ILLINOIS MANUFACTURERS' ASSOCIATION

www.ima-net.org

1301 West 22nd Street • Suite 307 • Oak Brook, Illinois 60523 • (630) 368-5300 • Fax: (630) 218-7467
220 East Adams Street • Springfield, Illinois 62701 • (217) 522-1240 • Fax: (217) 525-0055
Email: ima@ima-net.org

May 12, 2021

Honorable JB Pritzker
Governor
State of Illinois
207 State House
Springfield IL 62706

Dear Governor Pritzker:

Illinois businesses are in crisis with a rapidly growing economy significantly constrained by an inability to find workers to fill open positions. Data clearly shows that the additional federal unemployment benefits, paired with the Executive Order waiving the requirement that an individual who is able and available must be actively seeking full-time work to obtain benefits, serves as a strong disincentive for people to return to the workplace as Illinois moves to a full opening in the coming weeks.

According to recent data released by the Illinois Department of Employment Security, there were 5.66 million people employed in Illinois in March 2021, and the state's unemployment rate was 7.1 percent. At the same time last year at the start of the pandemic, our state's unemployment rate was 5.3 percent and the number of people working topped 6.02 million. There were 358,800 additional people in the workplace at the same time last year.

These numbers in Illinois are not unique as evidenced by last week's underwhelming national jobs report showing the creation of only 266,000 jobs when most economists expected to see an additional one million jobs created. Yesterday, the U.S. Department of Labor released numbers showing that number of open manufacturing jobs in March jumped to 706,000, a record high, and an increase of 134,000 vacant positions. The total number of job openings across the nation reached 8.1 million, another record level.

Illinois' own job site for example shows more than 100,000 open positions listed today of which nearly 20,000 are in the manufacturing sector. Manufacturers of all sizes and sectors are reaching out daily with an urgent plea to find workers for their facilities in all positions. The average manufacturing job in Illinois pays more than $80,000 in wages and benefits.

The current maximum unemployment benefit for an individual (no dependents) in Illinois is now $771 per week which equates to $19.27 per hour with the federal enhancement.

This issue reaches beyond the manufacturing sector – it's a major impediment for retailers, hotels, construction, and other industries as well. You can simply drive around any town in Illinois and see "help wanted" signs on numerous businesses especially in the hospitality industry where restaurants are now closed multiple days per week because of a lack of employees.

We simply cannot allow able-bodied workers to remain on the sidelines when there are hundreds of thousands of jobs available. While the added federal benefits clearly served a purpose, as did the Executive Order, Illinois' economy will not fully return to normal when conditions favor a refusal to return to work. Employers and employees need your immediate help.

On behalf of the Illinois Manufacturers' Association and our members, I strongly encourage you to take two immediate steps.

1. End Illinois' participation in the federal pandemic-related unemployment benefit program on June 1 rather than waiting until September.

2. Rescind the Executive Order that waives the requirement that a person must be able, available, and actively seeking employment in order to qualify for unemployment insurance benefits.

These ideas are not unique to Illinois. Many states around the nation are ending participation in the federal programs while numerous states are again requiring workers to actively seek jobs in order to qualify for benefits. Some states are using federal stimulus dollars to pay "return to work" bonuses rather than unemployment benefits.

Illinois is moving to a full reopening of the economy in less than one month and we need employees to be able to keep moving forward. Manufacturers led the way forward during the pandemic and are critical to restoring our economy but cannot do it without a workforce.

Thank you.

Mark Denzler
President & CEO

Cc: Illinois General Assembly
Illinois Congressional Delegation