Pandemic causes public hearing on PTO to go virtual, also results in nearly no employer participation

As part of its ongoing rulemaking process, the Maine Department of Labor (DOL) conducted a public hearing on Wednesday evening, April 15, regarding the recently-proposed rules that will govern the implementation and operation of Maine’s first-in-the-nation “paid time off” (PTO) law. The PTO law passed in 2019 and is scheduled to take effect on January 1, 2021.

The hour-long virtual hearing attracted less than 50 attendees and only about a dozen speakers. The vast majority of those who provided public comment represented unions or progressive advocacy groups. In fact, only two of the commenters could actually be considered true businesses, one of which was threatened during the public hearing with a boycott by a member of the nurse’s union for daring to speak out with concerns.

The Maine State Chamber of Commerce, represented by Executive Vice President Peter Gore, did provide public input, in response to the tone-deaf comments of many of the participating advocates regarding the costs associated with this leave and requests for its immediate implementation of full leave benefits for employees. Earlier last week, the Maine State Chamber and more than 30 different business associations, representing a broad cross section of our state’s economy, requested that the Governor and DOL commissioner suspend the public comment period until the state of emergency currently in place due to the COVID-19 pandemic is lifted.

The Maine State Chamber and others noted that the catastrophic economic impact thousands of small businesses are currently suffering as a result of the pandemic, coupled with the need for a societal shutdown, is first and foremost on the minds of small businesspeople. As such, their participation in the process would be limited, at best, and likely not at all.

Unfortunately, the Department refused to cancel the public hearing. However, they did agree to extend the written comment period for an extra 30 days to May 27, 2020. As predicted, the concerns of the Maine State Chamber and others manifested when only two true businesses showed up to speak at the virtual public hearing - and then they were berated and intimidated for it.

The rulemaking process is part of an ongoing public input process that started after the passage of the bill by the Legislature in 2019. After months of gathering comments and input from around the state, the Maine Department of Labor released its draft rules (www.maine.gov/labor/proposedrulemaking) that helps to determine the implementation and operation of Maine’s PTO law, which sprang out of LD 369, An Act Authorizing Earned Employee Leave. LD

Maine’s business community steps-up to help during COVID-19 pandemic

Within days of the first Coronavirus diagnosis in Maine, Maine businesses began stepping-up to help fellow Mainers and people around the globe. Whether it was shifting production to make PPE or medical testing equipment, making sure Maine school kids have access to the internet, or donating to food banks, Maine businesses are pitching-in in unique ways and they are making a difference. It is a true testament to Mainers’ ingenuity and innovative thinking, and to the character and resilience of Maine people and our state’s business community.

As soon as the virus hit Maine, and with learning transitioning from the classroom to online, internet service provider Charter announced it would offer free Spectrum broadband and Wi-Fi access to households with K-12 or college students in need of internet services. Comcast opened its Xfinity WiFi network for free and began offering unlimited data for free. Bangor Savings Bank recently announced a $50,000 grant to Connect Kids Now, a new initiative from the Maine Department of Education aimed at helping make sure students are connected to the internet.

Companies like CMP, Hannaford, and Harvard Pilgrim quickly committed large contributions to food banks as most are experiencing unprecedented demand due to the virus. CMP and Emera also announced they were suspending power disconnec-
A Message from our President...

“Reopening Maine’s Economy: A healthy economy is dependent on healthy people…”

by Dana Connors

During these unprecedented times and uncharted waters of the global pandemic in which we find ourselves, it is encouraging to see the public and private sectors working together and every individual doing their part to protect the public health.

As we move forward together and enter into the next phase of the pandemic with the health and safety of Maine people paramount, and knowing that a healthy economy is dependent on healthy people, the time is now to start thinking about reopening our economy. Maine needs to begin planning now, and planning well so when we do reopen, we do so in the safest, most responsible manner possible.

It is in this context that the Maine State Chamber of Commerce would like to highlight the guidance prepared by our friends at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce (www.uschamber.com/coronavirus/implementing-national-return-to-work-plan). This is a thoughtful framework dealing with the many issues surrounding reopening safely, including health and COVID-19 testing in the workplace, social distancing at work, regulatory issues, the liability of reentering a new workplace environment, public transportation and childcare considerations for the workforce, and more.

The following links offer details on specific issues for consideration:

- Essential Services and Resources (www.uschamber.com/coronavirus/implementing-national-return-to-work-plan#work);
- Resolution of Regulatory and Legal Liability Issues (www.uschamber.com/coronavirus/implementing-national-return-to-work-plan#liability); and,

Additionally, you likely are aware that on Thursday evening, April 16, the White House released its blueprint for reopening the nation’s economy. Opening Up America Again (www.whitehouse.gov/openingamerica) is a three-phased approach offering guidance for state and local officials on reopening economies and getting people back to work while continuing to protect public health and safety.

We appreciate its measured approach and direction from medical experts.

You also may be aware that both Senators Susan Collins and Angus King have been appointed to serve on President Trump’s task force on reopening the economy. This is a testament to the leadership, experience, and expertise of our senators, and to the importance of getting back to business in states where small employers are in many ways the backbone of economies.

We recognize that some regions of Maine and business sectors will find it easier to ramp up than others. There is no one-size-fits-all playbook. We also recognize the importance of balancing the health of our people and the health of our economy. Some may want to divide the two, but they are not mutually exclusive, and neither can operate in a silo. A healthy vibrant economy depends on jobs, economic activity, and a strong workforce. When we return to health, we need to be ready to return to work.

As the Voice of Maine Business, the Maine State Chamber of Commerce will continue to be a resource and advocate for Maine businesses during these uncertain times. We are committed to ensuring that we reopen our economy as quickly and responsibly as possible so that Maine employers and people can get back to work. Planning well in this changed business environment is key to our success. It is our top priority at the Maine State Chamber.
Late Friday afternoon, April 17, Governor Janet Mills issued the following statement in response to the President’s Guidelines for Opening Up America Again:

“We all want life to return to normal as soon as it is safe to do so. Our hearts break to see closed storefronts and people struggling to make ends meet because of this crisis. At the same time, we all know that reopening too soon and too aggressively will likely cause a secondary surge in COVID 19 cases, jeopardizing the lives of Maine people and further destabilizing the economy. None of us want that. I have been speaking with a number of economic leaders, including the President of the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston. Their message is clear: the most important thing we can do to turn the economy around is to defeat the virus.

“As the President acknowledges, the Governors are in charge of reopening their states’ economies and gradually lifting public health restrictions. Here in Maine, we too are planning a phased-in reopening, tailored to the demographics and various economic sectors of our state. Ultimately, the protocols we adopt, made after consulting with people from all parts of the state, will be guided by fact, science and public health expertise. As the President’s guidelines note, widespread testing, personal protective equipment, and contact tracing are critical to lifting restrictions and reviving the economy; for that reason, the nation’s governors yesterday again urged the Federal government to ensure that all states have these resources.”

