COVID-19: Summary of Rhode Island Executive Orders to Date

Monday, March 23, 2020

To date, Rhode Island’s Governor Gina Raimondo has issued five Executive Orders in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. These orders address some of the challenges facing businesses, local governments, and the provision of health care. The following is a summary of the Executive Orders highlighting the key provisions and impact of each.

Executive Order 20-06 – March 18, 2020 - Telemedicine

By this Executive Order, Governor Raimondo suspended the patient location requirements for telemedicine and the prohibition against audio-only video conferencing for care. The Order also directed insurance carriers to establish reasonable requirements for the coverage of telemedicine services. The Office of the Health Insurance Commission will issue guidelines on the implementation of this order.

Executive Order 20-05 – Issued March 16, 2020 - Open Meetings and APRA

This Executive Order addressed problems encountered by municipal governments, agencies, and other public bodies related to the requirements of the Open Meetings Act and the Access to Public Records Act to ensure that meetings can continue and
timelines for access to public records are relaxed.

Open Meetings: The Rhode Island Open Meetings Act (Rhode Island General Laws § 42-46-5(b)) generally prohibits public bodies from convening by telephone or other electronic means. This Executive Order relieved public bodies from these prohibitions provided that the public body is meeting for an “essential purpose” and ensures public access to the meeting of the public body for members of the public through adequate, alternative means. An “essential purpose” is that which is necessary for continued government operations or to ensure compliance with statutory or regulatory deadlines. A public body that for reasons of economic hardship is unable to provide alternative means of public access in real time may instead post a full and complete transcript on its website.

Public Records: The Access to Public Records Act (Rhode Island General Laws §§38-2-3 and 38-2-7) requires agencies and public bodies to respond to requests for public records by members of the public within certain timeframes. This Executive Order suspended these timeframes for all pending and new public records requests and allowed for an additional period of 20 business days to respond provided that the agency or public body notifies the requestor in writing before the regular statutory deadline.

Executive Order 20-04 – Issued March 16, 2020 – Limiting Gatherings and Restaurant Service

Recognizing that Rhode Island had experienced community transmission of the virus for the first time, Governor Raimondo ordered that gatherings of 25 people or more are prohibited in Rhode Island. She also prohibited on-site consumption of food or drink at retail establishments.

Executive Order 20-03 – Issued March 13, 2020 – Quarantine Requirement

In order to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 from outside of Rhode Island, the governor ordered persons arriving in Rhode Island from outside the 50 states and the District of Columbia to immediately quarantine for 14 days.

Executive Order 20-02 – Issued March 9, 2020 – State of Emergency Declared

In this first Executive Order related to the pandemic, the governor declared a state of emergency for Rhode Island. She also directed the Rhode Island Emergency Management Agency (RIEMA) to establish a state emergency operations center and to activate all other necessary state emergency response plans. The Rhode Island National Guard is to assist in the response if necessary. The Order also directed that no person, firm, or corporation “shall increase the price of personal protective equipment, including masks and gloves, hand sanitizer, soap, bleach or other household disinfectant” that are sold at retail. Finally, any price gouging and related activities will be deemed unfair trade practices under existing law.