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UPDATE ON STATUS OF THE LEGISLATURE AND RESPONSE TO COVID-19

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The Legislature convened today to unanimously pass two budget bills intended to appropriate funding for the state’s immediate response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

SB 89 appropriates $500 million to be used by the Governor for disaster relief including funding for increased hospital capacity and any activities included in the Governor’s March 4 proclamation declaring a state of emergency. A copy of the proclamation was transmitted with this memo for your convenience. An additional $500 million may be appropriated for the same purpose upon notification to the Joint Legislative Budget Committee.

Importantly for all residents and small businesses, SB 89 also includes language stating the Legislature’s intent that the Administration work with stakeholders to develop strategies to provide assistance to individuals, small businesses, and nonprofits experiencing economic hardship as a result of the pandemic. This language merely notes the Legislature’s desire to address issues in substantive legislation in the coming weeks. In discussing this language on their respective floors, the Assembly and Senate Budget Chairs noted that the Legislature would be reviewing how Federal relief legislation would impact the state.

SB 117 provides for the continued support for schools in the state including $100 million for cleaning and protective equipment.

Finally, the Senate adopted a Resolution which, among other things, amended their House Rules to allow Senators to participate in Legislative proceedings remotely. In presenting the resolution, Pro Tem. Atkins stated that she hoped the new authority would only be used rarely. The legality of remote voting and exactly how this would be implemented in practice are open questions.

Just before adjournment, the Senate and Assembly adopted a joint resolution sending the Legislature into recess until April 13 unless leadership from each house calls them back into session sooner. There was some discussion of potentially extending the recess depending on how things develop. It remains to be seen what this will mean for the Legislature’s schedule and the several thousand bills introduced at the beginning of the year.

We will keep you apprised as we learn more. We expect the Governor to continue issuing emergency proclamations in the coming days and weeks. Please do not hesitate to reach out to our firm for further information, or with any concerns related to COVID-19 and the state’s response to it.