

## Wisconsin Government Relations Update: COVID-19 Response

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### **Federal Government Enacts FFCRA and Considers Cash Payments to Taxpayers**

- **FFCRA Enacted:** On March 18, the President signed the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA), which among other things, provides paid sick leave, unemployment benefits, free coronavirus testing, and expanded Medicaid benefits for food and medical care for people impacted by COVID-19. Click [here](#) to read more about the FFCRA.
- **Federal Stimulus Package Under Discussion:** President Trump has also asked Congress to pass a bill that would include direct cash payments to taxpayers, \$300 billion in small business loans, \$50 billion for the airline industry and \$150 billion for other severely distressed industries.

### **Wisconsin Policymakers Working on Aid Package; End of Legislative Session Delayed**

- Governor Evers, Majority Leader Fitzgerald and Speaker Vos have been speaking daily about the State's policy response to COVID-19. While nothing has been agreed upon yet, Governor Evers is pushing to repeal the current law one-week delay before laid off workers can begin collecting unemployment insurance.
- An extraordinary session is likely to be scheduled in the spring to address bills passed by the Assembly in February 2020, as well as an aid/response package to assist individuals and businesses with the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **Wisconsin Executive/Emergency Orders Issued**

- State of Wisconsin Executive Orders responding to the pandemic are issued nearly daily. A few of the significant Emergency Orders include:
  - **School Closures:** An [Order](#) closing all Wisconsin public and private schools beginning March 18, 2020. The original order had a school reopening date of April 6, but that has been subsequently suspended and schools in Wisconsin are currently closed indefinitely.
  - **Mass Gatherings of 10 or more Prohibited:** An [Order](#) that all public and private "mass gatherings" of 10 or more people are prohibited. This includes the closure of bars, restaurants, theaters, and indoor malls, among others. **NOTE: There is a commercial and non-profit exemption from this Order.** Office spaces and manufacturing facilities are exempt for employees. However, businesses are directed to implement telework, work from home and social distancing as much as practicable. Offices with waiting rooms or other public spaces are advised to adhere to the fewer than 10 prohibition in those spaces.

- **Daycare Center Restriction:** An Order restricting day care centers to no more than 10 staff at a time, and not more than 50 children present at a time

### **State Operations Continue Remotely; Government Meetings Held Via Teleconference**

- **State Agencies are Operational:** State agencies remain operational, but many employees are working remotely, and as a result, may not have immediate access to files and other relevant information. Delays are likely.  
**Public Meetings:** While certain public meetings have been cancelled and rescheduled, some governmental bodies may choose to hold meetings via phone and/or teleconference, which is permitted under the open meetings law so long as the public is able to effectively monitor the meeting and proper notice is given.
- **DOT:** The Department of Transportation is closing for one day to deep clean its DMV facilities. Upon reopening, DOT will extend the expiration dates for regular and commercial drivers licenses by 60 days.

### **Reminder to Monitor Local Government Orders/Guidelines**

- Many local public health authorities have led the way on ordering restrictions on mass gatherings and other closures. It is important to follow not only the orders of the Wisconsin and federal government, but also to monitor the actions of local government. At the outset of the response to COVID-19, local government orders have often been more restrictive than those of the state or federal government.

### **Wisconsin Plans to Keep its April 7 Election Date (For Now)**

- The Elections Commission has highlighted logistical problems with holding the election on April 7, but does not have the power to reschedule it. Rescheduling the election would require court intervention, an act of the Legislature, or an order of the governor. DeWitt will continue to monitor and update on any changes in the election date.

### **Reminder to Trade Associations and Corporations: Review your Commercial Contracts**

- We advise reviewing contracts you may have for upcoming events or exhibitions to determine if a provision exists that would excuse performance as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Often these contracts include language that would excuse performance as a result of “government regulation,” which may include executive orders prohibiting mass gatherings and mandating social distancing. If you have specific questions regarding upcoming events, please contact us.

### **State Aid Programs for Wisconsin Businesses**

- WEDC will establish a task force to help small businesses survive the pandemic, which will include short-term efforts to help bridge cash flow pressures.

- WEDC is providing up to \$5 million in grants to small businesses. Individual grants are capped at \$20,000 and reserved for companies with 20 employees or fewer that have borrowed from one of the state's 23 community development financial institutions. The funds will go toward rent and payroll expenses including paid leave for workers. Click [here](#) for more details.