



Papio-Missouri River Natural Resource District Legislative Update

Thursday, April 9, 2020

Due to the recent circumstances due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we are submitting a written update in place of our in-person update that was scheduled to happen on or near the 40th day of our 60-day legislative session. Included in our update is an outline of the emergency funding package passed on March 25 to help Nebraska combat coronavirus. The package was passed in a quick legislative manner; however, the process took 3 days from our legislative schedule.

Speaker Jim Scheer made a few announcements before the Legislature adjourned on March 25, stating he does not know when lawmakers will come back and finish the session. Scheer said he knows they will not meet within two weeks before the primary election on May 12, and that when senators return, they will prioritize the budget bills and claims bill. Scheer also asked senators to help him make decisions on the priority of other bills and to not hang other bills onto those priority bills at that time. Lastly, he announced that when senators come back, it will be for three weeks—likely meeting Monday through Saturday.

We are anticipating a busy final 17 days of the Legislature, with many important issues left to debate like property taxes and business incentives. Our team is anticipating a reset in many of these issues as the future budget forecast will likely change due to the pandemic, forcing senators to rethink current proposed legislation.

As some of you may know, we provide daily updates on current legislative and state news, as well as summaries from Gov. Ricketts' daily press briefings. We hope these have been helpful as you navigate the current uncharted territory the COVID-19 pandemic has brought upon us. If you have not been receiving the updates and would like to receive them, please contact McCartney Martin at mmartin@catalystnebraska.com or 402- 261-5293 and she will gladly add you to the email list.

As always please feel free to call, email, or text us directly with any questions, concerns, or comments you may have regarding the current legislative session. We will do our best to get you the answers you need as we navigate the weeks ahead.

Best regards,

Tim Gay Kaitlin Reece

Status of the Nebraska Legislature

On March 16, Speaker Jim Scheer announced that the Nebraska Legislature would be postponed indefinitely due to the coronavirus pandemic. Nebraska lawmakers reconvened on March 23-25 to pass emergency funding to address COVID-19. The appropriation included \$25 million more than Gov. Ricketts' earlier request of \$58.6 million, as lawmakers decided to include the extra \$25 million as "just in case" funds. The package passed on Final Reading unanimously on a 45-0 vote, with 4 members absent. Governor Ricketts signed the bill shortly after it passed on March 25, immediately enacting it into law. **Included in the \$83,619,600 appropriation:**

- **DHHS Public Health Local Response Efforts - \$38,156,700**

This will provide additional funding for Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and other supplies to local jurisdictions, and support to local health departments for staffing, PPE, call centers, information technology needs including additional laptops/servers, and other essential expenditures.

- **DHHS Staffing - \$4,004,000**

Due to the size of the response and need to cover response needs, additional staffing expenditures are needed to cover costs for overtime and additional staff. The areas that need immediate surge and sustained staffing are epidemiology, support services (administrative, communications, and data entry), emergency preparedness, and contracts for staffing in epidemiology to meet the increased demands of the Division of Public Health.

- **Surge Staffing for Veterans Hospitals & DHHS Care Facilities - \$13,000,000**

Additional staffing expenditures are needed to cover costs for overtime and additional staff to maintain facility healthcare coverage needs. The areas that need immediate surge and sustained staffing at veterans' homes and DHHS care facilities including nursing, administrative, and other health care professionals.

- **UNMC COVID-19 Lab Testing - \$515,000**

This would augment the cost of the reagents, laboratory personnel, and equipment to conduct the COVID-19 lab testing for the state. This would include funds to purchase a combined sample extraction/detection robot for efficient and accurate serial processing of specimens, reducing staffing needs.

- **Lab Equipment, Software Programming and Personnel - \$2,500,000**

The equipment includes higher throughput automated equipment for microbiology and molecular diagnostics. The increased testing throughput will be implemented on a fast track within the next 2-4 weeks. All funds would be dedicated to support statewide needs.

- **UV Light Boxes - \$100,000**

As PPE become more difficult to obtain through supply chains, we anticipate the need to use UV light boxes to provide tertiary cleaning of N95 respirators for reuse by healthcare workers. Initially, one unit and one light meter (measures device effectiveness), eventually 100 units/10 meters for distribution to hub hospitals.

- **Knowledge Center - \$343,900**

This system is used by coalitions and all stakeholders across the state to establish an interoperable platform for communication, bed tracking, resource sharing, and an overall interoperable platform. Stakeholders include PH, Healthcare, EMS, and Emergency Management for varying counties as well as State entities.