

Illinois Insights Review

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Executive Summary

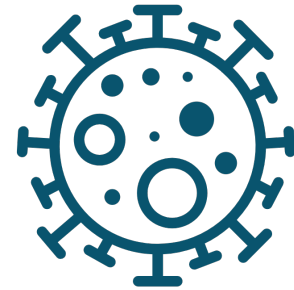
From September to November 2020, Ballast Research spoke with 30 state and local policymakers in Illinois to understand how the government and private sector responded to the COVID-19 pandemic and what policymakers want to see from advocates during this time.



Top Policy Priorities in Illinois

During the Pandemic

- Policymakers identified inefficiencies in PPE & test procurement, insufficient small business support, and housing insecurity as key issues during the pandemic.
- Policymakers across both parties agree that private businesses have been valuable in responding to issues related to COVID-19 by donating meals to first responders, providing quarantine shelter, and shifting their operations to produce critical care supplies like hand sanitizer and PPE.



Beyond the Pandemic

- Beyond COVID-19, policymakers emphasized that environmental challenges remain a top priority for Illinois, including clean energy, flooding, and ecosystem changes.
- Policymakers see an opportunity for public and private sector collaboration in response to these environmental concerns. Policymakers call on private businesses to improve their operations and products to minimize waste, work with the public sector to understand the economic impact of climate change, and showcase their contributions to climate change solutions.

COVID-19 in Illinois

As COVID-19 spread through Illinois, policymakers experienced unique and unprecedented challenges presented by the pandemic. Inefficiencies in PPE and test procurement, insufficient small business support, and housing insecurity all emerged as prominent issues during this time.

Inefficiencies in PPE & Test Procurement

As Illinois responded to COVID-19, policymakers highlighted the need for greater efficiency in the procurement of PPE and other emergency supplies.

“Cutting through red tape on PPE and test procurement has been a big deal and should continue. There are so many levels of bureaucracy in state governments that it slows down our ability to procure necessary supplies. The emergency order has helped that, but I think it should be looked at as a possible permanent fix for what we consider essential services.”

-Assistant Division Chief, State Executive Agency

Insufficient Small Business Support

Small businesses struggled to remain open as the pandemic continued throughout 2020. Policymakers underscored the necessity of small businesses for Illinois’ economy and urged the public and private sector to support them during this time.

*“We have some mom-and-pop restaurants in our community, like this wonderful family-run Italian restaurant. They have put their heart and soul into the business. **When we had to shut down businesses because of COVID, this restaurant couldn’t survive. They and other local restaurants are on their last leg.**”*

-Municipal Trustee, R

Housing Insecurity

Policymakers emphasized the impact of COVID-19 on the affordable housing crisis in Illinois’ urban areas. The recent spike in unemployment pushed many residents into housing insecurity, relying only on the temporary protection of the utility shutoff and eviction moratoriums.

*“Already there is an incredible lack of affordable housing. Then with COVID, residents—especially those impacted by unemployment—are not able to pay their mortgages or **their rent**, which is having a trickle-down effect on apartment building owners. So everyone is pointing fingers at each other about how they’re going to resolve this housing crisis.”*

-Municipal Elected Official, D

Private Businesses Rose to the Challenge in Illinois' COVID-19 Recovery Response

Policymakers applauded the private sector for its role in Illinois' COVID-19 recovery. Businesses stepped up to donate meals to first responders, provide shelter to those unable to quarantine in their own homes, distribute PPE to schools and hospitals, and retool operations to produce emergency supplies like hand sanitizer. Policymakers praised these businesses for utilizing their scope and resources for the greater good of Illinois.



Donating Meals to First Responders

"As much as restaurants have been struggling, they have also given back to the community by donating meals to the staff at the hospital or firehouse. Two that come to mind are Smoothie King and Dickey's Barbecue. Buy a meal and one gets donated through the restaurant."

-Mayor, Independent



Providing Quarantine Shelter

"Businesses have done a phenomenal job where they could. Some businesses, like hotels and motels have provided shelter for those that were displaced due to the need to quarantine."

-Municipal Elected Official, D



Donating PPE

"When COVID first hit, companies responded by donating time and PPE- masks, gloves, etc. They were able to help their neighbors with pretty much anything. For example, a company donated trash bags during the PPE shortage to be used as makeshift hospital gowns."

-Division Chief, State Executive Agency



Producing Hand Sanitizer

"Companies have stepped up during COVID. Even distilleries and breweries switched over their production lines to make hand sanitizer. So you've seen help from the private sector from all different directions."

-Representative, R

Environmental Challenges in Illinois

Amid chaos and disruption caused by COVID-19, policymakers continued to focus on major environmental challenges in Illinois. Policymakers, especially Democrats, highlighted clean energy, flooding, and ecosystem changes as pressing issues in the state.

Clean Energy

Democratic policymakers proposed the Clean Energy Jobs Act (CEJA) as a push to make Illinois' clean energy economy more equitable. As the bill continues to progress through the state legislature, policymakers agree there is a need to improve Illinois' clean energy infrastructure.

*"A lesson we can take away from COVID is that when scientists say something is a problem, you should listen. You see that communities of color and low-income communities tend to be the most impacted by COVID-19, environmental racism, and the like. Those communities are not set up with the resources they need to bounce back from big issues like that. **The Clean Energy Jobs Act is a great opportunity for us to make sure that vulnerable communities have the resources they need to combat challenges like climate change.**"*

-Chief of Staff, D

Flooding

With major waterways and bodies of water like Lake Michigan, the Mississippi River, and the Illinois River, Illinois experiences flooding and water management issues, which policymakers believe are exacerbated by climate change.

