



Illinois Department of Commerce & Economic Opportunity

JB Pritzker, Governor

March 1, 2024

Governor JB Pritzker
Members of the General Assembly
Illinois State Capital Building
401 S. 2nd Street
Springfield, IL 62701

Dear Governor and Members of the General Assembly:

The following report fulfills the statutory directive that the Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO) provide the Governor and Members of the General Assembly with an annual report on the activities of the Office of Business Permits and Regulatory Assistance, more commonly known as the First Stop Business Information Center. The Business Assistance and Regulatory Reform Act (20 ILCS 608) authorizes the Department of Commerce & Economic Opportunity (Department) to create the Office which shall consolidate information about existing programs throughout State government, provide assistance to businesses with fewer than 500 employees in meeting requirements, and perform other functions specified in the Act in order to improve the State's business climate by making it easier for small and mid-sized businesses to navigate State requirements. This goal is achieved by providing timely and accurate information regarding business requirements.

Please feel free to contact the Department with any questions about this report.

Sincerely,

 By 
Khama A. Sharp
Assistant Director

Kristin A. Richards
Director
Illinois Department of Commerce & Economic Opportunity



2023 ANNUAL REPORT TO THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

First Stop Business
Information Center

(Office of Business Permits and Regulatory Assistance)
[Business Assistance & Regulatory Reform Act \(P.A. 88-0404\)](#)



Illinois
Department of Commerce
& Economic Opportunity
OFFICE OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP,
INNOVATION & TECHNOLOGY

2023 ANNUAL REPORT

FIRST STOP BUSINESS INFORMATION CENTER

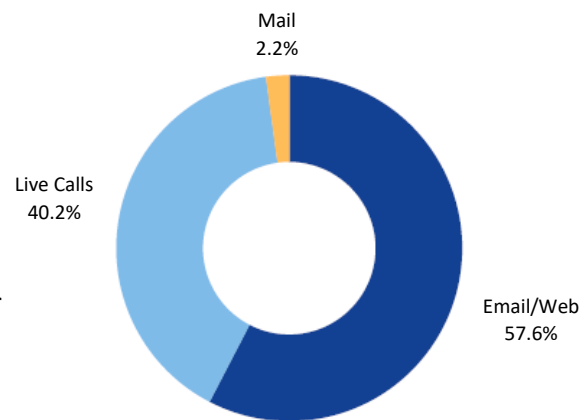
The First Stop Business Information Center (First Stop) was created under the Business Assistance and Regulatory Reform Act (20 ILCS 608) as the Office of Business Permits and Regulatory Assistance over 30 years ago. First Stop provides small businesses and business startups with comprehensive information regarding business licenses, permits, and government regulations. Business specialists provide professional guidance to businesses and entrepreneurs by helping them identify and navigate regulatory requirements for their business and connecting them to state and local resources.

Department Activity

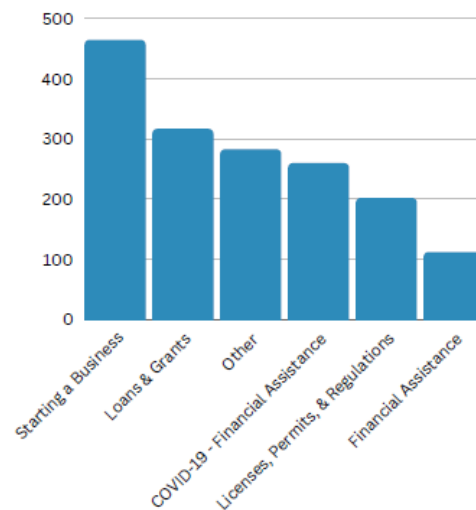
In 2023, First Stop provided information and technical support - via phone, email, and mail – for new and existing businesses with inquiries pertaining to starting a business in Illinois, COVID-19 pandemic recovery, regulations, programs, resources, incentives, and more.

The Office provided entrepreneurs and small business owners free business startup kits, online access to its searchable knowledgebase system for license and regulatory information, as well as easy to understand guides on various business topics.

First Stop also continued to build upon its partnership with the Illinois Department of Corrections’ Women and Family Services Division to provide “Starting Your Business in Illinois” handbooks for use by its re-entry counselors as they prepare individuals for their return to their communities.



CY23 Business Assistance by Type



CY23 Request for Assistance by Category - Top 6



2023 ANNUAL REPORT

FIRST STOP BUSINESS INFORMATION CENTER

First Stop Core Business Services

Business Specialists

The First Stop Business Information Center employees have over 80 years of combined experience assisting new and established business owners with Illinois regulatory processes and connecting them with resources from the federal, state, and local governments to support the launch and expansion of their enterprises. First Stop experts assist in facilitating communication between the business client and State agencies if a firm needs assistance with the state regulatory process to help alleviate any confusion or irritation.

First Stop welcomed its new Manager, Jenny Malloy in January of 2024, and the Office currently has two full-time business specialists who can be reached via the First Stop Business Information Center Helpline at 800-252-2923 or email at ceo.firststop@illinois.gov

Services for Diverse Communities

Striving to ensure equitable assistance and opportunities for success for Illinois' diverse communities, First Stop has provided a bilingual business specialist for Illinois' Spanish-speaking entrepreneurs for the past twenty years and continues to provide its most popular publications, such as the

“Starting Your Business in Illinois” Handbook, in Spanish.

Online KnowledgeBase of Business Resources & Requirements

First Stop uses Oracle Service Cloud to host its KnowledgeBase System, a comprehensive database of over 500 business-related questions and answers, to better serve clients. Over 61,000 visits were made to the knowledge base in 2023. This technology is available on the First Stop website and enables entrepreneurs and small businesses to have access to the same business permit, license, certification, and business resource information as our professional staff. Self-serve information can be found on the [First Stop website](#).

Business Start-up Assistance

The program's business startup package revolves around the “Starting Your Business in Illinois” handbook. It is available in English and Spanish and links can be found on the [First Stop website](#). It includes responses to frequently asked questions and issues that new businesses often face. It also contains lists of important government agencies, a business plan outline, a business feasibility checklist, and other helpful data.



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First Stop Business Information Center Staff

Jenny Malloy – First Stop Manager
Sonia Gerson – Spanish Bilingual Business Specialist
Jessica Thomas – Business Specialist

First Stop Business Information Center's Strategic Future



Mission Statement

To support small businesses and startups in Illinois through direct services and a network of resources by providing information, regulatory assistance, advocacy, and business guidance.

Strategic Focus

- Strengthened Strategic Collaborations
- Data Driven Resource Development
- Business Permitting Portal Development Assistance
- Enhanced User Experience
- Strengthened First Stop Brand

This strategic plan serves as a roadmap for the Illinois First Stop Business Information Center, providing clear objectives and actionable steps to guide its growth and impact over the coming years.

