

Legislature back in session, addressing COVID-19

By Speaker of the House Philip Gunn

Since my last update to you in March, it would not be a stretch to say that we are now living in a different world today. Over the past few months, many of you may have followed my daily updates on social media and at philipgunn.org. I plan to continue these updates, although not on a daily basis, as important information becomes available on the current status of COVID-19 efforts in Mississippi and how it affects you.



Small Business Relief

As you may know, Mississippi received \$1.25 billion from the federal government for coronavirus relief, known as the CARES Act Funds. In May, the Mississippi Legislature reconvened after the statewide shutdown to begin appropriating these funds. Our first priority was figuring out a way to help those businesses affected by the shutdown and how to

provide the relief as quickly as possible.

On May 13, the House passed legislation appropriating \$300 million in relief funds for Mississippi small businesses via two tracks, a direct payment track and an application-based track. Its purpose is to provide economic support to eligible Mississippi businesses for costs incurred in connection with COVID-19, including business interruption caused by forced closures or restricted operations resulting from voluntary closures instituted to promote social distancing measures, decreased customer demand,

cleaning or disinfection, and provision of personal protective equipment.

The direct payment track was allocated \$60 million. The Mississippi

COVID-19 Relief Payment provides \$2,000 in direct payments to certain eligible taxpayers, such as restaurant operators, whose small businesses have 50 or fewer employees and were shut down due to COVID-19.

No application is needed to receive the \$2,000 payments, which will be automatically sent by the Mississippi Department of Revenue (DOR) to eligible taxpayers. DOR has published guidelines on its website, available here: <https://www.dor.ms.gov/Business/Documents/MS%20COVID19%20Business%20Relief%20Payments.pdf>. The guidelines provide further details about payment eligibility. As of June 1, over \$18 million in checks have already been sent out by DOR.

The grant application process allocation was \$240 million for the

provision of additional compensation, whereby eligible businesses not wishing to itemize their eligible expenses may receive, subject to approval, a base payment of \$1,500 plus \$500 per full-time equivalent employee as a reasonable estimate of costs incurred.

The Mississippi Development Authority (MDA) began accepting applications on June 11 for the Back to Business grant program created by the Mississippi Legislature. Eligible taxpayers whose small businesses experienced COVID-related losses and have 50 or fewer full time equivalent employees can apply for relief with MDA. More info, as well as an application, can be found here: <https://www.backtobusinessms.org/>.

House Concurrent Resolution and CARES Act Funds

This past week, the Legislature passed HCR 69 to extend the 2020 legislative session in order to be able to come back to address any new federal funding or changes in the CARES Act guidelines. We are continuing to analyze and assess where the remainder of the CARES Act funds can be best used for Mississippi's recovery and relief.



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