“I remain in contact with Governor Sununu of New Hampshire and Governor Scott of Vermont regarding actions that may be appropriate for the northern New England region. My Administration, through the Department of Economic and Community Development, has been connecting with individual economic sectors across the state to devise a plan for how we gradually reopen the Maine economy. Those decisions, of course, are driven first and foremost by the need to protect the public health. We will release details of the plan in the near future.”
We offer sustainable programs to our customers that not only provide sound economic and environmental return but also build jobs and careers. We view waste as a valuable resource as well as an opportunity for positive change.

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Casella Organics® transforms traditional organic waste streams, including short paper fiber, ash, wood wastes, food wastes and biosolids into compost and other renewable products.

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In the past few weeks, Maine State Chamber President Dana Connors has participated in several tele-town hall meetings hosted by Congressman Jared Golden, Maine’s second congressional district representative to the U.S. House. Golden initiated the listening sessions to hear from Maine small businesses about their challenges during the Coronavirus crisis and what resources they need to help them stay afloat during the pandemic.

SBA Maine District Director Amy Bassett, Chris Pinkham of the Maine Bankers Association, and Todd Mason of the Maine Credit Union League were also on hand to answer questions and offer guidance about the various programs and resources available to help small businesses.

Town Hall participants included small business owners, seasonal business owners, sole-proprietors, self-employed individuals, independent contractors, and fishing and lobstering business owners. Altogether, several hundred people called-in over the two nights.

Discussions and questions focused primarily on the financial relief programs in the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act, including the Economic Injury Disaster Loan (EIDL) program and Paycheck Protection Program (PPP), and changes to unemployment insurance. Bassett emphasized the compliance and documentation requirements to maximize PPP loan forgiveness. Golden addressed congressional efforts to put forward additional stimulus packages to help more Maine businesses, and the potential extension of relief programs beyond the initial 8-week aid period.

Golden pointed to several resources for small businesses, including his office’s Small Business Resource Page for information on loans, grants, and other federal programs available during the crisis. Constituents can reach his Small Business Response Team by emailing smallbizresponseteam@mail.house.gov. Golden also mentioned several free resources for small businesses, including Maine’s Small Business Development Centers, SCORE, CEI, and SBA.

The Maine State Chamber thanks Congressman Golden for hosting these important events to help provide businesses across Maine with accurate and current information on COVID-19 resources. The chamber appreciates the work of Maine’s entire federal delegation, and the partnership between the public private sectors, including Maine’s lending institutions, for their efforts over the last four weeks to quickly make available new programs and put new processes in place to help Maine businesses access the critical aid they need during the COVID-19 pandemic.

If you would like to hear the audio recordings from those sessions, please visit the Maine State Chamber’s YouTube channel at www.youtube.com/MaineChamber.
Businesses Step Up...
(Continued from Page 1...)

tions for anyone impacted by COVID-19.

Early on, Northern Light Health set up a COVID-19 screening hotline.

L.L. Bean began using its distribution center to pack food for pantries across the state and began sewing 'sneeze masks' for first responders and other frontline workers at the facility where they normally make their famous Bean Boots. New Balance and Cuddledown also began making free masks for health care workers.

Bath Iron Works donated more than 3,000 protective masks to health workers in Maine and is helping to keep local eateries afloat during virus outbreak by purchasing lunches for employees made by area restaurants.

The Sazerac Co. in Lewiston, maker of Fireball whisky, joined distillers like Portland's Maine Craft Distilling to make much-needed hand sanitizer, adding production capacity to cope with high demand.

The Jackson Laboratory is collaborating with Maine hospitals to provide additional Coronavirus testing for frontline health care workers and patients throughout Maine.

Flowfold and Thermoformed Plastics are making face shields that are being distributed by the thousands to health care facilities and first responders.

Financial institutions are deferring loans, restaurants are delivering free meals to health care workers, and hotels are providing rooms for health care workers free of charge.

To support local restaurants and healthcare workers during the coronavirus outbreak, The Maine Flag Company is hand-making “heart of it all” flags. Profits are helping support Portland restaurants to feed healthcare workers on the front lines.

Several Maine companies are innovating and ramping-up production of medical products.

IDEXX's human health business, Opti Medical Systems, is in the early stages of developing a COVID-19 test kit specifically for use on people.

Amplify Additive in Scarborough is developing a splitter device that will

Continued on Page 8...
The Maine Department of Labor (MDOL) is pleased to partner with the Maine State Chamber to share information and Frequently Asked Questions regarding the COVID-19 public health emergency, its impact on employers and employees, and the unemployment compensation process. Maine DOL know these are exceptionally challenging times. You and your employees are dealing with changes and difficult choices none of us imagined even a few weeks ago. It’s hard for those temporarily closing business and laying off staff, and hard for laid off workers who now must apply for unemployment. In the past four weeks initial claims totaled 89,500, the most ever for a four-week period with continued claims for the week ending April 11 totaling 55,700, a new record high. In the face of this, the Maine DOL paid out over $100 million in benefits over the past four weeks to Mainers statewide to provide a lifeline for families and an economic stabilizer to communities.

The MDOL is implementing solutions to the challenges of the sudden and unprecedented surge in claims and questions in order to meet the needs of Maine people and businesses. Claims staff are working over the weekend to process applications and are contacting claimants who have errors on their applications. The Department has also contracted with a Maine-based center to provide first level claims assistance. Starting this week, up to 100 people are answering calls, increased from 14 a month ago. MDOL has launched a new alphabetical calling schedule to ease the pressure on the phones and extended phone hours by three hours, now available from 8:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. The online unemployment system, which Maine implemented a few years ago, is performing as designed and is available 24/7.

At both the state and federal level, law changes have been enacted to increase flexibility and support in the unemployment system. The MDOL has been implementing the state changes and making plans to execute the federal changes. Among other provisions, Governor Mills’ COVID-19 emergency legislation required that any unemployment benefits paid under these provisions will not affect an employer’s experience rating record. In addition, the new law waives the work search requirement for individuals still connected to their employer and waives the one-week waiting period so that benefits will be available sooner.

Federally, the recently enacted CARES Act includes new temporary unemployment programs to provide additional relief to people affected by COVID-19. At the direction of Governor Mills, Maine opted in immediately to these new temporary federal unemployment programs. The first of these programs, Federal Pandemic Unemployment Compensation (FPUC) has been set up and Mainers already receiving unemployment benefits have begun to get the additional weekly $600 this week. The additional funds will be received concurrently with the individual’s current benefits and will be retroactive to either the date of the law’s enactment or the individual’s loss of employment, whichever is later. This $600 additional weekly benefit expires July 25. The Department is still in the process of setting up implementation of the other new federal unemployment programs such as benefits for those who are self-employed, and those who have exhausted their current benefits.

