Tuesday, March 24, 2020

Earlier this month, Maine Governor Janet Mills announced that she had taken the following initial steps to respond to the growing threat from COVID-19:

- Convened a Coronavirus Response Team led by Maine CDC Director Dr. Nirav Shah.
- Issued a Proclamation of Insurance Emergency directing the Superintendent of Insurance to exercise his statutory authority to “make, amend, or rescind such rules and regulations governing the business of health insurance carriers as the Superintendent deems expedient in order to adopt and maintain sound methods of protecting the interests of such insurers, beneficiaries and the public.”
  - Maine Bureau of Insurance Superintendent Eric Cioppa subsequently issued Emergency Bulletin 442 directing the governor's proclamation to all insurers.
- Directed the Maine Department of Health and Human Services to issue emergency rules to ensure MaineCare does not charge copays for office visits and prescription drugs needed for COVID-19 diagnosis and treatment, and to allow for a prescription refill of up to 90 days.

- Distributed personal protective equipment to first responders and health care
professionals across Maine.

- Temporarily suspended non-essential, out-of-state travel for all state employees.

- Applied for and received a waiver from the U.S. Department of Agriculture to allow schools the ability to provide meals offsite to students.

- Requested and received approval from the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) for Maine small business owners to begin applying for economic support loans to in order to help them overcome any temporary loss of revenue.

On Sunday, March 15, 2020, Governor Mills signed a Proclamation of State of Civil Emergency that allows her to deploy all available state resources to protect the health and safety of Maine residents and to take every action she deems reasonably necessary to “respond to and protect against the spread and impacts of COVID-19 in Maine.” In addition, the proclamation eased Maine’s access to federal aid to boost response efforts. Governor Mills also made the following recommendations:

- Ending classroom instruction in all public schools.

- Postponing all non-urgent medical procedures, elective surgeries, and appointments at hospitals and health care providers across the state until further notice.

- Until further notice, restricting visitors and all non-essential health care personnel to long-term care facilities except for certain compassionate care situations such as end of life.

On Wednesday, March 18, 2020, Governor Mills issued an Executive Order that:

- Mandated all restaurants and bars statewide closed to dine-in customers effective March 18, 2020 at 6:00 p.m. for a period of 14 days until midnight, March 31, 2020.
  
  - Takeout, delivery, and drive-through may continue.
  
  - Prohibited gatherings of more than 10 people statewide.
  
  - Strongly recommended non-essential public-facing businesses, such as gyms, hair salons, theatres, casinos, shopping malls, to close their doors for the next two weeks to minimize public gatherings.

Governor Mills also issued a Proclamation Declaring Abnormal Market Disruption on Tuesday, March 17, 2020, that prohibits a person from selling or offering certain necessities at unconscionable prices. This includes paper products, cleaning supplies, hand sanitizer, personal hygiene products, medicine and medical supplies, food, and water. The proclamation applies to both retail and wholesale sales, and orders that these items not be sold to consumers at more than 15 percent the price these goods and services were sold immediately prior to the disruption.

Maine Legislature
The Maine Legislature adjourned on Tuesday, March 17, 2020, one month ahead of schedule. Before adjourning, the Maine Legislature enacted the following emergency measures to address COVID-19:

- **Public Law 2019, Chapter 618** transfers up to $11 million to the COVID-19 Response Fund established by the state controller to fund needs associated with COVID-19.

- **Public Law 2019, Chapter 617**, a sweeping omnibus bill, provides for the following:
  - Allows the governor, in consultation with the commissioner of education, to waive the compulsory school attendance requirements.
  - Expands unemployment benefits to those impacted by closures or quarantine.
  - Removes the weeklong waiting period for unemployment benefits.
  - Gives Governor Mills the ability to prohibit water and electric utilities from terminating services due to unpaid bills.
  - Gives Governor Mills control over the June primary elections if necessary.
  - **Public Law 2019, Chapter 616**, a modified supplemental budget, includes an additional $1 million for the Maine CDC.
  - All legislation not considered prior to adjournment was carried over to a special session. However, no date has been set for the Maine Legislature to reconvene for a special session.

**State Agency Action**

**Court Cancellations and Postponements**

On March 18, 2020, the Maine Supreme Judicial Courthouse closed through May 1, 2020, and with the exception of certain events, all in-person court events for family, civil and criminal dockets are postponed.

- **Emergency Order and Notice**

**Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) Programs**

Maine DEP’s programs have announced the following changes due to COVID-19:

- **Bureau of Land Resources**
  - Department staff continue to process license applications while working remotely, and applications continue to be received by mail and hand delivery. The DEP expects it will accept electronic submission of applications in the near future.
Bureau of Remediation and Waste Management

- All online services are still available, while staff continues to provide services via telephone and email.

- On Wednesday, March 18, 2020, the DEP announced that it will temporarily refrain from enforcement activity involving Maine retailers and redemption centers for failing to accept beverage containers for redemption.

Bureau of Motor Vehicle Offices Closed Until Further Notice

On Tuesday, March 17, 2020, Secretary of State Matthew Dunlap closed all Bureau of Motor Vehicle (BMV) offices until further notice. Secretary Dunlap has also suspended all BMV Mobile Unit visits. However, many BMV transactions can still be processed online here.

Maine Revenue Service Announces Public Access Limited to Only Accepting Tax Payments

On Wednesday, March 18, 2020, Maine Revenue Services (MRS) announced that it will be limiting public access to MRS facilities, effective Thursday, March 19, 2020. The Augusta facility will be open only for purposes of accepting tax payments, while the Portland facility is closed entirely.

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