**State House Activity**

The General Assembly cancelled all hearings and meetings for this week as the State expects cases of coronavirus to peak sometime in the next two weeks.

**Unemployment Compensation Update and Federal Funds**

Commerce RI coordinated a conference call with members of the business community last week. During the April 15th call, the Chamber heard from Department of Labor Director Scott Jensen. As of April 15th, 154,000 Rhode Islanders filed for unemployment benefits (although the Director did say that some of the 154,000 may be duplicate applications so the number may be somewhat overstated). To provide a perspective of caseloads, he said that on April 7th alone, there were 15,000 claims filed. Approximately $107 million has been paid out as of last week, which represents 1/5 of the amount available in the Unemployment Trust Fund. Should the fund be zeroed out by claims, the State will then borrow from the federal government to meet benefit requirements. Director Jensen also said that companies that lay off employees due to coronavirus fallout, will not be penalized through their experience rating once the economy restarts and employment returns to “normal.”

Governor Raimondo announced that the State received $625 million in federal funds last week. A total of $1.25 billion is expected to be received – the remainder should reach the state treasury in the next couple weeks. However, federal guidelines as to exactly how the money can be used have not been provided to states yet. Those guidelines should be released soon.

**Mask Requirement Reminder**

Last week, the Governor signed an executive order issuing clear direction about face coverings. The following directives are in effect:

* + All employees of customer-facing businesses, office-based businesses, manufacturers, nonprofits and construction workers must wear cloth face coverings when they are at work.
  + Additionally, all customer-facing businesses must take steps to remind customers to wear face coverings.
  + The only exceptions are for anyone whose health would be in jeopardy because of wearing a face covering or any children under 2 years old.

The Governor stated that businesses are NOT required to refuse entry or service to customers without masks. She acknowledged that some Mayors are choosing to order businesses in their towns to refuse entry to customers without masks. The Governor said those Mayors have the right to adopt a stricter ordinance than her state executive order.

**Governor Looks for Chamber Input**

Governor Raimondo is asking Chambers of Commerce and other industry groups to think about ways to safely re-open the State’s economy in phases. Once the State experiences 14 days of declining coronavirus cases, the first phase of re-opening can begin. Re-opening will likely require some type of social distancing as well as cleaning requirements and customer flow regulations; but different types of businesses will likely require different types of regulations. The Chamber will continue to work with the Governor and her team to develop ideas to help in this endeavor.