The Department understands the impatience and anxiety that employers and workers are feeling as DOL adapts its unemployment insurance system to handle the rapidly changing needs. MDOLL also wants to make sure they answer the questions of employers and employees as fully and quickly as we can. The Department has many resources on its new COVID-19 webpage: www.maine.gov/labor/covid19. MDOL has developed Frequently Asked Questions and updates them often: www.maine.gov/labor/docs/2020/covid19/covidfaqandui.pdf. Some of those questions...
DOL FAQs & Answers...  
(Continued from Page 7...)

FAQs appear below, and hopefully, prove useful to you and your employees.

MDOL FAQs for Employers

The following information is general guidance based on hypothetical unemployment scenarios. It is not legal advice on any specific unemployment claim. Individual cases must be analyzed and decided by a Bureau of Unemployment Compensation (BUC) claims representative.

COVERAGE & ELIGIBILITY

1. If I must temporarily close part or all of my business operations due to the COVID-19 virus and lay off my employees, will they have to look for other work while they are collecting unemployment benefits?
   A. No. As long as you plan to return them to their jobs when you resume operations, and provided they remain able and available to work for you and provide you with current contact information by which to reach them, they will not have to seek other work.

2. Can an employer who needs to temporarily lay off employees because of COVID-19 continue to pay health insurance premiums for the employee during the layoff period, or will that negatively impact the employees’ unemployment benefits?
   A. Continuing to provide health insurance will not impact your employee’s ability to receive unemployment benefits.

3. What if an employer is considering a reduction in work hours?
   A. Employers are encouraged to contact MDOL’s Bureau of Unemployment Compensation to learn about Workshare, an unemployment option that helps businesses retain their workforce during a temporary slowdown in

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Businesses Step Up...  
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allow one ventilator to help multiple patients breathe, making more efficient use of scarce medical ventilators.

Abbott, also in Scarborough, is manufacturing a COVID-19 test that delivers rapid results.

STAR Systems in Brunswick is increasing production of temporary modular wall containment systems for hospitals that can be used to configure instant isolation rooms and quarantine sections of a hospital.

Puritan Medical Products in Piscataquis County is one of the top two manufacturing companies in the world making specialized testing swabs for COVID-19.

And a group of Maine business leaders are helping address Maine’s blood shortage. In just two days, led by WEX and in partnership with the American Red Cross and MaineHealth, the business leaders organized “Distance Saves Lives” blood drives to address the critical shortage caused by the Coronavirus.

Last, but certainly not least, are the incredible efforts of much of Maine’s workforce — health care workers, first responders, and other essential-services workers including those at every grocery store and pharmacy in Maine — who every day are going above and beyond their regular duties, some risking their own health, to take care of Mainer in need.

The saying, “When the going gets tough, the tough get going,” applies to every single Maine essential service worker and every business in Maine that is stepping-up and pitching-in to help others during this unprecedented time. It has been remarkable to witness the generous contributions and efforts of so many individuals and companies to help their fellow citizens and communities during the COVID-19 pandemic. There has never been a time to be prouder of Maine people and our state’s business community.

The Maine State Chamber is creating a written history of the business community’s resilience and innovation during this extraordinary time. We hope you will share your organization’s story with us by emailing blog@mainechamber.org.

For the most current information, visit www.mainechamber.org
Maine Department of Labor announces alphabetical call-in schedule for unemployment benefits

After receiving an unprecedented number of unemployment claims due to the novel coronavirus (COVID-19), the Maine Department of Labor (MDOL) announced a new alphabetical-by-last-name call-in schedule for Maine people filing for unemployment benefits. The new schedule will help reduce phone line congestion as the Department ramps up its capacity to receive and process claims.

Maine people seeking to file for unemployment by calling the 800 number with last names beginning with A-H should call on Monday; I-Q on Tuesday; R-Z on Wednesday. Thursday and Friday will be left unassigned for those who miss their alphabetical day or need to call at that time.

“While we hope to have 100 more people answering the phone lines by the end of next week, implementing this new system will ease congestion on our phone lines in the meantime,” said Commissioner Laura Fortman on Friday. “This is an easy way for individuals to take action to improve access for everyone. We are all in this together and we appreciate your help as we navigate these unprecedented times.”

The recently enacted federal CARES Act includes new temporary unemployment programs to provide additional relief to people affected by COVID-19. At the direction of the Governor, Maine has opted in to the new programs. However, MDOL requires guidance from the U.S. Department of Labor in order to implement the new programs. MDOL continues to press for that guidance and once it is received, will implement the system changes.

Claims filed will be processed retroactively to the dates in the law.

Until then, the Department urges Maine people who would be eligible under these programs to wait to file until they are in place. Filing now will result in a denial of benefits when those applying, in fact, deserve the benefit. MDOL wants every Mainer to receive the benefits for which they are eligible during this difficult time.

4. Is it better to lay off employees than have employees resign?
A. It is easier to determine unemployment eligibility in the case of a layoff because there is a clear separation from work. To be eligible for unemployment, individuals must lose their jobs through no fault of their own.

5. Will self-employed, sole proprietors be covered?
A. If the self-employed are incorporated, they will be eligible for unemployment benefits. However, most independent contractors, small business owners, and other self-employed individuals are not incorporated, do not contribute to unemployment taxes, and are not usually eligible for unemployment benefits. However, the new temporary federal unemployment programs will cover the self-employed. These new programs are complex, and we are working to implement them as quickly as possible. At this moment, those are self-employed should wait to file a claim for benefits. Since these programs have not been implemented yet, filing at this point will only result in a denial. We will continue to provide information as it becomes available. Once implemented, benefits will be paid retroactively.

6. To what extent are the changes in the new bill applicable to people who work for large (500+ employees) employers?
A. The new state temporary measures in the new legislation are for all covered workers in the state.
7. How will new unemployment measures affect Direct Reimbursement employers?
A. Unlike private sector employers, nonprofit and government employers can choose to either pay into the unemployment trust fund or to cover the cost of benefits paid out directly. Private employers must contribute to this social insurance program so that the resources are available during economic downturns. Those who choose not to pay the unemployment tax are typically responsible for 100% of the cost of any benefits paid to former employees. MDOL awaits final interpretation of the federal CARES Act from U.S. DOL; it appears that the legislation provides federal funds to cover 50% of the state unemployment benefits that would have otherwise been charged to direct reimbursable employers. Maine cannot waive the remaining 50%. Having no source of funding available to cover these costs would result in the transfer of the liability to taxable private employers. As of December 31, 2019, there were slightly over 1,000 direct reimbursable employers in Maine.

8. If an employer lives in Maine and owns a restaurant in New Hampshire and has employees who live in both states, in which state do the employees apply for unemployment?
A. The work is being performed in NH so all claimants (workers) will need to file claims in NH regardless of their individual residences.

