



# Legislative Report

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AS SUMMER WRAPS UP and we head into Fall, COVID-19 continues to cause disruptions across the State. To get a handle on the widespread issues COVID-19 has created, the Illinois General Assembly continued to meet remotely over the summer in targeted working groups to discuss COVID-19 relief and response legislation. The summer working groups primarily focused on addressing issues resulting from the strain COVID-19 has put on individuals, families, businesses and communities throughout Illinois. The Governor has also requested federal assistance for pandemic relief efforts.

In an effort to encourage Illinois residents to wear face coverings in public, mandated by the Governor on May 1, 2020, the Governor launched a \$5 million public awareness campaign—‘It only works if you wear it’. The campaign was announced shortly after 11 counties reached the Illinois Department of Public Health’s (IDPH) “warning level” for virus spread. The campaign was launched from the State Emergency Operations Center, and Dr. Ngozi Ezike, Director of the IDPH, and Alicia Tate-Nadeau, Director of Illinois Emergency Management Agency (IEMA) will help lead the state’s efforts.

To expand efforts to protect Illinois’ workers and communities during the COVID-19 pandemic, IDPH filed emergency rules for businesses, schools, and childcare establishments regarding the use of face coverings and the size of gatherings. The emergency rules will provide multiple opportunities for compliance before a penalty will be issued. This will allow local health departments and local law enforcement leeway in ensuring public health in a productive manner. In contrast to the existing, pre-pandemic enforcement laws (such as revoking a license) that are stringent and severe, these emergency rules are intended to provide flexibility for local communities in a measured process that helps keep people safe.

In other efforts, IDPH has also taken guidance from the Center for Disease Control and Prevention and has begun reporting both confirmed and probable cases and deaths on its website. IDPH states that reporting the probable cases will better show the potential burden of the illness as well as the efficacy of population-based

non-pharmaceutical interventions. IDPH will be updating this data on a weekly basis.

Governor Pritzker also signed into law SB 471 (now P.A. 101-0651) which expands workplace protections. This law amends the Public Employee Disability Act (PEDA) and provides that upon the occurrence of circumstances which would hinder the physical recovery from an injury of an eligible employee within the one-year period as required under the Act, the eligible employee shall be entitled to an extension of no longer than 60 days by which he or she shall continue to be paid by the employing public entity on the same basis as he or she was paid before the injury. The employing public entity may require proof of the circumstances hindering an eligible employee’s physical recovery before granting the extension. The law also increases paid disability leave for any injury that occurs after March 9, 2020 by 60 days for firefighters, law enforcement and paramedics whose recovery was hindered by COVID-19 and adds a penalty for assaulting or battering a retail worker who is conveying public health guidance, such as requiring patrons to wear face-coverings or promoting social distancing.

The Illinois Department of Employment Security (IDES) announced that an additional 20 weeks of state extended benefits will be available to those who exhaust the currently allotted 26 weeks of regular state unemployment as well as an additional 13 weeks of federal Pandemic Employment. Compensation (PEUC) benefits.

Over the summer, the Governor along with Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT) announced its second, of six, \$250 million grants to counties, municipalities, and townships to address local transportation needs. The grants are part of the bipartisan Rebuild Illinois capital plan. The plan is the State’s largest and first infrastructure program in nearly a decade. Its funding will help maintain investment in the Illinois transportation systems, focusing specifically on providing safe and reliable infrastructure at the local level. These grants are part of a larger rollout of \$1.5 Billion to be distributed over three years with the purpose of advancing municipal, township and county projects statewide. The projects will be selected and managed locally, with IDOT oversight. Examples of eligible projects include,


but are not limited to, roads and bridges, traffic signal upgrades, new storm sewers, bike paths and sidewalk replacement or repair, and other long-term maintenance projects. Importantly, however, the funding for these projects are dependent on tax revenue and with the detrimental impact COVID-19 has had, only time will tell how much revenue can be distributed.

The Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO) published emergency rules to implement the Business Interruption Grant 'BIG' program. The BIG program was authorized by the General Assembly during the May Special Session. The program makes \$636 million of the federal CARES Act money available to small businesses that have either been forced to close or had a substantial loss of customer activity due to COVID-19. Awardees of the grants, may use the funds to cover operational costs such as staff wages and benefits, occupancy costs, materials, supplies and other professional services that are eligible for federal Coronavirus Relief Fund reimbursements and are not otherwise covered by another grant or loan program such as the Payroll Protection Program or other disaster relief programs.

The General Assembly is currently scheduled to return to Springfield for two weeks of Fall Veto session, November 17–19 and again December 1–3. Due to the current uncertain state of affairs, there is a possibility

that the legislature will not convene again in Springfield until after the new year.

Lawmakers from both sides of the aisle have, however, publicly requested the convening of a Special Session—asking for the General Assembly to return to Springfield prior to the scheduled Veto Session. Calls for a Special Session have primarily been based on a desire to discuss various reform proposals—ethics reform and criminal justice reform being the two main topics requested. A special session is constitutionally required to be limited in its purpose, and if convened, the General Assembly could only conduct business that relates to the stated purpose. If such a Session were to happen, matters outside the scope of the stated purpose could not be voted on. It is unlikely that any requests for a Special Session will be successful at this time. If a Special Session is not called and the Senate and House decide to forego Veto Session this Fall, all pending matters will be on hold until the General Assembly reconvenes for Spring Session in 2021.

Regardless of when the General Assembly returns, TOI will remain vigilant in its efforts to advocate for townships. Thank you for continuing to support and service the people of Illinois, at a time when they need it most. To find out more about specific pieces of legislation or the Fiscal Year 21 budget please check out the End of the Year Report available at [TOI.org](http://TOI.org). 

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