

## **Springfield Update – April 2020**

Governor Pritzker via executive order shut down all non-essential businesses on March 20 due to the growing Coronavirus pandemic. His order was later extended to the end of April. Listed in his executive order as essential business are the design and construction industries and their suppliers. Both are encouraged to practice social distancing and in the case of design, to work from home to the extent possible. The number of cases and deaths related to the pandemic continues to climb, but in recent days state medical experts say the rate of increase has slowed and we may be nearing the peak of the curve. The governor has declined to speculate about what he will do after April 30.

Concurrent with the Governor's stay at home order, the Capitol complex was shut down with only the most essential employees working at the facility. All other employees and support staff are working from home. The legislature has cancelled session until further notice, while no one knows for certain, many expect lawmakers to return to the capitol in late May or sometime in June. Until then, both chambers have created a series of working groups to work out a budget, review legislation, and determine the most urgent issues to be addressed. Conventional wisdom is that when legislators return to Springfield, they will pass a budget and address a couple of other urgent legislative matters before adjourning to the fall veto session after the November election.

Emergency rules were released by the Illinois Workers Compensation Commission on Monday establishing that front line workers who contract Covid-19, will be rebuttably assumed to have contracted the disease while on the job. Questions remain as to whether or not the assumption is limited to the infection phase, or if long-term damage is covered under workers compensation. Expect to hear more about this as Illinois employers and their insurers grapple with the implications.

The administration announced this week that the Department of Employment Security received over 500,000 first-time unemployment claims between March 1 and April 4. That surpasses all of the claims made in 2019 and is 5 times more than the number of claims filed in the first five weeks of the Great Recession in 2008. Governor Pritzker has faced criticism over the handling of unemployment claims. Many claimants have been unable to file, despite repeated attempts over several weeks. The Governor said that the state increased the number of individuals processing claims, partnered with private firms, has employees working overtime, and is stuck with an antiquated system that is incapable of processing the current load.

While generally supportive of the Governor's efforts, Republican legislators are starting to speak out. House Republican Leader Jim Durkin and others are calling for a review of the stay at home order as the extension nears its end and the number of cases decline. Republican legislators across the country are echoing that call as cases decline, more is known about the virus, and fears about the ability of the economy to recover mount.

Regardless of what happens, life on the other side of this pandemic will look very different than it did just a few short weeks ago. New laws are certain to be passed and new rules will be put in place.