9. Is an employer required to have employees exhaust all paid time off before putting them on temporary layoff (after which they will apply for unemployment)?
A. No. Employers are not required to pay out all paid time off before a layoff, but they are allowed to do so. Use of leave time during a temporary layoff depends on an employer’s policies. The employer may require use or payout of leave time.

Payments received by employee may have an impact on unemployment benefits paid to an individual.

10. Is it possible to find out if an employee is eligible for unemployment before the person files a claim?
A. No, MDOL can’t determine whether an individual would be eligible for unemployment before that person separates from the employer. An individual must separate from their employer and then file a claim. MDOL reviews the case to make a determination. If an individual is not sure whether they would be eligible, it is best to apply. The individual must still be connected to the labor market in order to receive benefits, be able and available for work and retain contact with the employer.

11. If I layoff my employees and they get unemployment, can they come back and volunteer to work for me?
A. Employees cannot volunteer at a for-profit business. Employees cannot volunteer to perform the same work they would normally get paid to do for a public employer. If employees are laid off—by a private or public employer—and then go back in to perform work for their employer, they are employed (not laid off) and must be paid wages. If they are truly laid off, they can apply for unemployment benefits through the online system.

12. I closed my business and laid my staff off a few weeks ago as a result of COVID-19 requirements. I plan to re-open in early May and have notified my employees I’d like them to return to do their jobs. However, many of them do not want to come back to work and prefer to stay on unemployment especially now that the additional $600/week from the federal program is added to their benefit. What can be done to encourage these workers to come back to my business? Can they just stay on unemployment even if I have told them I want them back to work?

Continued on Page 11...
Cianbro-Irby, NCI and Sargent Electric awarded $300 million in contracts to build and upgrade transmission and provide land clearing for the New England Clean Energy Connect

The New England Clean Energy Connect (NECEC) today announced it has awarded more than $300 million in contracts to Maine-based Cianbro in a joint venture with Irby Construction, Sargent Electric, and Northern Clearing, Inc. (NCI) to build and upgrade transmission and provide land clearing for the project. Sargent Electric and NCI have significant employee presence in Maine and are IBEW Local 104 contractors. The companies will subcontract work to other Maine-based suppliers, contractors and consultants with preference for hiring Maine workers when possible.

“The clean energy corridor will bring jobs and significant economic benefits to Maine,” said Thorn Dickinson, President & CEO of NECEC LLC Transmission. “In addition to the 1,600 jobs that will be created annually during construction, the project will indirectly support employment in local businesses in towns from Jackman to Lewiston. The clean energy corridor is projected to inject more than $570 million into Maine’s economy and these contracts represent $300 million that is going to Maine companies to deliver high quality jobs for Mainers.”

Cianbro, Maine’s largest general contractor, in a joint venture with transmission construction company Irby Construction, will construct the new, high voltage DC transmission line that will run 145 miles from the Canadian border to a substation in Lewiston, Maine. Sargent Electric will perform transmission line upgrades required for the project, specifically on a segment from Wiscasset to Windsor and others in the Lewiston-Auburn area. NCI will provide all clearing and access road improvement work.

“This is a significant contract for our company and our state. We are eager to put Maine people to work on this important project that brings both clean energy and economic benefits to the State,” said Andi Vigue, President and CEO at Cianbro.

Cianbro-Irby teamed up similarly to construct the $1.4 billion Maine Power Reliability Project which was completed in 2015 on time and under budget. As part of this contract, they expect to hire 260 employees.

To date, the NECEC has received permits from a number of State agencies and additional permits required to begin construction are expected in the second quarter of 2020. Construction is expected to be completed in 2022.

A. It depends. This is a complex situation, and eligibility for unemployment will depend on the claimants’ personal circumstances. When those receiving unemployment benefits file their required weekly certification, they must answer questions regarding whether they have been offered any work in the past week. Employers should let MDOL know if they have recalled employees back to work and if those employees have turned down the work offer. MDOL will analyze the circumstances on a case-by-case basis to see if there is a valid reason for refusing the work or not. For example, under the new federal programs (e.g. Pandemic Unemployment Assistance - PUA), unemployment benefits are made available to a broader set of people with circumstances affected by COVID-19. MDOL’s determination may also depend upon the circumstances of the particular workplace, such as whether the employer is taking steps to minimize the risk of COVID-19 exposure, or such as by following recommendations by the Maine CDC that are in place at the relevant time. If MDOL determines that an offer of suitable work was made and that there was no valid reason to refuse it, unemployment benefits including the $600 additional benefit would be disallowed. If regular unemployment benefits are denied, the additional $600 a week in federal benefits (under Federal Pandemic Unemployment Compensation - FPUC) would also be denied. In any event, the additional $600 benefit under FPUC is temporary and expires July 25 for all applicants.

13. My employees are applying for unemployment and I’ve been notified that MDOL needs wage information from me, what is the best way to share that information?

A. Establishing a person’s eligibility for unemployment benefits is a case-by-case process and includes gathering wage and

**For the most current information, visit [www.mainechamber.org](http://www.mainechamber.org)**
Big news for small businesses

More plan choices, more savings than ever with Chamber BlueOptions®

Welcome to a better health care solution. With Chamber BlueOptions, small businesses can now offer employees a choice of eight plans with different levels of coverage! And the best part — the savings are through the roof. Here’s how it works:

Chamber BlueOptions is our portfolio of small business health plans created just for Maine’s state, regional and local chamber members. So if your business has 2 – 50 employees, this one’s for you:

More plan choices
Employees can choose from eight different plans that include a PPO, an HMO with tiered options or either one paired with a health savings account.

New found savings
Anthem’s HMO tiered plans offer you savings of about 13% compared to the same in-network benefits on a PPO plan. And, employees can save 10 to 15% on their premiums and get added discounts on medical care.

Get the health plan you’ve been waiting for!
Contact your broker or go to anthem.com/mainechamberblueoptions.
Senator Collins announces Maine colleges and universities to receive more than $41 million

On Monday, April 13, U.S. Senator Susan Collins, a member of the Education Committee, announced that Maine institutions of higher education will receive a total of $41,092,834 in the first round of funding for colleges and universities through the CARES Act (www.collins.senate.gov/newsroom/senator-collins-announces-maine-colleges-and-universities-receive-more-41-million). Of that amount, at least $20,546,425 must be used for emergency financial aid grants to students. With the additional funds, colleges and universities will offer direct aid to students to help them pay for items such as food, housing, course materials, technology, health care and child care. They may also use their funding to purchase technology to expand remote learning and to defray costs associated with lost revenue.

