GCP Advocacy: COVID-19 Daily Update

April 9, 2020 – 10:50 AM

Please note resources and updates are evolving rapidly.

Resources

- Assistance for Small Businesses
    - The Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) prioritizes Americans employed by small businesses by authorizing up to $349 billion toward job retention and certain other expenses.
    - On April 7th, the U.S. Treasury updated its list of Paycheck Protection Program Frequently Asked Questions document.
    - Our partners at the National Small Business Association (NSBA) posted this podcast to help answer Paycheck Protection Program Loan questions.

State Updates

- On Wednesday, Ohio Department of Health Director Dr. Amy Acton reported totals of 193 deaths and 5,148 cases since the beginning of the pandemic; cases have resulted in 1,495 hospitalizations and 472 intensive care unit admissions.

- The Ohio Department of Health offered a common COVID-19 "Myths Versus Facts" document that can be found here.

- The Ohio Bureau of Workers' Compensation (BWC) Board of Directors will be asked to send $1.6 billion in dividends to employers this spring; frequently asked questions on the BWC proposal can be found here and additional information is here. For other questions about COVID-19 related to BWC, email BWCCOVID19@bwc.state.oh.us.
    - "This dividend equals approximately 100 percent of the premiums employers paid in policy year 2018," said Governor Mike DeWine.
    - If the proposal is approved, approximately $1.4 billion will go to private employers while roughly $200 million will go to local government taxing districts, with checks being sent later in April.

- Lt. Governor Husted announced the creation of the Office of Small Business Relief to coordinate efforts to identify and provide support for Ohio's nearly 950,000 small businesses. This office will be housed within the Ohio Development Services Agency (DSA). You can visit the Office of Small Business Relief website HERE. The Office will initially focus on three key areas:
    - It will serve as the state's designated agency for administering federal recovery funds awarded to Ohio for small business support and recovery.
    - It will work with federal, state, and local partners to evaluate and determine possible regulatory reforms that encourage employment and job creation.
    - It will coordinate efforts of the Ohio Small Business Development Centers and Minority Business Assistance Centers at local levels.

- Governor DeWine announced restaurants and other Ohio liquor-permit holders can now sell limited liquor and mixed drinks for carryout and delivery, under a new emergency rule. Read that signed Executive Order here.

- In order to assist JobsOhio's existing client companies that are negatively impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, JobsOhio is offering enhancements to some of the JobsOhio incentive programs. To read more about this program and others, created to minimize the negative impact of COVID-19 on Ohio businesses, please click here.

- The Ohio Department of Job and Family Services announced Ohioans enrolled in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) who did not already receive the maximum monthly allotment for their household size in March, will be issued an additional payment beginning this week. SNAP-eligible households will also be able to pick up a pre-packaged box of food at their local foodbank. This came after Ohio received federal approval to waive certain administrative verifications.

- Despite receiving a high number of applications from agricultural producers seeking to participate in the H2Ohio program, Ohio Department of Agriculture Director Dorothy Pelanda said the initiative will undergo a budgetary "reevaluation" along with other agency programs as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

- As a reminder, all public water systems in the state are prohibited from disconnecting customers due to non-payment of fees and charges during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Ohio Environmental Protection Agency order can be found here.
  - State coronavirus omnibus legislation authorized the Ohio EPA director to issue such an order for the duration of the coronavirus state of emergency declared by Governor DeWine, but not beyond December 1, 2020.
  - Additionally, all public water systems that disconnected customers due non-payment on or after January 1, 2020 are required to restore drinking water service "as expeditiously as possible" without charging a reconnection fee.
  - According a fiscal analysis from the Legislative Services Commission this could lead to revenue losses for water systems.
  - The state legislation also allows the Ohio Public Works Commission, Ohio Water Development Authority and Ohio EPA to waive fees and other specified requirements for the duration of the COVID-19 state of emergency.

- The chairman of an Ohio House of Representatives Economic Recovery Task Force told members that he hopes to craft a framework for recommendations by the end of next week; their next meeting will be on Monday.

- On Tuesday, Speaker Larry Householder stated he does not believe Governor DeWine's agency spending cuts alone will close Ohio's budget gap.
  - "I don't know how much money that will generate. I don't think it will get anywhere close to what we'll need to cut," he said.
  - The Speaker went on to say the state won't be able to completely cut its way out of the crisis, since its three largest expenditures are Medicaid — the state and federally run health-care program for the poor and disabled — schools and prisons.
  - Householder said borrowing for public-works projects could be a tool used to help restart Ohio's economy.
  - One option is to use the Budget Stabilization Fund, which currently has about $2.7 billion. Householder said lawmakers already planned for such a contingency, having added language to the coronavirus response legislation, which allows the DeWine administration to use the Budget Stabilization Fund to cover any shortfall at the end of the fiscal year with a vote of the Controlling Board. The language also requires the

vote to include approval from two members of the Senate and two members of the House.
- o On a separate occasion, on Wednesday, the Speaker's spokesperson said, "tax increases are not being considered as a response to COVID-19."

