

The Honorable Gov. Eric J. Holcomb
Statehouse, Second Floor
200 W. Washington St.
Indianapolis, IN 46204



Dear Gov. Holcomb and Economic Recovery Team,

The Indiana Chamber of Commerce fully endorses a gradual re-opening of the state's economy as soon as is feasible in May, recognizing that health and safety has to be leading the call. As many of our members have communicated to us, we must get back to a level of business activity that resembles some sense of normalcy. All the better if that can begin to occur in early May.

Economic Road to Recovery Survey

That need is all the more reinforced by the results we are seeing from our Economic Road to Recovery Survey of the business community. More than 1,300 of our member companies across the state have taken part to date (April 16-20). **The standout finding is how deeply the pandemic has affected their business. On a scale of 1-10, with 10 representing the most dramatic impact, the average response is 7.23; more than half put the level of impact at an 8, 9 or 10. Moreover, only 5% of companies combined said the pandemic had no impact or they actually added employees.**

Other notable findings:

- How long can your business survive past May 1 – 37% under six months (with nearly 10% saying a month or less); 33% six months-plus; 29% not sure
- When do you feel businesses can return to typical operations – 33% when more widespread testing has taken place; 32% after May 1; 9% when there is a proven treatment
- Have you received federal assistance – 43% received a Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) loan, while 33% await a response
- What are your biggest challenges – 48% customer retention; 46% finances; 38% personnel
- Will you resume with fewer employees – 55% no; 20% yes; 25% not sure

The smallest employers, under 50 employees, represent the majority of our survey respondents (56%), followed by employers with between 100 and 499 workers (20%). Manufacturing participants account for one-quarter of the overall total.

Recommendations for Business Restart

Our recommendations for re-opening reflect our position as the umbrella organization for all different types of Hoosier businesses. We will leave industry-specifics to their association groups.

Below are the required steps the Indiana Chamber views as paramount:

- **Legal protection order through IOSHA or other state agency** – Companies need assurance that as long as they are abiding by the state return-to-work safety guidelines (as noted below) and any additional IOSHA guidelines based on their industry that they are immune from lawsuits if an employee contracts COVID-19 after returning to work. The reality is the person could have been exposed to the

virus at home or out in the general public, but it's the employer who will be seen as a target for a lawsuit. At minimum, a thorough state-led examination of liability issues will be urgently needed.

- **Full public policy agenda** – The Indiana Chamber advocacy team is formalizing a full proposal of potential actions to help ensure short-term relief and long-term economic growth. The most urgent action in this category would be implementation of a work share program or, at a minimum, a cooperative agreement with the federal government. This would be a win for employees, their employers and state government finances.
- **Statewide return-to-work safety guidelines (for employees and their customers)** – These guidelines need to be uniform and established by appropriate state/federal officials so employers are all on the same page and confidence is instilled in the workforce that everything recommended to keep everyone safe is being implemented.

Topics to include:

- Masks and social distancing
 - Disinfecting strategies
 - Engineering approaches (air filters, increased ventilation options, installing physical barriers like sneeze guards, etc.)
 - Mental health (there will be apprehension and anxiety; this may be best achieved through an off-site service like a state hotline)
 - Protective behaviors best practices (e.g., cough etiquette and proper use/care of personal protective equipment (PPE), for workers needing it)
 - Protocol if someone is symptomatic/tests positive (from sending symptomatic employees home to instituting return-to-work clearances)
 - Testing options
- **Formalize state support for small businesses** – As indicated from the results of our survey, too many small businesses are on the razor's edge for survival. Among the potential considerations:
 - Launch a coalition with state officials, Indiana Chamber, statewide trade groups and select mayors/local chambers to allow immediate and direct input from the business community to decision-makers
 - Establish a state grant or loan fund to assist those most affected as credit access needs will remain high, especially at the onset
 - Elevate Ventures can also play a key role. Consider a statewide investor network that allows for easy access by businesses across the state
 - Accelerate any state payments to business vendors and encourage local governments to do the same
 - Keep the benefits pipeline open and moving for temporarily laid off workers so employers can retain workers with institutional knowledge of the business and, in frequent cases, were trained and invested in for their growth with the company
 - Offer a tax credit to businesses that continue to pay employees who must isolate due to contracting COVID-19 or who must take care of family members with the virus
 - Exempt PPP loan amounts from state income tax
 - Provide state and federal assistance to assist or reimburse employers for purchases of PPE and implementing safety measures
 - **HR/administrative FAQ or webinars for general concerns and questions** – There are always administrative controls or changes to work policies needed to reduce or minimize exposure to a hazard. With respect to COVID-19, that may come in the form of re-defined shift schedules and

safety education/training plans for their workers, for example. Such considerations may or may not fall under the purview of state government on an ongoing basis but jumpstarting with an HR/administrative FAQ (produced internally or via outside resource) or webinars would be much appreciated, especially by small employers. It also would serve to help ensure those smaller employers can function as effectively as large companies with greater resources.

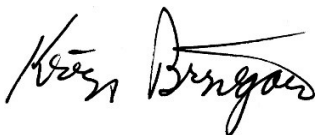
- **Set COVID-19 testing standards and expectations** – Increased testing will not only speed the return-to-work process but also provide greater peace of mind to all Hoosiers. That can't happen overnight, but there needs to be specifics of what can take place when and who should be prioritized for that in the workforce. Related to testing and employee care is the role telemedicine can play. A push for more providers to get the state's Telemedicine Provider Certification is likely in order, especially for the workforce in more rural areas.
- **Continued public support/encouragement for telecommuting, if industry permits** – Beyond obviously helping to ease non-essential businesses back into operation, this will reinforce with any hesitant employer that remote work is the best course of action in the short-term for a portion or all of its employees.
- **Ensure/tout reliable, high speed broadband service** – Where any rural area may be lacking, deploy state/federal assistance to strengthen internet capabilities. Otherwise, reinforce the service reliability Hoosier businesses should enjoy through the various broadband providers in the state. This will also serve to promote telecommuting.

Please feel free to reach out to our organization at any time to clarify or further discuss any of the above. As we have communicated previously, our sincere thank you for your and the task force team's handling of this public health crisis in such a thoughtful manner; it's very much noticed and has been a source of great support and comfort for Hoosiers.

I also wanted to make you aware that I have been appointed the Indiana representative to a joint U.S. Chamber-Council of State Chambers task force working on coordinating federal and state approaches on reopening the economy.

Going forward, the Indiana Chamber stands ready to work with you in any way it can to ensure that the state's economic health comes back strong after the COVID-19 pandemic is behind us.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kevin Brinegar". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Kevin" and last name "Brinegar" clearly legible.

Kevin Brinegar
President and CEO
Indiana Chamber of Commerce