*"**We have experienced several floods in our community.** We had a huge million-dollar infrastructure project that we were mandated to perform by the Illinois Department of Natural Resources, and it failed. We were scared that we were going to have to spend more money. We got a loan through the EPA to pay back the million dollars. **Then we had another flood, and it completely destroyed all the infrastructure work that we had done and paid for.**"*

-Municipal Trustee, R

Ecosystem Changes

Illinois policymakers highlight ecosystem changes, particularly invasive species, as a serious environmental issue that impacts not only the state, but the entire Great Lakes region.

*"**We're dealing with invasive species.** The poster child of that is the Asian carp coming up the Illinois River. **The other Great Lakes states and provinces are very concerned about this fish getting into the Great Lakes.** So quite a bit of focus is happening right now to monitor commercial fishing on the Asian carp and make sure they're not advancing toward Michigan."*

-Director, State Executive Agency

How the Public and Private Sector Can Partner to Address Environmental Issues

While climate change is a global issue, policymakers believe private sector organizations in Illinois have an important role to play in addressing environmental challenges in the state.



Improve Operations and Products to Minimize Waste

“I think the private sector plays an enormous role in responding to environmental challenges. Individuals can recycle and make other minor little changes in their lives. But if we really want to make significant cuts in the junk that we’re putting into the environment, companies need to change their production.”

-Chief of Staff, D



Work with Policymakers to Understand Economic Impact of Climate Change

“The private sector needs to start pushing the government to understand the impact climate change will have on the Illinois economy.”

-Staff, State Executive Agency



Showcase Company’s Contributions to Climate Change Solutions

“Our constituents are so energetic about clean energy and action on climate change. Companies should show how they’re doing their part to protect constituents against climate change. That feels like a fantastic marketing strategy. If I were the CEO of a company, I would shout from the rooftops, ‘Look at all the stuff we’re doing on climate change!’”

-Chief of Staff, D

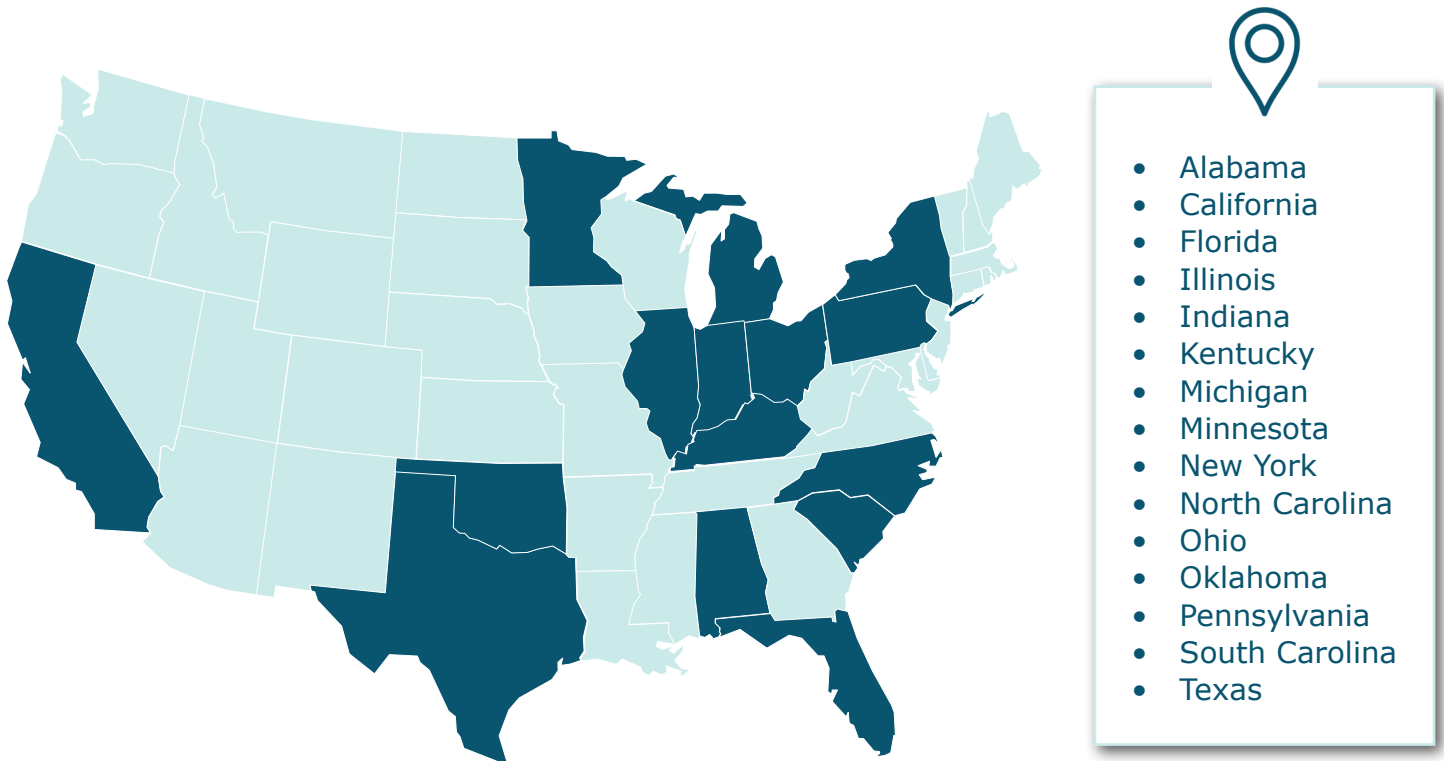
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States Insights Review**

States Insights Review

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