Some of the Maine institutions of higher education that received the first installment of CARES Act funding are below. The full list of schools can be found online at www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ope/allocationsforsection18004a1ofcaresact.pdf.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Total Allocation</th>
<th>Minimum Amount for Emergency Financial Aid Grants to Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bates College</td>
<td>$953,516</td>
<td>$476,758</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bowdoin College</td>
<td>$1,123,660</td>
<td>$561,830</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central Maine Community College</td>
<td>$1,882,719</td>
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<tr>
<td>Colby College</td>
<td>$1,244,996</td>
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<td>College Of The Atlantic</td>
<td>$303,385</td>
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<td>Eastern Maine Community College</td>
<td>$1,426,773</td>
<td>$713,387</td>
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<tr>
<td>Husson University</td>
<td>$2,674,616</td>
<td>$1,337,308</td>
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<td>Kennebec Valley Community College</td>
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<tr>
<td>Maine Maritime Academy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Northeast Technical Institute</td>
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<td>Northern Maine Community College</td>
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<td>Saint Joseph’s College</td>
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<td>Southern Maine Community College</td>
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<td>Thomas College</td>
<td>$762,266</td>
<td>$381,133</td>
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UMaine, Maine MEP collaborating on production of aerosol shields to protect health care workers

A University of Maine and Maine Manufacturing Extension Partnership (Maine MEP) innovation team developing solutions to COVID-19-related health care challenges has worked with in-state hospitals and manufacturing partners to build, test and start production of two variations of an “aerosol box” meant to protect frontline medical staff as they intubate or transport patients who may be sick with the disease.

The two designs of the aerosol boxes are constructed from clear polycarbonate. The first design is a three-sided shield with handholes that covers the patient’s head and shoulders and allows medical personnel to intubate safely to contain aerosol spray from a patient’s respiratory tract. The second fully encloses a patient’s head and, with the help of a portable tube and filter, creates a negative-pressure environment so that viral particles leaving a patient’s respiratory tract can be captured before they contaminate the surrounding air.

The boxes were developed collaboratively following a request from MaineHealth that referenced a concept first conceived by Dr. Hsien Yung-Lai, a physician in Taiwan whose aerosol box design to treat COVID-19 patients has been shared widely during the ongoing pandemic.

UMaine’s first prototype was based on a sketch by John Karp, business growth coach for the Maine MEP and a member of the UMaine innovation team. John Belding, director of UMaine’s Advanced Manufacturing Center (AMC), and his team worked with Karp to refine the sketch using computer-aided design.

Continued on Page 16...
employment information from both the claimant and the employer. MDOL sends paper Separation Forms (B-1 Forms) to employers asking for this information. In this time of high volume of claims, MDOL cannot process paper forms efficiently. Starting immediately, we ask that employers send in the paper B-1 forms you’ve already received and then, from now on, please register for and use the online program called State Information Data Exchange System (SIDES), a free nation-wide system separate from your ReEmployME account. Please register for the system so that going forward the needed wage and employment information can be transmitted electronically in both directions – https://reemployme.maine.gov/accessme/faces/sides/SEWEmployerWelcome.xhtml. For specific questions about SIDES, please email division.uctax@maine.gov or call 1-844-754-3508.

14. Will my experience rating record be affected if any of my employees receive unemployment benefits because of COVID-19?  
A. If an individual receives unemployment benefits due solely to COVID-19, benefits paid to the worker would not be charged against the experience rating record of the employer.

15. I have laid off my employees and they have requested that their paid time off (PTO) is paid out to them. Will this affect their unemployment benefits?  
A. If the employees have been truly laid off and are separated from employment with your business, then the payout of PTO will not count against unemployment insurance benefits (although any severance pay would cause a reduction in benefits in the week it is paid). If the employees are on an unpaid leave of absence due to COVID-19 measures, they can apply for and receive unemployment bene-

fits. If employees are receiving pay while on a leave of absence (in any of these forms: sick leave, vacation pay or regular wages), they are not unemployed and would not collect UI on top of their earnings. New federal legislation was enacted March 18 on paid sick leave and paid family and medical leave. There is more information for employers and employees on the website of U.S. DOL on new federal paid sick leave or federal paid family and medical leave from U.S. DOL – www.dol.gov/agencies/whd/pandemic. For additional FAQs focused on the unemployment process, please see www.maine.gov/labor/covid19.

**UNEMPLOYMENT TIPS**

- Apply for unemployment online with a computer by visiting www.maine.gov/unemployment.
- To avoid errors, all filers should review the guide online at www.maine.gov/unemployment/reem
Even though schools are remote for rest of academic year, labor laws still apply

On April 13, the Maine Department of Labor sent a public that while the Department of Education has recommended that schools continue remote learning for the remainder of the school year, labor laws pertaining to minors still apply. School buildings may not be physically open; however, school is still considered to be in session since students are still expected to complete school assignments from home. The following still apply for minors in the workplace:

For minors under 16 years old, a work permit is required, even if working in a parent owned business. Work permits can be downloaded at www.maine.gov/labor/labor_laws/publications/2018/work_permit_072018.pdf. Minors under 16 years old can work between 7:00 a.m. and 7:00 p.m. during the school year and between 7:00 a.m. and 9:00 p.m. during summer vacations only. No work hours are permitted during school hours. The maximum hours are capped at three hours a day on school days, including Fridays or 18 hours in any week during a school week. The maximum hours during non-school periods are capped at 40 hours in a week with no school or eight hours on days without school (during weekends, holidays, vacations, storm days, etc.). These workers cannot work more than 6 days in a row.

Workers who are 16- and 17-years old (enrolled in school, including home-school) may work after 7:00 a.m. on a school day and after 5:00 a.m. on a non-school day; until 10:15 p.m. on a day before a school day and until midnight if there is no school the next day. Minors under 17 years old may NOT work during school hours. These workers may work a maximum of six hours on a school day and eight hours on the last school day of the week; there are some exceptions for co-op (work-study) students and students with an alternative education plan with a work component. They may work 10 hours a day on weekends, holidays, vacations, teacher workshops; 24 hours a week in any week with three or more school days; and, 50 hours a week each week there are less than three scheduled school days or during first and last week of school year. They may NOT work more than six days in a row.

Exceptions include students enrolled in an approved alternative education plan or an approved cooperative/vocational education program. They can work the daily or weekly hours required for the program without having those hours count toward the regular maximums allowed. For example, a 17-year-old student could work 15 hours under a cooperative/vocational education plan plus the 24 hours that the law would normally allow for a student under 18 years old.

It should also be noted that minors cannot work in occupations that are considered hazardous by the Maine Department of Labor and or U.S. Department of Labor. More information can be found in the DOL’s online guide at www.maine.gov/labor/labor_laws/publications/minorsguide.html.

OSHA issues enforcement guidance for recording cases of COVID-19

In an April 10 memorandum, the U.S. Department of Labor’s Occupational Safety and Health Administration provided interim guidance (www.osha.gov/memos/2020-04-10/enforcement-guidance-recording-cases-coronavirus-disease-2019-covid-19) to Compliance Safety and Health Officers (CSHOs) for enforcing the requirements of 29 CFR Part 1904 with respect to the recording of occupational illnesses, specifically cases of Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19). This memorandum will take effect immediately and remain in effect until further notice. This guidance is intended to be time-limited to the current public health crisis. Please frequently check OSHA’s webpage (www.osha.gov/SLTC/covid-19) for updates. If you have any questions regarding this policy, please contact Elizabeth Grossman, Director of the Office of Statistical Analysis, at (202) 693-2225.

