

Here is a recap from our Chamber of Commerce Member Conference Call with additional information to provide to you. We will continue to keep you informed and facilitate solutions to help you.

We are participating in conference calls with Wisconsin Manufactures & Commerce (WMC) which is the State Chamber of Commerce. These calls have included Governor Evers, Secretary Hughes of WEDC and Senator Ron Johnson; these took place last week. Today, we will be on a call with the Small Business Administration (SBA) to get more details on the loans that are becoming available.

Please continue to send us updates with your business as a result of this pandemic. We want to be able to share these with the membership and the community. In addition, please tell us what you need from your State and Federal Government. Email us your comments/ideas that we can share. We are compiling information to share with our local legislatures.

1. Governor Evers to sign “Safer at Home” order on Tuesday, March 24, 2020 (details provided to us by the Wisconsin Manufactures & Commerce - WMC)

Gov. Tony Evers announced via Twitter on Monday (3/23/2020) that he would be signing a “Safer at Home” order on Tuesday. The order, which is similar to “Shelter in Place” orders given in other states, is expected to ban non-essential businesses from operating and order people to stay home. According to his Tweets, Wisconsinites can still go outside for a walk, travel to the doctor or pick up groceries and medication. However, he said people would not be allowed to have play dates or dinner parties with friends and neighbors.

Gov. Evers held a news conference on Monday afternoon, but provided very few additional details about what the order would look like. When asked about what businesses would be deemed essential, the governor referenced a federal list from CDC, but said Wisconsin’s would not be identical and did not elaborate.

When the full order is made available, we will share it.

2. Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation (WEDC), SB 20/20 Program
This program makes up to \$5M (total) available to selected Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFI’s) to make grants up to \$20,000 each to existing loan clients.

Eligible grant recipients include:

- Current CDFI loan recipients in good standing as of 3/1/2020
- 20 or fewer part-time and full-time employees
- Less than \$2 Million in annual revenue
- Preference will be given to service and retail businesses

3. Small Business Administration Updates (SBA)

Wisconsin is now eligible for Economic Impact Disaster Loans (EIDLs). Eligible businesses should be able to apply for \$2 million or less, long-term (up to 30 years), low interest loans. This would apply to businesses with 500 employees or fewer.

Under this loan program, businesses and non-profits may qualify for up to \$2 million in loans to cover losses resulting from the pandemic. The interest rate on the loans is 3.75% for for-profit businesses and 2.75% for non-profits. Participants may be able to extend payments for up to 30 years.

Businesses and non-profits can begin their loan applications at www.sba.gov/disaster.

Wisconsin's SBA office is offering daily webinars to answer your questions.

Register here for the daily webinars:

10 am webinars: <https://buff.ly/2WBI7g6>

2 pm webinars: <https://buff.ly/2J3uKxb>

4. Families First Coronavirus Response Act passed on March 18

This Act has several impacts on employers. There are provisions for paid sick leave, free testing and expanded unemployment benefits. It requires employers with fewer than 500 employees to provide two weeks' worth of paid sick leave if employees are unable to work because they're subject to quarantine or isolation, are experiencing symptoms of COVID-19, are caring for someone who is in quarantine or isolation and/or have children in schools that have closed. Employers themselves will receive tax credits to offset the costs of providing this paid leave.

5. Wisconsin Unemployment Insurance claims have increased.

According to the Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development, initial claims for Unemployment Insurance across the state have increased over 1,100%. For claims the week of March 8, there were just over 5,000 and now claims starting the week of March 15 have jumped to just over 60,000 according to preliminary data from the state.

Governor Evers has waived the work search requirement for citizens receiving unemployment. That means that if you are filing a weekly benefit claim you do not have to perform the "work search actions" during this public health crisis.

6. Tax Update

Both federal and Wisconsin income tax payments and return due dates are automatically extended to July 15.

7. Governor Evers Suspends Utility Rules and Allows for Additional Consumer Protections

The Governor signed an executive order on Sunday that will suspend numerous rules related to utility service providers. In a news release, Gov. Evers said, "it is critically important to give people flexibility

during this emergency, when paychecks might be disrupted, to keep the lights and heat on and water flowing."

The order does the following:

- Stop utility disconnection for nonpayment for all customers, including commercial, industrial, and farm accounts. Previously this applied to residential accounts only;
 - Cease assessing late fees to customer accounts;
 - Halt the practice of requiring deposits from customers for reconnection of service;
 - Allow deferred payment agreements for all customers who request them;
 - Remove any administrative barriers for customers establishing or reestablishing utility service;
- and
- Authorize water utilities to provide budget billing arrangements to customers. Electric and natural gas utilities are allowed to do this under current rules.

8. City of Portage Meetings

Mayor Dodd has ordered that all City Board, Committee and Commission meetings to be suspended, effective immediately, until further notice to establish some protections to limit the exposure to the virus.

9. Aspirus Divine Savior Healthcare

Haley Gilman, Community Relations Director has asked that we share this with you. They would like to reinforce that staying home and washing hands diligently is still very important. If someone is experiencing symptoms, please call ahead rather than showing up at the hospital or clinic (the Aspirus Divine Savior call center number is 844-568-0701 or you can call your local provider/clinic office).

If you are looking for ways to help DSH right now, you can check in on or support the health care workers in their lives. They will reach out to us if and when they have specific needs which the community could help.

10. Madison College Status Update

Last week the college made the difficult decision to close all campuses throughout the district, including the Foundation Centre, through May 15. All staff is working remotely with classes resuming online, beginning March 30. All college related travel and activities have been cancelled, including our commencement ceremony. The college is working on an alternative format for graduation.

The Chamber website www.portagewi.com has links to various resources for you including business updates in hours of operations. We will keep you informed and continue to work for you to facilitate solutions. Please reach out if you have any questions. Remember, we can do this, and it will get better.

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