



Hello friends & neighbors,

This has been a somber week as our country reached the one year mark of COVID-19 being declared a pandemic. One year later, we are still finding ways to live in a pandemic world while keeping ourselves and everyone around us safe. Hope is on the way. President Biden announced he will direct states to make all adult Americans eligible for the vaccine no later than May 1, and Gov. Pritzker said Illinois is well ahead of schedule and on track to open eligibility earlier than required. We're working tirelessly to ensure families in the 25th District have access to the vaccine as soon as they meet eligibility requirements. Please find a link to register for COVID vaccines on Monday, March 22nd at the Wheaton Bible Church. There are no walk-in appointments, everyone must pre-register via this link

<https://kordinator.mhealthcoach.net/vcl/1615494661611>

## Legislative Update

A bill I'm sponsoring, [Senate Bill 1632](#), just passed out of the Licensed Activities Committee and will now head to the Senate floor. Senate Bill 1632 removes the requirement that social workers pass an examination for licensure, but retains the examination requirement for clinical social workers.

## Federal Relief Coming to Illinois

The U.S. Congress passed a landmark COVID-19 response package Wednesday, and the president has now signed it into law. The American Rescue Plan can begin to help Illinois businesses, homeowners, renters, workers, students and more get back on their feet.

This one-time revenue infusion will go a long way toward helping our state recover from the COVID-19 crisis.

### **We can expect help with our COVID-19 response.**

The plan includes an estimated \$275 million to help facilitate our vaccine rollout, plus hundreds of millions more for testing, health departments and community health centers, hospitals, and mental health care and substance abuse treatment. The legislation also includes a plan to allow unemployed individuals to stay on their employer-sponsored health plans for free via COBRA through September.

### **Residents will receive more direct relief.**

About 85% of Illinois adults will receive relief checks. Single filers who make less than \$75,000 annually and couples who make less than \$150,000 will receive \$1,400 per person, including dependents. Federal unemployment programs have been extended through Sept. 6 and the SNAP benefit increase will remain in place through Sept. 30. Rent relief and mortgage assistance programs will also get a boost.

### **Small businesses will get the help they need to survive and thrive.**

The American Rescue Plan establishes an aid program for restaurants, offering up to \$5 million per location to help them recover from revenue losses in 2020. The Emergency Injury Disaster Loan and Paycheck Protection Programs will also receive additional funding to enable more small businesses to keep their doors open.

### **Schools and local governments will receive stronger support.**

Illinois K-12 schools will receive approximately \$5 billion to help keep students safe and engaged during the pandemic, and an additional \$1.3 billion will bolster our colleges and universities. To ensure bright futures for our youngest learners, Head Start and child care providers will also receive assistance. Counties, cities and smaller municipalities have been allocated funding to help cope with revenue losses and continue providing the services our communities rely on.

I'm thrilled to see the federal government step up to offer support, and I'm committed to making sure the state uses these dollars responsibly, with Illinoisans in mind.

The American Rescue Plan can help us support our neighbors in need and get our state's economy back up and running to secure a stronger future for all of Illinois. It's time to lend a hand to those hit hardest by COVID-19, including struggling small business owners and out-of-work Illinoisans—and I plan to work with my fellow legislators and the executive branch to ensure this relief helps us move forward, together.

The light at the end of the tunnel grows stronger every day.

## **Public Charge Has Been Eliminated**

The Department of Homeland Security announced it will be eliminating the “public charge” rule, which penalized undocumented residents who accessed health benefits and other government services. With this rule eliminated, families can safely pursue legal status without fear of retaliation.

Remember:

- It never applies to U.S. citizens, including the children of immigrants.
- It does not apply to green card holders, asylees, refugees, people with U visas, T visas or VAWA.
- A family member's use of benefits does not affect your future immigration applications.
- Testing and treatment for COVID-19 — including vaccines — are not part of public charge.
- Stimulus checks are not considered public charge.

Learn more [here](#).

## **Temporary Protected Status for Venezuela**

On March 8, the Secretary of Homeland Security designated Venezuela for Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for 18 months. This new TPS designation allows Venezuelan nationals residing in the United States who meet eligibility requirements to file initial applications for TPS.

Individuals who file an application must file with U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services within the 180-day registration period. They may also apply for Employment Authorization Documents (EADs) and for travel authorization. Eligibility criteria can be found in the [Federal Register Notice](#). Learn more [here](#).

## Wildlife Habitat Projects

The Illinois Department of Natural Resources announced the availability of grant funding for wildlife habitat projects through the State Pheasant Fund Special Wildlife Funds Grant Program. This program provides support for enhancing pheasant wildlife habitat through projects developed by not-for-profit organizations and governmental entities.

Prospective applicants can find more information on the [IDNR website](#).

## What's Next?

This week our Environment Agriculture Advisory Committee is meeting at 7 p.m. on Thursday, March 25. RSVP to [environment.49th@gmail.com](mailto:environment.49th@gmail.com) to receive the Zoom link. My staff and I are here to serve you — please don't hesitate to reach out with questions or concerns at (630) 326-9319 (English), (630) 326-9419 (Spanish) or [www.senatorvilla.com](http://www.senatorvilla.com).

As always,



Karina Villa, MSW  
State Senator, 25th District