



Governor Pritzker Announces \$275 Million Provided to Hard Hit Businesses Across Illinois

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SPRINGFIELD—Governor JB Pritzker and the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO) today announced more than \$275 million in nearly 9,000 emergency assistance grants have been made to small businesses in over 600 cities and towns statewide through the Business Interruption Grants (BIG) program. Through this historic program – the largest of its kind in the nation - grants have been made available to a wide range of small businesses– with a focus on the industries and communities hardest hit by the COVID-19 crisis, and with the majority of funding going to smaller and minority-owned businesses.

Today’s announcement marks the conclusion of the BIG program, which was created by Governor Pritzker and the General Assembly to assist Illinois’ hardest hit businesses with making ends meet during the pandemic. A full list of awards made can be found on [DCEO’s website](#).

“Small businesses are the backbone of their local communities, providing essential goods and services to Illinois residents across the state. Due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, too many of those businesses are facing tough choices about the future, which is why my administration worked quickly to launch the historic BIG program to provide the relief business owners need,” said Governor JB Pritzker. “Through BIG, the state was able to provide nearly 9,000 grants to small businesses in every corner of the state, with nearly half of all grants going to businesses in industries and communities hardest hit by COVID-19. Over \$275 million in funding has been dispersed, allowing businesses to make payroll, purchase PPE, and cover other necessary operational costs. While the BIG program has now concluded, my administration continues to provide other relief programming for Illinois businesses and families impacted by COVID-19.”

Using an equity framework created by the Pritzker administration and the General Assembly, the BIG program sought to ensure that the hardest hit businesses and communities would be prioritized for small business grants provided using federal CARES Act dollars. As a result, nearly half, or over 4,200 awards, were made to businesses located in disproportionately impacted areas (DIAs); more than 80 percent, or over 7,300 awards, were made to businesses with \$1 million or less in annual revenues; and 40 percent, or over 3,600 awards, were made to minority-owned businesses statewide. Additionally, \$105 million or 3,100 awards were provided to downstate communities.

“Through the historic BIG program, we are proud to have helped thousands of deserving businesses with assistance that will help them continue to make payroll, afford operational costs, and make ends meet during these unprecedented times,” said DCEO Director Erin Guthrie. “With equity a cornerstone of Governor Pritzker’s response to COVID-19, our BIG grantees represent the hardest hit industries, the hardest hit communities, and among the smallest and most vulnerable businesses affected by the pandemic. We thank our community and grant partners for their tireless work over the past several months, and we stand committed to assisting more small businesses impacted in the months ahead.”

The hardest hit industry sectors are among the largest beneficiaries of this program – including restaurants and taverns; gyms and fitness centers; museums; performing arts venues, event venues, concert venues; and indoor recreation. Businesses located in downstate communities were also prioritized for funding. Nearly half of all funds went to restaurants and taverns, with 3,747 grants totaling more than \$133 million dollars. More than 2,700 grants were made to other heavily impacted industries.

“Illinois’ restaurant industry has been devastated by COVID-19, necessitating continued relief at the local, state and federal levels,” said Sam Toia, President and CEO, Illinois Restaurant Association. “Every grant, every program, stands to make a difference. Financial support - now and in the future - remains critical to the industry’s long-term chances for survival.”

BIG grants average \$30,000 in size. Grants were tailored in amounts ranging from \$5,000-\$150,000, according to the amount of loss incurred. The funds may be used toward reimbursing losses due to COVID and operational expenses, including PPE, rent and utilities, payroll, and more. To receive BIG grants, businesses were required to demonstrate they experienced losses due to COVID-19, and that annual revenues in 2019 did not exceed \$20 million.

“If it weren't for the BIG award, COVID-19 would have done us in for sure,” said Linda Sandoval, co-owner of Louie’s Pub in Wicker Park. “With no contingency plan, we would have been forced to sell our established 30-year-old business. Now, we are looking ahead, using our award to add a kitchen at the bar, as well as pay rent, taxes and other expenses that will allow us to reopen this spring when it is safe to do so.”

To administer this unprecedented program quickly and efficiently, DCEO partnered with Accion Serving Illinois and Indiana and the Women’s Business Development Center (WBDC) to launch a streamlined online application process to respond to the urgent demands facing businesses. Thousands of applications were reviewed each week – and more than 50,000 were reviewed in total before the program closed. Given the extended nature of the crisis, DCEO maintained a rolling application to ensure that small businesses in every part of the state had ample opportunity to apply and receive grant funding, with many businesses awarded funds in the final weeks of 2020.

