



On April 9th, Mainstreet hosted a webinar concerning advocacy during the coronavirus outbreak. So many members have questions concerning unemployment benefit opportunities, transfer taxes and inspections on a municipal level, and how all the new federal programs surrounding COVID-19 relief apply to them. These and many more questions were answered by our panelists during the hour long livestream presentation. The following is a summary of the event, hosted by Mainstreet President Brian Kwilosz.

NAR Political Representative, Patrick Wohl, provided information regarding [the NAR Coronavirus website](#) and the [Right Tools, Right Now](#) benefits provided through NAR. Patrick also zeroed in on the various relief packages passed through Congress, including the Coronavirus Preparedness & Response Supplemental Appropriations Act, Families First, and the CARES Act. The CARES Act provides the most applicable benefits for REALTORS® as independent contractors, and provides opportunities to apply for unemployment benefits through their state programs. The act also provides an avenue for assistance through the Payroll Protection Plan, which is on a first come, first served basis. This is a loan that can be 100% forgivable and can be used for payroll, including independent contractors and commission employees. A list of lenders can be found [here](#).

Patrick also reviewed the various tax changes regarding use of retirement income and delayed payments for self-employment taxes to the federal government. These options require full and/or repayment, so discussing these options with your accountant or attorney are necessary. The stimulus funds for those making under \$75,000 is also discussed in the video. These funds will not be considered income for your 2020 taxes.

Julie Sullivan, Senior Lobbyist at Illinois REALTORS®, provided a timeline for members leading up to the crucial decisions that led to the inclusion of real estate as an essential service in Illinois. Many states did not include real estate as an essential service and therefore thousands of real estate professionals are unable to transact business and general income during this crisis. Another big win for our members was the passage of the executive order that allowed for remote notary services throughout the state. This eliminated a huge hurdle in the ability to complete real estate transactions.

A major topic of interest for REALTORS® in Illinois is the ability to file for unemployment benefits. Julie reviewed the process, reminding members that the current system is set up for employees whose employers pay into the program through payroll taxes. A new program must be created by the state in order to distribute the funds that will be provided by the federal government for independent contractors. IR is working tirelessly with IDES to get a program up and running. Unfortunately, IDES is overwhelmed with unemployment requests through the current system, and patience will be required for those seeking assistance. At this time, a forgivable loan through the Payroll Protection Plan might be a more viable option.

Finally, the Mainstreet Government Affairs Directors, Joe Roth (Lake County), Tom Joseph (South Cook), and Jeff Merrinette (DuPage County and North/NW Cook County) provided an overview of municipal services in their specific region. The big takeaway was for members to plan ahead and be prepared for the process that individual municipalities have put in place for the time being. Flexibility is key as most communities are doing what they can to accommodate real estate transfer taxes, inspections, water readings, etc. The GADs stressed the importance of reviewing municipal websites and contacting staff with questions. A list of municipal updates can be found [here](#).

Another good tip shared by Julie Sullivan and the GADs was to check the [Mainstreet Coronavirus Update website](#), and the [Illinois REALTORS website](#) daily for updates.