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HOUSE RESOLUTION

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WHEREAS, The Illinois Department of Employment Security (IDES) is directed by State law (20 ILCS 1005/1005-45) to help the prosperity of Illinois' laboring men and women; and

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WHEREAS, IDES is directed by State law (20 ILCS 1005/1005-100) to operate a statewide network of public employment offices; and

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WHEREAS, IDES has traditionally operated public employment offices throughout Illinois, where job-challenged Illinois residents can go for immediate and direct assistance; and

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WHEREAS, These IDES public-access public employment offices closed down "temporarily" in March 2020, due to the COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic and, as of March 2021, have remained closed; and

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WHEREAS, Due to the same pandemic, the need of the people of Illinois for IDES advice and counsel has sharply increased; at calendar year 2020 year-end in December 2020, Illinois nonfarm payroll employers reported employing 419,100 fewer people than in the previous year; and

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WHEREAS, These numbers have generated a statewide

1 unemployment rate of 7.6% in December 2020, with more than
2 468,300 Illinois residents estimated to be unemployed and
3 actively searching for work and additional tens of thousands
4 of Illinois residents having dropped out of the labor force in
5 despair; and

6 WHEREAS, This six-figure total of Illinois individuals
7 includes men and women who need help filing for unemployment
8 insurance benefits, request counsel in searching for new
9 employment, or require additional and further assistance for a
10 wide variety of pandemic-related unemployment problems; and

11 WHEREAS, Under current IDES policies, there are no
12 physical locations that these people can visit to get this
13 help; and

14 WHEREAS, People with standardized problems are expected to
15 interact with a computer robot, the "IDES assistant", on the
16 IDES site, but not everyone has access to a computer and,
17 furthermore, constituents state that the webpage robot puts
18 people into a spiderweb and does not answer their questions;
19 and

20 WHEREAS, People with additional questions and requests for
21 assistance are supposed to call a IDES hotline phone number,
22 (800) 244-5631, but our constituents report that the hotline,

1 when used by Illinois residents who need help, generates a
2 cold, automated response; persons who call into the hotline
3 with a problem are told to deposit their names, phone numbers,
4 and identifying information on a segment of electronic
5 recording and to wait for a response; and

6 WHEREAS, In a report broadcast on Chicago's
7 WBBM-TV/Channel 2 on Monday, March 8, IDES reported that as of
8 the most recent reporting period 155,765 calls from Illinois
9 residents were sitting in its callback queue and they had not
10 yet called back any of the names on this lengthy list; and

11 WHEREAS, At the current rate of callbacks, persons who
12 left their names and phone numbers in IDES' callback queue
13 cannot expect to get a return call until more than one month
14 has passed since depositing a request for assistance,
15 including many urgent requests for immediate help; and

16 WHEREAS, In an Illinois House public hearing carried by
17 video technology under conditions of pandemic social
18 distancing held on Thursday, March 4, senior officials of IDES
19 confessed to House members that their employees have not been
20 able to respond to Illinois public requests and pleas in a
21 timely manner; and

22 WHEREAS, Many of the problems represented by these 155,765

1 unanswerd phone calls are complex problems requiring an
2 Illinois resident to find and submit one or more pieces of
3 information written on a legal form, one or more coded
4 passwords, one or more pieces of personal secure identifying
5 information (such as a Social Security number), or some
6 combination of these elements; and

7 WHEREAS, When problems like these are addressed over an
8 audio link, more than one phone call is often required to deal
9 with these requests for assistance, leading to a significant
10 number of currently open IDES case files and unresolved
11 issues; and

12 WHEREAS, Other Illinois State agencies also do work for
13 which face-to-face interactions are desirable or necessary
14 and, recognizing this, have taken steps to partially reopen
15 their offices under pandemic conditions of social distancing;
16 examples include the Department of Driver Services within the
17 Office of the Illinois Secretary of State and the Family
18 Community Resource Centers operated by the Illinois Department
19 of Public Aid; therefore, be it

20 RESOLVED, BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE ONE
21 HUNDRED SECOND GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF ILLINOIS, that
22 recognizing the unique circumstances of the COVID-19
23 coronavirus pandemic, we call upon the Illinois Department of

1 Employment Security to immediately reopen their public-access
2 public employment offices to provide face-to-face help to
3 Illinois residents who urgently need assistance; and be it
4 further

5 RESOLVED, That we call upon all of the other departments
6 of the State of Illinois to provide IDES with advice,
7 technical assistance, and guidance on how to safely reopen
8 public-access office spaces under current conditions; and be
9 it further

10 RESOLVED, That we support the working people of Illinois,
11 whether currently employed or not, including the working
12 people of IDES; we recognize the stressful circumstances of
13 operating a publicly accessible office in a time of pandemic;
14 and be it further

15 RESOLVED, That suitable copies of this resolution be
16 delivered to Governor JB Pritzker and IDES Acting Director
17 Kristin Richards.