“Governor Pritzker and his team helped thousands of small business owners receive much-needed relief,” said Brad McConnell, CEO of Accion Serving Illinois and Indiana. “I’m grateful to our team who worked night and day to quickly and thoroughly review tens of thousands of applications. But we know this isn’t nearly enough. We look forward to continued partnership with the State to meet the needs of small business owners who still need our help.”

To help small, minority-owned and hard to reach businesses gain access to the program, DCEO partnered with a dozen community organizations to conduct outreach and technical assistance for businesses seeking funding. Using a “community navigator model,” DCEO worked with lead partners including the Chicago Urban League, the Resurrection Project, IBIC and the Greater Auburn Gresham Development Corporation to connect with over 29,000 individual businesses in the fall and winter months of the program.

“This Program provided much needed operating support to small and micro businesses, particularly in heavily impacted industries and disproportionately impacted areas, to help survive the economic devastation caused by the pandemic,” said Emilia DiMenco, President and Chief Executive Officer, WBDC. “There are really no words to describe the relief the business owners expressed when they were notified of the State’s support. While the demand was far greater than the funding supply, many businesses, which would have otherwise shuttered, will have a chance to survive the pandemic.

“I’m very happy this program was able to serve so many minority-owned small businesses,” said Senate Majority Leader Kimberly A. Lightford (D-Maywood). “This pandemic has been hard on our Black and Brown communities on so many levels, and I know these BIG grants have helped struggling businesses keep their doors open.”

"Thank you to the Pritzker administration for managing the Business Interruption Grant (BIG) program with such efficiency and for leading this effort that has saved so many livelihoods across Illinois," said State Rep. Carol Ammons (D-Urbana). "For months, the national PPP program failed to ensure that small businesses would get the assistance they needed. And because of that failure, the General Assembly made it our number one priority to ensure that we could provide hard working people with financial bridges. For many of the businesses in the 103rd district, this grant money has not only assisted them with overhead costs, payroll and bills during the crisis - but it will allow them to stay open long term."

Community outreach efforts complemented efforts by DCEO’s own statewide network of 42 Small Business Development Centers (SBDCs), regional economic development liaisons and businesses development directors in the Office of Minority Economic Empowerment who partnered with community leaders, chambers, and legislators to conduct over 200 webinars, 1:1 Technical assistance, and calls reaching over 15,000 businesses throughout the course of the program.

"The pandemic has devastated small businesses across Illinois, but especially Downstate," said Sen. Dave Koehler, (D-Peoria). "I am thrilled that the BIG program invested over \$100 million in Downstate at a time when our small business community needed it most."

"Restaurants, bars, and independent retail are the lifeblood of our communities, but also the most vulnerable," said Sen. Heather Steans, (D-Chicago). "Over half of the money from BIG went to these businesses, and I am grateful to Gov. Pritzker and DCEO for maximizing our federal CARES Act funding to serve businesses who would otherwise be at risk for closure."

"Black-owned businesses didn't have it easy before a pandemic devastated our economy," said Rep. Nicholas K. Smith (D-Chicago). "That's why I'm grateful to Gov. Pritzker for implementing an equity-centric program, emphasizing the need for outreach to businesses that don't have every resource at their disposal. I'm proud to say that the BIG program invested \$1.1 million for Black-owned businesses in my district and 40% of all funds to minority-owned businesses statewide.”

"These grants will go a long way in helping small businesses keep employees on the payroll, which makes all the difference as families try to stay afloat during this pandemic," said Rep. Lakesia Collins, (D-Chicago). "I am grateful to the Pritzker Administration for prioritizing businesses in Disproportionately Impacted Areas, where it is needed most."

"The money being provided to businesses through BIG is a lifeline to our communities and working families," said Sen. Omar Aquino, (D-Chicago). "I'm proud that the State of Illinois is leading in providing help to those who need it most, in every neighborhood and corner of our state."

"When COVID-19 slowed down business, we could not pay our bills," said Lisa Thompson, owner of non-profit, Blue Sky Bakery & Cafe in Chicago. "With the Illinois Business Interruption Grant (BIG) we can rebuild our staff this spring and continue to pay bills."

"The Business Interruption Grant (BIG) Program has helped us stay afloat and our staff employed here at Goose Island Shrimp House," said Tanya Cobb, owner of Goose Island Shrimp House in Chicago. "We have been truly blessed to continue to serve our customers."

Additionally, the BIG program has allowed DCEO to provide loan forgiveness totaling \$7 million for over 200 businesses that received low-interest loans through the Illinois Small Business Emergency Loan program. The Department of Agriculture is processing applications for up to \$5 million in business interruption grants through the livestock facility grant program.

