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Governor Hogan Institutes Budget and Hiring Freeze Across State Government, Takes Action to Bolster Unemployment Claims Process

Statewide Strike Teams Expanded to Include Group Homes for Medically Fragile Children and Assisted Living Facilities
Launches 'COVIDConnect' Registry for Recovered Coronavirus Patients
Will Deploy New Decontamination Site for PPE at BWI Airport
Ratifies State Board of Elections' Decisions Regarding June 2 Primary Election

ANNAPOLIS, MD—Governor Larry Hogan today announced that the state is instituting a budget and hiring freeze amid estimates that Maryland is facing a projected $2.8 billion shortfall due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The governor also announced that he has directed the Maryland Department of Labor to take steps to bolster the state's unemployment insurance process to handle an unprecedented surge in claims.

"The spread of this deadly virus is wreaking havoc on our national and state economies, on small businesses, and the people of our state," said Governor Hogan. "In addition to defeating this invisible enemy and saving thousands of lives, there is nothing more important to me than getting our economy and our people back on their feet."

(Watch)

To reassure Maryland children of all ages ahead of the holiday weekend, the governor announced that he has issued an official proclamation deeming the Easter Bunny an

way we celebrate this weekend will be very different, but that in no way should diminish the promise of Easter, which celebrates a resurrection after a period of suffering and sacrifice. Easter really is a day of hope, which is something all of us desperately need right now. So this weekend, I ask all Marylanders regardless of your faith to reflect on that spirit of hope and to carry it forward in the difficult days and weeks ahead."

Below is a comprehensive list of today's announcements and actions:

BUDGET ACTIONS. After Comptroller Peter Franchot announced a potential $2.8 billion shortfall in the coming months, Governor Hogan outlined a series of budget actions:

- **Budget freeze.** Effective immediately, all agencies must stop discretionary purchases of items or services not related to addressing the COVID-19 pandemic or necessary to support core agency functions.
- **Hiring freeze.** Effective Monday, April 13, all vacant positions in the executive branch of state government will be frozen with the exception of those currently subject to COVID-19 response pay.
- **Budget restrictions.** The Office of Budget Analysis will be sending state agency budget reduction targets for FY 2021 within the next two to three weeks.

The governor also announced that it is unlikely any bills that require increased spending will be signed into law. In addition, the state will be tapping into and spending much, perhaps even all, of the state's Rainy Day Fund.

UNEMPLOYMENT CLAIMS PROCESS. Governor Hogan directed the Maryland Department of Labor to take action to bolster the unemployment insurance process to handle the unprecedented surge in claims. While over 94 percent of claims are currently processed online, aggressive steps are being taken to improve service for those who attempt to file by phone.

- The Maryland Department of Labor is in the process of more than doubling staffing at claims center across the state, and will expand call center hours to Saturdays.
- Starting next Friday, everyone eligible for benefits ending the week of April 4 will begin receiving an additional $600 per week as part of the Federal Pandemic Unemployment Compensation program on top of current regular benefits. Marylanders will begin to see the increase in their next regularly scheduled payment.
- The Maryland Department of Labor is also partnering with a vendor to expedite and streamline the implementation of additional programs under the CARES Act:
    - Pandemic Unemployment Assistance Program or PUA, which will expand eligibility to those who are self-employed, independent contractors, gig workers, those who have insufficient work history, and more. These individuals can visit mdunemployment.com and enter their email address to be notified directly as soon as this program is available.
    - Pandemic Emergency Unemployment Compensation, which will allow Marylanders currently receiving benefits, as well as newly approved claimants, an additional 13 weeks of unemployment insurance benefits.

REGISTRY FOR RECOVERED PATIENTS. Governor Hogan announced the launch of COVIDConnect, a new registry for Marylanders who have recovered from COVID-19. This registry will serve as a community platform to share experiences and lend support to others who are coping with the recovery process. COVIDConnect will also provide opportunities for these recovered patients to learn about potential research or clinical studies that may contribute to scientific progress in the treatment of COVID-19 through vaccine testing or medication trials. To become part of this new registry, recovered coronavirus patients can visit health.maryland.gov/covidconnect.

EXPANSION OF STRIKE TEAMS. Governor Hogan announced that the state has expanded its strike teams for nursing home facilities to include assisted living facilities and group homes for medically fragile children.

LARGE-SCALE TESTING INITIATIVE. Governor Hogan announced that the state is investing $2.5 million in a joint partnership with the University of Maryland School of Medicine to provide the technology to launch a large-scale COVID-19 testing initiative. Read the University of Maryland School of Medicine's release.

NEW DECONTAMINATION SITE FOR PPE. The Maryland Department of Transportation, in coordination with FEMA, is setting up a new site at BWI Marshall Airport to decontaminate

JUNE 2 PRIMARY. Governor Hogan executed a proclamation to ratify the State Board of Elections' comprehensive plan to hold the June 2 primary by mail. While the board's plan requires select polling places for those unable to vote by mail, the governor urged all Marylanders who can vote by mail to cast their ballot by mail. Read the governor's proclamation.

REMOTE WITNESSING. Governor Hogan enacted an emergency order today to allow wills, powers of attorney, and advance directives to be witnessed remotely, i.e. by video conference. Currently, the law requires witnesses to be physically present when these documents are signed. Read the governor's order.

All of Governor Hogan's emergency orders and proclamations are available here. For COVID-19 resources, including case counts and clinician guidance, visit coronavirus.maryland.gov.

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