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Government Relations



### CNLA Legislative Update

Prepared by Linda Kowalski and The Kowalski Group  
March 17, 2020

COVID-19 is upending the General Assembly the same way it is changing everyone's life here in Connecticut. This situation is changing by the hour, and I will save much of this update for the board meeting call-in.

I have been working with several legislators about contacting the Governor's office to exempt nursery, landscape and greenhouse operations from any mass business closure requirement. Rep. Linehan has written a letter on this issue and it is attached. I talked to Commissioner Hurlburt about this and reiterated the need for these businesses to remain open. This will be an ongoing effort.

The General Assembly was completing the public hearing process when leadership decided to "pause" all activities through the end of the month. I am in contact with legislators, who are reachable, as well as staff, who are working from home. We continue to advocate for you during this time.

I am including here the latest information that has been released on state and federal aid to businesses. I know what a stressful time this is, but the information here is a starting point for accessing programs and assistance.

Small businesses and non-profits are eligible for federal disaster relief loans of up to \$2 million. Please review the SBA web site for information on the application process: [www.sba.gov/disaster](http://www.sba.gov/disaster)

The link to the Governor's release on this is below and contains additional information.  
<https://portal.ct.gov/Office-of-the-Governor/News/Press-Releases/2020/03-2020/Governor-Lamont-Announces-Connecticut-Businesses-Approved-to-Receive-Disaster-Assistance>

In addition, the state has outlined a number of steps to expedite unemployment compensation claims for entities affected by COVID-19. Please click the link below for frequently asked questions from the Department of Labor.

<https://www.ctdol.state.ct.us/DOLCOVIDFAQ.PDF>

One avenue, called “Shared Work,” enables a company to keep an employee at reduced hours with the unemployment compensation used to supplement the lost wages. Here is a brief explanation of it:

*Unemployment benefits are available to workers whose employer needs to temporarily shut down or slow down business. Employees who are furloughed by the emergency but expect to return to work can access up to at least six weeks of benefits. Employers reducing hours but not furloughing employees can partner with CTDOL’s Shared Work program, which allows employers to reduce employees’ work schedules by 10 percent to 60 percent and supplement lost wages with unemployment benefits*

A number of items you will be interested in, such as paid sick leave, are part of the federal rescue bill that has passed the U.S. House and now needs to be passed by the U.S. Senate. As information becomes available, we will get it to you.

As mentioned, the General Assembly has suspended activities until March 31. All public hearings and committee meetings have been cancelled. It is looking more likely that the leadership will decide the contours of what happens in the remaining weeks of the session, and that this could include the consideration of only a few “must-pass” bills in both chambers.

Prior to the pause, CNLA had offered testimony on two bills:

- Senate Bill 232, *An Act Establishing Collective Bargaining Right for Certain Agricultural Workers*. The public hearing was held on February 25; the bill remains pending in the Labor and Public Employees committee.
- Senate Bill 301, *An Act Concerning the Use of Chlorpyrifos*. The public hearing was held March 6; the bill remains pending in the Environment committee.

We discussed both the agriculture unionization bill and chlorpyrifos bill with numerous legislators on the committee and the leadership. A number of CNLA members came to the Capitol for discussions. Key to the process has been Sen. Cathy Osten, Senate chair of the Appropriations committee, who has been assisting us with the unionization issue. I will have additional comments on other legislation of interest during the board call-in.

Finally, Governor Lamont’s State of Emergency will enable the state to provide additional authority to DECD for business loans, although there are no details of this yet. The declaration will also give most businesses additional time to make tax payments.