"The BIG grant from DCEO was a great help to our business. The funds helped us to stay in business, offset the losses we experienced from being completely closed for two months and modernized our operations," said Carol Ruthenberg, owner of The Fitness Center in Monticello. "We were able to implement an on-line reservation system to help control occupancy levels of the facility and to enhance our cleaning protocols."

"The Business Interruption Grant (BIG) funds will help us with the devastating losses that we've incurred this year, and hopefully kickstart the new year in a positive direction," said Kathy Smith, owner of Venue 720 Productions in Flora. "We are grateful for this opportunity."

“I am incredibly grateful for the Business Interruption Grant from DCEO to help during this mitigation,” said Joe D'Astice, owner of Woodfire Brick Oven Pizza in Rockford. “The grant will help continue to pay our remaining eight employees and outstanding bills.”

“Peoria Charter thanks Governor Pritzker and DCEO for helping our company survive 2020,” said Bill Winkler, owner of Peoria Charter Coach. “Because of the Business Interruption Grant (BIG), I was able to pay operating expenses throughout the rest of the year and it helps us start off 2021 strong.”

“We’ve been really fortunate to receive the Business Interruption Grant (BIG),” said Matthew Chiu, owner of Chiu Quon Bakery. “The extra money has gone a long way in helping to keep our staff employed and cover expenses. Because of the funding we will be able to continue to serve the community that supports us.”

“The BIG grant we received from the State of Illinois was extremely beneficial as it allowed us to offset the operating losses incurred as a result of the COVID-induced shutdown of indoor dining for restaurants,” said Rosa E Robles, owner, Fiesta Tequila of Rockford. “We feel committed to our customers and employees during the epidemic as they were there for us before during COVID-19 crises.”

“The BIG grant was a much-needed infusion in keeping our business going,” said Sharon Taylor of A.L. Taylor & Associates CPA of Chicago. “It helped us keep our staff on payroll so we could make the shift to remote operations and continue servicing our customers on the south side of Chicago.”

“The BIG Grant allowed our newly established SpringHill Suites property within an emerging business district the ability to provide stable hours to our team members and meet the responsibility of our mortgage due to an offset in revenues during the pandemic,” said Darin Dame, owner of SpringHill Suites hotel in Springfield.

“Receiving the BIG Round 2 grant, provided relief for our business after all, we can see the light on the end of the tunnel,” said Jose Hernandez co-owner of Diamond Garden Banquet Hall in Chicago. “The grant has helped our business pay for a couple of months of mortgage, taxes, utilities and payroll.”

“The Illinois Business Interruption Grant came at a crucial time for our business,” said Spenser Ng, owner of Triple Crown Restaurant in Chicago's Chinatown community. “It has allowed us to keep our employees at work, while keeping us in good standing with our suppliers.”

“The pandemic has impacted everyone including the entire hospitality industry.? Receiving the grant has allowed us to keep people employed, pay bills and buy us more time to navigate?this increasing changing environment,” said Mark Legenza, owner of On Tour Brewery in Chicago. “We are thankful to the State of Illinois for creating a program that has helped support our dream and afford us more time to work hard and rebuild our business.”

"Thank you to Governor JB Pritzker and the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO) for assisting thousands of minority-owned small businesses who economically suffered during the pandemic through the Business Interruption Grant (BIG) program,” said Raul Raymundo, CEO of The Resurrection Project. “Small businesses are the backbone of our neighborhoods. Historically minority-owned businesses have lacked access to the same level of funding and opportunities as other business owners. Though we are delighted to know that many minority-owned businesses received financial assistance, we are hopeful that more programs such as the Business Interruption Grant are made readily available as part of economic recovery efforts to strengthen local and statewide economies.”

"The BIG grant came at the right time for our business. The restaurant industry has been decimated by COVID, especially the locally owned places in rural America,” said Amy Mills owner of 17th Street Barbecue in Murphysboro and Marion. We were able to make payroll, purchase critical PPE, and pay a few vendors whose own businesses are impacted when their customers are delayed. A huge thanks to the State of Illinois and Department of Commerce for awarding us this grant.”

The BIG program is one part of over \$1 billion in emergency assistance programs awarded by the State of Illinois in response to the economic crisis created by COVID-19. These programs have collectively provided financial assistance to thousands of businesses and communities across the state, through programs including the \$250 million Local CURE program, \$325 million through the Emergency Rental Assistance Program, and over \$580 million distributed to small business and childcare providers through the BIG program.