Federal Legislation

Emergency COVID-19 Spending Package
On Friday, March 6, President Trump signed an emergency spending package into law, providing approximately $8 billion in funding to fight COVID-19. The legislation includes funding for immediate priorities, including:

- Medicare telemedicine services for seniors;
- Coronavirus vaccine development and therapeutics;
- Increased funding for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to address state and local preparedness;
- Medical supplies;
- Funding for state and local agencies for COVID-19 testing, tracking, and mitigation; and
- Low-interest loans for small businesses affected by COVID-19 mitigation efforts.

Families First Coronavirus Response Act
On Wednesday, March 18, President Trump signed the Families First Coronavirus Response Act into law. This legislation provides:

- **Free COVID-19 testing** to be covered by either private health insurance or government programs. This includes a special waiver for state children’s health insurance programs, such as Dr. Dynasaur, to temporarily cover diagnostic tests. Families First also provides funding for Medicaid, the Department of Veteran’s Affairs, Indian Health Services, and the National Disaster Medical System to help cover testing-related expenses.

- **Temporary federal emergency paid leave program** to provide paid leave for employees of certain public and private employers with fewer than 500 employees.
  o Employees of covered employers are eligible for:
    - Up to two weeks of expanded family and medical leave at an employee’s regular rate of pay if an employee is unable to work because they are quarantined (based on federal, state, or local government order, or the advice of a health care provider), and/or experiencing COVID-19 symptoms and seeking a medical diagnosis.
    - Up to two weeks of expanded family and medical leave at two-thirds of an employee’s regular rate of pay if the employee is unable to work because:
      - They are caring for someone who is quarantined, and/or
      - They are caring for a child (under 18 years of age) because school or child care is closed or unavailable for reasons related to COVID-19, and/or
      - The employee is experiencing a substantially similar condition.
    - Up to 10 additional weeks of expanded family and medical leave at two-thirds of an employee’s regular rate of pay if an employee has been employed for at least 30 calendar days and if the employee is unable to work due to a need to care for a child (under 18 years of age) whose school or child care program is closed or unavailable for reasons related to COVID-19.
  o Employers with fewer than 50 employees may request an exemption from the requirement to provide leave due to school or child care closings.
Employers cannot require employees to find a replacement worker for themselves or require an employee to use other paid time off if they need leave for one of the reasons noted above.

Employers will receive tax credits to offset the cost of providing paid leave.

For those who are self-employed, there will be a tax credit equivalent to the sick leave available for employees of qualifying employers.

- **Unemployment Aid**
  - The legislation provides almost $1 billion in grants to help states provide increased unemployment insurance.

- **Nutrition Assistance**
  - The legislation allocates nearly $1 billion to provide food insecure individuals with meals, half of which will go to WIC (Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children).
  - Households with children may be eligible for food assistance if a child’s school has been closed for at least 5 consecutive days because of COVID-19.
  - The legislation also expands eligibility for SNAP (known in Vermont as Three Squares) and suspends the program’s work requirements.

**Vermont Legislation**

**H. 742 - An Act Relating to Grants for Emergency Medical Personnel Training.** This legislation was passed by the Vermont House of Representatives and is currently being considered by the Senate Committee on Health & Welfare. The current version of the bill includes an important provision that removes a cap that currently limits the Child Development Division’s ability to spend Child Care Financial Assistance Program funds on emergency child care. The removal of this cap will allow the Child Development Division to continue payments to child care programs during the closure period.

**H. 681 – An Act Relating to employer registration for unemployment insurance and amendments to the unemployment laws to address the COVID-19 outbreak.** This bill was passed by the Vermont House and is currently before the Vermont Senate. The legislation creates special provisions to expand eligibility for unemployment assistance in response to COVID-19.