DOL FAQs & Answers... (Continued from Page 14...)

• For more information and resources, visit the MDOL’s COVID-19 page: www.maine.gov/labor/covid19, follow us on Facebook @MElabor and Twitter @maine_labor.
and drafting software and produced a prototype box for MaineHealth to test. Maine MEP then worked with its in-state manufacturing contacts to start production on a version of the design, incorporating MaineHealth’s feedback.

Gorham-based Plas-Tech was the first manufacturer to come online in early April, followed by Thermoformed Plastics of New England, based in Biddeford, and VELUX America in Wells.

The negative pressure version of the box developed out of conversations between Dr. Robert Bowie, UMaine professor of biomedical engineering, and hospital contacts at Northern Light Eastern Maine Medical Center and St. Joseph Hospital, both located in Bangor. The team at AMC built prototypes for those hospitals to test, and refined designs to their specifications. A third negative-pressure prototype was recently delivered to Maine Medical Center in Portland.

“The transport aerosol box is an example of how the community can contribute to keep frontline staff safe and reduce the risk of exposure to COVID-19,” says Lindsey Lucas, nursing director, Maine Medical Center Acute Ventilator Unit. “By providing an extra layer of personal protective equipment while transporting a patient who requires oxygen therapy, we can reduce the risk of exposure to our health care workers. The immediate feedback from staff has been positive, as it provides a sense of safety and security, which goes a long way when we are navigating such an unpredictable course.”

Hospitals can clean and sterilize the boxes for reuse. In-state manufacturing means they can be delivered quickly to area hospitals to meet demand.

“This is an example of what we can do collaboratively as a community,” says Dr. James Jarvis, FAAFP, medical specialist, COVID-19 incident commander, Northern Light Health. “We remain extremely grateful for the innovative efforts by UMaine to help protect our frontline health care workers and will enthusiastically support any assistance that meets all safety standards.”

The University of Maine COVID-19 innovation team includes UMaine faculty, staff and students, representatives from the Maine Department of Economic and Community Development, Maine MEP, MaineHealth, St. Joseph Hospital and Northern Light Health. Other collaborating partners include the Manufacturers Association of Maine and Maine Procurement Technical Assistance Center.

The team based at the state’s public research university is operating as part of a March 22 umbrella agreement with the Maine Emergency Management Agency (MEMA) allowing the University of Maine System to provide goods and services to Maine health care facilities and agencies as coordinated by MEMA.

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**USM**

**Internship Information for Employers**

Interested in building an Internship Program for your organization?

University of Southern Maine’s Career & Employment Hub offers tools and support to help Cultivate Your NEXT GENERATION Workforce.

**Areas of Support from Our Team Include:**

- Program Creation
- Project/Learning Outcomes
- Sharing Best Practices
- Providing Compliance Information

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**USM Career & Employment Hub**

231 Luther Bonney Hall, Portland Campus
85 Bedford St., Portland, ME

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For the most current information, visit www.mainechamber.org
To level the playing field for Maine students, Maine State Chamber’s Educational Foundation invites businesses to donate for school technology

Maine employers have been remarkably resilient and generous in the many ways they have stepped up to help their employees and communities in the face of the global COVID-19 pandemic. We have yet another opportunity for you to consider.

As schools throughout the state wrestle with how to best deliver continuity of learning to their students, a need for technology has arisen in several districts and counties throughout the state. To support today’s learners and tomorrow’s employees, the Maine State Chamber of Commerce is asking its members to participate in a crucial effort to help students engaged in remote learning.

If your company would like to donate to this cause, donations can be sent to the Maine State Chamber Educational Foundation, attn: DOE Connectivity Project, at 128 State Street, Suite 100, Augusta, Maine 04330. Questions can be directed to Megan Diver, Senior Government Relations Specialist for the Maine State Chamber, by emailing mdiver@mainechamber.org. For DOE specifics, please contact Beth Lambert (beth.lambert@maine.gov), Maine DOE’s Coordinator of Secondary Education and Integrated Instruction, or Maine DOE Chief Innovation Officer Page Nichols (page.nichols@maine.gov).

Governor Mills extends state income tax payment deadline to July 15, 2020

Governor Janet Mills and Commissioner of the Department of Administrative and Financial Services Commissioner Kirsten Figueroa announced on March 26 that the State will extend the deadline for Maine income tax payments from April 15, 2020, to July 15, 2020. The change aligns with the Federal government’s recent extension of the Federal tax filing deadline to July 15, 2020.

The State extended the payment deadline of April 15, 2020, to July 15, 2020. This includes any final and estimated Maine income tax payments due by April 15, 2020. Any failure-to-pay penalties and interest will be abated for the period of April 16, 2020, through July 15, 2020.

The extended filing deadline for Maine income tax returns is automatically tied to any federal extension. Therefore, the filing deadline of April 15, 2020, for 2019 Maine income tax returns, is automatically extended to July 15, 2020. This includes Form 1040ME (Maine Individual Income Tax Return), Form 1041ME (Maine Income Tax Return for Estates and Trusts), and Form 1120ME (Maine Corporate Income Tax Return).

Sales tax and payroll payments will continue as normal. For questions about Maine income tax, contact Maine Revenue Services (MRS) at (207) 626-8475 or visit the MRS website at www.maine.gov/revenue.

Maine delegation announces $2 million grant to strengthen Maine’s marine economy

On April 8, U.S. Senators Susan Collins and Angus King, and U.S. Representatives Chellie Pingree and Jared Golden announced that the Economic Development Administration has awarded $2,000,000 to the State of Maine to establish a new three-year project to develop an industry-led roadmap and action plan called Maine’s Marine Living Resource Economy Initiative (www.king.senate.gov/news-room/press-releases/maine-delegation-announces-2-million-grant-to-strengthen-maine's-marine-economy). Overseen by the Maine Technology Institute (MTI) and FocusMaine, the initiative will bring together industry leaders from both commercial fishing and aquaculture industries, including Maine fishermen, marine researchers, scientists, and educators, to develop strategies to match Maine’s marine products with global markets, attract investment, and bolster the industry’s workforces.

“Today’s announcement marks the culmination of more than a year of thoughtful collaboration and planning. This award complements FocusMaine’s strategy to grow good jobs in Maine’s aquaculture industry. This infusion of resources comes at an especially critical time and will strengthen Maine’s competitiveness, support Maine’s sea farmers, and build the skills and talent needed to transform our heritage marine economy into a modern engine for sustainable economic and job growth.”