- New Ohio Senate legislation would give Ohio Attorney General Dave Yost the power to set quantity limits on purchases of in-demand items and to initiate legal action against price gougers during the ongoing coronavirus emergency.

Federal Updates

- Roughly 6.6 million Americans filed new applications for unemployment benefits in the first week of April, according to data released Thursday by the Labor Department.

- The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) released a statement clarifying that residents do not need to do anything to obtain the stimulus package funds if they filed a tax return in 2018 or 2019. The IRS will use information from those tax filings to identify a bank account number for direct deposit or a physical check will be sent to the address on file with the agency.

- U.S. Senator Sherrod Brown continued his call for "pandemic pay" for workers at a high risk of being infected with COVID-19, such as health care workers on Wednesday
  - o The proposal would also seek to provide personal protective equipment (PPE) for workers at a heightened risk of exposure through enacting an "emergency standard."
  - o Funding for the bonuses would come from a new COVID-19 "Heroes Fund" which Brown said could receive funding from both the federal government and businesses; see here for more details about the possibility of a "Heroes Fund".

- On Tuesday, U.S. Senator Rob Portman said the next round of federal legislation aimed at mitigating the economic toll of the coronavirus pandemic would fill gaps in the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act -- the $2 trillion COVID-19 (CV-19) relief bill signed into law last month -- as well as act as a stimulus package for the economy.
  - o Portman said local communities in Ohio that rely on income tax are losing revenue even as their costs increase due to the pandemic.

- House lawmakers introduced a pair of bills Wednesday aimed at cracking down on excessive pricing, as Senators asked the U.S. Department of Justice to better enforce a White House order targeting price gouging and hoarding of medical supplies during the coronavirus outbreak.

- The Hill: The Senate on Thursday blocked dueling plans to provide hundreds of billions to help small businesses contend with the coronavirus-fueled economic meltdown amid a stalemate over the scope of the package.
  - o Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell tried to pass an additional $250 billion for the Paycheck Protection Program, which provides loans and grants to small businesses with fewer than 500 employees. Democrats objected, referring to it as a "political stunt."
  - o Instead, Democrats tried to offer their own alternative to amend the GOP plan to include $100 billion for hospitals, $150 billion for state and local governments and an expansion of food assistance, in addition to the small business funding. Republicans, similarly, rejected the Democratic measure.

- o The partisan impasse very likely throws the process into limbo until at least Monday, when the Senate is next expected to be in session.
  - o Even if the Senate had been able to pass the bill on Thursday, it faced an uncertain timeline in the House.

- U.S. DOL Reminds Employers That They Cannot Retaliate Against Workers Reporting Unsafe Conditions during Coronavirus Pandemic (HERE)
  - o OSHA is reminding employers that it is illegal to retaliate against workers because they report unsafe and unhealthful working conditions during the coronavirus pandemic. Acts of retaliation can include terminations, demotions, denials of overtime or promotion, or reductions in pay or hours.

- The Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) continues to monitor how the crisis is affecting the American public on the cybersecurity and infrastructure security front.
  - o CISA and United Kingdom's National Cyber Security Centre issued an activity alert titled, *COVID-19 Exploited by Malicious Cyber Actors*. This joint alert seeks to address the growing use of COVID-19-related themes by malicious cyber actors and it can be found here: https://www.us-cert.gov/ncas/alerts/aa20-099a.

Additional Federal Guidance *(as of April 8 at 8:00 a.m.)*:
- **CDC** - Guidance for Childcare Programs that Remain Open (Click here)
- **CDC** - Guidance for Building Water Systems (Click here)
- **FDA** - April 7 Daily Roundup (Click here)
- **GSA** - Coronavirus Acquisition-Related Information and Resources (Click here)
- **GSA** - COVID-19 Acquisition Resources Hub (Click here)
- **DOT** - U.S. Department of Transportation Issues Final Order on Service Obligations for Air Carriers Receiving Financial Relief Through CARES Act (Click here)

Local Updates

- In case you missed it, Mayor Jackson and the City of Cleveland have established an emergency working capital fund in order to help maintain the business community. It includes a loan of up to $10,000, no fees, no interest or payments due until January 1, 2021, 1% interest thereafter and payments of $150/month until repaid. Funds are limited, so applicants are encouraged to submit their applications as soon as possible. View the summary and application here.
  - o The City previously introduced legislation which was passed by Cleveland City Council allowing for a six-month deferral of payments on economic development loans issued by the City. The program authorizes the Director of Economic Development to defer payment on most loans and to seek the consent of lenders on other loans. A six-month deferral will relieve some of the debt burden on our borrowers, reducing costs to businesses, during the enforced closures to protect public health.

- Cuyahoga County has a call center during this time of crisis that is available Monday through Friday, 8AM – 5PM at 216-452-9714.

- Cuyahoga County will furlough some employees in anticipation of a drop in tax revenue.

- The Greater Cleveland Better Business Bureau (BBB) is warning Northeast Ohio residents about scams targeting the disbursement of payments from COVID-19-related federal stimulus programs.