giving them some relief on costs, while keeping their employees insured.

The Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT) has modified the process for haulers carrying heavy loads of essential goods. Generally, the state requires haulers with loads classified as "oversized" to seek advanced permission from ODOT before they are permitted to travel in and through the state. Haulers carrying essential goods can download and print the permit at Transportation.Ohio.gov. The federal government has also cut red tape around obtaining or

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renewing Commercial Drivers' Licenses and other licenses to prevent interruption of essential shipping. The Ohio Department of Public Safety and the Public Utilities Commission have also adjusted their enforcement practices to avoid confusion.

Ohio Legislature Passes Emergency Coronavirus Response Bill (Am. Sub. H.B. 197)

Also last week, the Ohio General Assembly was in session for what is expected to be the last time for many months, to enact an emergency state coronavirus response package. The following provisions are of import to the small business community, many of which were recommended and requested by the Columbus Chamber:

- Extends voting by mail to allow counting of absentee ballots postmarked by April 27. Request your vote by mail ballot [here](#).
- Aligns the state tax-filing deadline to the delayed federal deadline of July 15, extends date for estimated payments, waives interest payments (penalties are already able to be waived), and also extends the due date of the state-administered municipal net profit tax to the same.
- Extends the 20-day "occasional entrant" rule in current law for the duration of the Governor's State of Emergency Executive Order plus 30 days, so that businesses with an influx of employees working from home do not have to navigate the additional administrative burden of filing municipal income taxes in a different manner as a result of COVID-19.
- Allows a one-time transfer from the Rainy Day Fund this fiscal year into the GRF, with Controlling Board approval. The amount is currently \$2.69 billion.
- Implements a temporary law that tolls the statute of limitations for criminal & civil cases and administrative acts that would expire between March 9 and July 30, 2020.
- Specifies that all county offices required to transfer property and process titles that aren't made available online must remain open.
- Delays state occupational licensing renewal until 90 days after the date the emergency ends or December 1, 2020, whichever comes sooner.
- Amends current law regarding nurses and nurse anesthetists to enable increased nursing professionals into the workforce sooner.

Updates on Essential Business Enforcement

The Governor has issued an [executive order requiring Ohioans to "Stay at Home" \(Order\)](#). Beginning at 11:59pm on Monday, March 23, individuals must stay at home, with limited exceptions for essential activities. [Click here](#) to review the Chamber's guidance on whether you are an essential business and therefore able to require employees to work on-site with the implementation of required safety measures specified in the Order. It is advised that essential businesses communicate to your employees that they work in an essential function and will be required to work during the time the order is in place, and also communicate how you will be ensuring a safe workplace. Additionally, businesses should consider creating a document that

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provides justification and compliance with the Order based on one of the essential exemptions, just in case a complaint is placed with the local health department and or local law enforcement. Penalties for violations may include criminal misdemeanor charges and issuance of a temporary restraining order forcing closure of the business. All businesses may continue to operate with employees working remotely from their home. All businesses may conduct the minimum necessary on-site activities to continue operations, such as processing payroll and collecting mail. This order expires at 11:59pm on April 6, at which time the Governor will reassess. It is very likely that restrictions of some form will continue past this date, so we encourage all businesses to begin thinking about how they will operate under strict social distancing requirements.

Expanded Unemployment Benefits Available for Workers

An executive order issued by Governor DeWine and codified by the Ohio General Assembly expands flexibility for Ohioans to receive unemployment benefits during Ohio's emergency declaration period. The emergency declaration does not have an expiration date, and will remain in full force and effect until the emergency no longer exists. Unemployment benefits will be available for eligible individuals who are requested by a medical professional, local health authority, or employer to be isolated or quarantined as a consequence of COVID-19, even if they are not actually diagnosed with COVID-19. Employees laid off due to temporary closures will also be eligible for unemployment insurance benefits. In addition, the one-week waiting period for eligible Ohioans to receive unemployment benefits will be waived. Those who apply for unemployment under these circumstances will be exempt from the requirement that they be actively seeking work. Employers may contribute up to 20% in supplemental wages to the employee for them to still qualify. [Details here](#). The federal CARES Act took additional measures to expand unemployment benefits, including 13 extra weeks of coverage, and making independent contractors and gig workers eligible. The federal government will be issuing guidance to states on the implementation of these changes, expected to go into effect in the coming weeks.

Ohioans can apply for unemployment benefits online 24 hours a day, seven days a week, at unemployment.ohio.gov. It is also possible to file by phone at 877-644-6562 or TTY at 888-642-8203, Monday through Friday 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Employers with questions should email UCTech@jfs.ohio.gov. Please note, if you worked in a newly included category, your eligibility will take some time to go into effect.

SharedWork Ohio an Option for Employers

SharedWork Ohio is an alternative to layoffs for employers with an hourly workforce. It allows workers to remain employed and employers to retain their staff during times of reduced business activity. Under a SharedWork Ohio plan, employers reduce hours to avert a layoff. The participating employee works the reduced hours, and ODJFS provides an unemployment insurance benefit proportionate to their reduced hours. Interested employers should provide ODJFS with a list of participating employees and specify their normal weekly hours of work, not

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to exceed 40 hours and not including overtime. Part-time employees may be eligible, but all employees in an affected unit must have their hours reduced by the same reduction percentage. The Chamber has submitted a list of changes that could be made to this program to make it accessible to a wider variety of industry sectors and positions. For more information, please visit JFS.Ohio.gov/SharedWorkOhio.

One-time Liquor Buyback

The Ohio Department of Commerce is offering a one-time liquor buyback option to support bars and restaurants. Businesses wishing to take advantage of this opportunity should return their unopened, high-proof liquor products (obtained within the past 30 days) to the agency where they purchased the product. This opportunity is also extended to those with temporary (F2) permits for events scheduled between March 12 and April 6, 2020. If a business has questions about this program, they should reach out directly to the Liquor Enterprise Service Center (LESC) at 1(877) 812-0013 or by emailing OhioLiquorInfo@Com.Ohio.gov.