Continued on Page 19...
The Maine State Chamber of Commerce and the Kennebec Valley Chamber of Commerce invite you to attend our Legislative Strictly Social Virtual Coffee Hour. We invite you to grab a cup of coffee at 9:00 a.m. on Tuesday, April 28, and hear from legislators about current issues.

Normally, our annual series of statewide receptions is an ideal way for you, the Maine business leader, to interact with business associates, new and prospective Maine State Chamber members, and state representatives in a relaxed setting. This year, due to the COVID-19 situation, we will be hosting this event online as a coffee hour. We will have a panel of Maine Legislators open the hour and there will be an opportunity for questions through the Zoom chat feature. Please join us for this presentation. A participation link will be sent to you after you have completed registration. Learn more or register online at www.mainechamber.org.

Thank You To Our Generous Sponsors!

A special thank you to our sponsors from the Legislative Strictly Social, which has now become the Legislative Strictly Social Coffee Hour, due to the need for social distancing during this pandemic. Your continued support is greatly appreciated!

SERIES SPONSORS: Casella Waste Systems, Inc.; Central Maine Power Company; Maine Department of Economic & Community Development; Northeast Delta Dental; VHB

PREMIER SPONSOR: AT&T

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PRESENTING SPONSORS: Altria Client Services LLC; American Chemistry Council; Bank of America; Dead River Company; Emera Maine; Finance Authority of Maine; Hannaford Supermarkets; MaineHealth; Merrill’s Investigations & Security; Mitchell Tardy Jackson Government Affairs; PhRMA; Preti Flaherty, LLP; Spectrum Healthcare Partners; The Sheridan Corporation; Unitil Corp.

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Sponsorship opportunities for this event can be secured by emailing melodyr@mainechamber.org. Questions can be directed to Angela S. Arno, director of programs and events for the Maine State Chamber of Commerce, by emailing aarno@mainechamber.org or calling (207) 623-4568, ext. 104.
Check out the first “Meeting the Challenge” blog...

Remaining Essential During COVID-19 and Beyond

By Todd Mason, President and CEO of the Maine Credit Union League

Maine credit unions are first responders working hard to ensure our members have access to safe, secure, and reliable banking services no matter what. It is a responsibility we take seriously and a role our credit union employees take to heart. Their ingenuity, dedication, and unwavering commitment to our People Helping People philosophy supports our communities and helps our members cope with the financial uncertainty this pandemic has caused.

Credit unions took quick action to help protect members and staff against COVID-19. Branches moved to drive-up and appointment-only services. Greater emphasis was placed on digital banking, ATMs, and other forms of remote access. As a result, credit union members continue to have access to their accounts and the financial services they need while maintaining safe social distancing.

Credit unions also recognized the financial hardship COVID-19 would bear on our economy. We have worked in close collaboration with state and federal policymakers to implement meaningful programs that benefit consumers and small businesses alike. In addition, 100% of Maine’s credit unions are offering their own forms of relief to their members. That assistance can take the form of deferring or lowering payments, offering emergency loans, providing financial guidance, and so much more. We also make much needed contributions to organizations like Good Shepherd Food Bank, Full Plates Full Potential, and local food pantries to address growing food insecurity throughout the state. All of this is delivered with kindness and compassion because that’s what our members and communities need now more than ever before.

Maine people and businesses are resilient and will persevere. We are in this together and we will get through this with the hallmark grit, ingenuity, and compassion that Mainers are known for. Maine credit unions will continue to help and look forward to playing an essential role in our members’ and state’s economic recovery. Simply put, Maine credit unions are here for you.

At a time where Maine’s economy is being impacted in unprecedented ways by Covid-19, this award presents an opportunity to help advance Maine’s economic development plan to sustain and grow the state’s marine economy,” said Heather Johnson, Commissioner of the Maine Department of Economic & Community Development. “This is a great example of the kind of collaboration that is needed to create a resilient, forward looking plan to sustain communities, grow jobs, and preserve our natural assets. There is no doubt in my mind that Maine will continue to stay at the forefront of the marine economy, and this vote of confidence from the EDA will further strengthen our position. I applaud the diligent efforts of all who were involved and thank our federal delegation for their support in ensuring that Maine will be prepared for emerging opportunities in this sector.”

For the most current information, visit www.mainechamber.org
On April 7, the Maine State Chamber, in partnership with Pierce Atwood, hosted a webinar for employers on the latest guidance and information concerning the emergency paid sick leave, expanded family medical leave, and payroll tax credit provisions of the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA) and the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES) Act. More than 170 participants from businesses across Maine attended the virtual event.

Maine State Chamber Executive Vice President Peter Gore moderated the event. Katy Rand, a partner at Pierce Atwood, presented to attendees. With so many variables, exceptions and ambiguity in the FFCRA and CARES Act, understanding the details of this new law is important for every employer.

Rand presented detailed guidance on the family and medical leave expansion in the FFCRA, including qualifications for paid sick leave, eligibility, and the amount of pay. Rand also addressed provisions allowing employers to be reimbursed for paid family and medical leave through a payroll tax credit, and specific guidance for employers on IRS requirements for documentation. Regarding whether employers can require employees to use PTO, Rand indicated this is unclear in the FFCRA and that more guidance is being sought.

Regarding changes to unemployment insurance at both the state and federal levels, Rand noted that eligibility has been expanded, the waiting period has been waived, and emphasized that employers’ experience ratings will not be impacted if employees are laid-off due to the pandemic. Direct reimbursable relief is also built into the CARES Act. Due to increased payments through federal compensation that will go into effect once a state formally enters into an agreement with the federal government, Rand mentioned that

Continued on Page 22...
Maine State Chamber presents Free Wednesday Webinar Series

SERIES SPONSORS:
Bangor Savings Bank, Central Maine Power Company, and Maine Department of Economic and Community Development

Additional webinars will be forthcoming, and sponsorship opportunities are available by emailing melodyr@mainechamber.org. Questions can be directed to Angela S. Arno, director of programs and events for the Maine State Chamber of Commerce, by emailing aarno@mainechamber.org or calling (207) 623-4568, ext. 104.

Register for these webinars online at https://web.mainechamber.org/events.

WE ARE STILL FINALIZING THIS WEBINAR

TOPIC TO BE ANNOUNCED

Wednesday, May 6
Starting at 11:00 a.m.

Register for these webinars online at https://web.mainechamber.org/events.

RECENT STATE AND FEDERAL TAX CHANGES AND HOW THEY AFFECT YOUR BUSINESS

Wednesday, May 13
Starting at 11:00 a.m.

Sponsored by Pierce Atwood and WIPFLi, LLP

This webinar will focus on federal tax changes contained in the CARES Act and changes made at the state level that provide support for businesses during this pandemic. Additional topics also include a look at the ever-changing landscape at the federal level for additional stimulus funds and what those changes might look like.

Register for these webinars online at https://web.mainechamber.org/events.

NAVIGATING THE LEGAL AND FINANCIAL ISSUES DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC: PRESENTED EXCLUSIVELY FOR MAINE’S CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY

Presented on Wednesday, April 15

Listen to the recording here: www.mainechamber.org/webinar01.html

Thanks to our April 15 webinar presenters and sponsors: Rudman & Winchell; TD Bank; and, Albin, Randall and Bennett.

Maine State Chamber hosts webinar aimed at construction sector

The Maine State Chamber held a free webinar for Maine construction companies on April 15 that included a wealth of detailed information, guidance and advice for the industry. In partnership with the Associated General Contractors of Maine and the Maine Aggregate Association, well over 100 participants heard from leading construction industry legal advisors and financial industry representatives who gave a comprehensive overview on navigating legal issues and financial assistance programs during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Rudman Winchell attorneys Josh Tardy, Allison Economy, and Josh Randlett kicked-off the presentation. With construction operations deemed essential during the pandemic, it is crucial that construction companies are aware of legal changes that impact how they continue to do business safely, legally and in compliance with pandemic-related restrictions, keeping in mind that changes are occurring daily, if not hourly.

Examples include changes to unemployment insurance, paid sick leave and family leave laws, and tax credits. Changes to OSHA obligations if an employee contracts COVID-19 at work were discussed, as well as guidance on seasonal workers, staying in touch with furloughed employees, and working with employees and contractors who live out-of-state during current travel quarantine restrictions.

Presenters also shared advice on receiving payment for completed work, work in progress and future work, existing insurance policies, business interruption insurance, filing a lien or a complaint to enforce a lien, and what to do if a customer files for bankruptcy.

David Jean, CPA, CCIFP, CExP, and principal at Albin, Randall & Bennett along with Jay Violette, vice president and senior loan officer at TD Bank presented to webinar participants on financial relief programs available in the CARES Act. Those include Economic Injury Disaster Loans (EIDL) and Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) loans, as well as U.S. Small Business Association (SBA) grants and Finance Authority of Maine (FAME) bridge loan programs. Updates on PPP eligibility, requirements,

Continued on Page 22...
there are circumstances where someone will earn more on unemployment than they may currently working. It is important to note that the U.S. Department of Labor still expects states to investigate and police fraud in those cases where employees may be trying to take advantage of this situation.

Rand also touched on specifics of the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) and loan forgiveness. PPP offers loans of 2.5 times the monthly payroll for employers with fewer than 500 employees. For the loans to be forgiven, employers are required to spend at least 75% on payroll costs. The employee tax credit is a different option for businesses who do not borrow under PPP.

If you missed this live webinar, please visit www.mainechamber.org/covid-19-pa-webinar-20200407.html to listen to the recording. Information about additional webinars offered by the Maine State Chamber plans on important business issues surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic can be found on page 21.

Governor Mills issues Executive Order moving Primary election to July 14

On Friday, April 10, as Maine implements strategies to mitigate the spread of COVID-19, Governor Janet Mills signed an Executive Order moving Maine’s primary election from Tuesday, June 9, 2020 to Tuesday, July 14, 2020. The Order, which is effective immediately, also allows applications for absentee ballots to be made in writing or in person, without specifying a reason, up to and including the day of the election. It also extends the deadline for qualifying contributions under the Maine Clean Election Act to May 19, 2020.

The delay in the primary election will provide additional time for Maine people to request absentee ballots in order to minimize in-person interaction at the polls and will allow the Secretary of State’s Office additional time to develop guidelines to help municipalities conduct in-person voting in as safe a manner as possible.

In addition to rescheduling Maine’s primary election, the Executive Order allows applications for absentee ballots may be made in writing or in person up to and including the day of the election in order to allow voters to obtain an absentee ballot and return it prior to the closure of the polls on July 14, 2020. Absentee ballots issued more than three months before June 9, 2020 remain valid for use in the July 14, 2020 election.

The Order also extends the Maine Clean Election Act submission deadline for qualifying contributions to 5:00 p.m. on May 19, 2020 instead of April 21, 2020. To become eligible for Clean Elections funding, candidates must collect a minimum number of checks or money orders of $5. Governor Mills’ Stay Healthy at Home Order effectively prevents candidates for public office from traveling door to door to collect such contributions. Candidates can and should obtain these contributions online.
The Portland Regional Chamber and its initial partners - the Maine Department of Economic & Community Development, the Maine State Chamber of Commerce, and the Retail Association of Maine - set out to create a website containing an ever-growing library of ideas, tools, and resources for Mainers to come together during this pandemic, to lift each other up, to pay it forward for Maine.

In just three weeks since its launch - growing, and Pay It Forward Maine has grown to include 75 community partners (www.portlandregion.com/payitforward-maine.html#partners), been featured on multiple media outlets and websites (www.portlandregion.com/pifm-press) - including Governor Mills’ “Maine Helps” resource page (www.maine.gov/governor/mills/covid-19/mainehelps) - and has been shared via hundreds of inspirational social posts showing what we all know to be true - we are stronger together!

There is no doubt that the road ahead is long, but we plan on continuing to add useful materials to the Pay It Forward Maine website, www.portlandregion.com/payitforward-maine.html, for as long as it takes to get us all back on our feet again. Because that’s what Mainers do! If your business has continued to serve the community despite the challenges, let us know!

Please also reach out to the Portland Regional Chamber by emailing cmockler@portlandregion.com to not only share how Pay It Forward Maine has positively affected your business but with any ideas or suggestions you have - this is a collaborative movement and your input allows us to grow in ways that positively benefit the community.

For the most current information, visit www.mainechamber.org
Legislative Strictly Social Virtual Coffee Hour

Tuesday, April 28
Beginning at 9:00 a.m.

The Maine State Chamber of Commerce and the Kennebec Valley Chamber of Commerce invite you to attend our Legislative Strictly Social Virtual Coffee Hour. We invite you to grab a cup of coffee at 9:00 a.m. on Tuesday, April 28, and hear from legislators about current issues.

Normally, our annual series of statewide receptions is an ideal way for you, the Maine business leader, to interact with business associates, new and prospective Maine State Chamber members, and state representatives in a relaxed setting. This year, due to the COVID-19 situation, we will be hosting this event online as a coffee hour. We will have a panel of Maine Legislators open the hour and there will be an opportunity for questions through the Zoom chat feature. Please join us for this presentation. A participation link will be sent to you after you have completed registration.

LEARN MORE OR REGISTER ONLINE TODAY AT WWW.MAINECHAMBER.ORG.

Sponsorship opportunities for this event can be secured by emailing melodyr@mainechamber.org. Questions can be directed to Angela S. Arno, director of programs and events for the Maine State Chamber of Commerce, by emailing aarno@mainechamber.org or calling (207) 623-4568, ext. 104.