



March, 2001

TO THE GOVERNOR AND GENERAL ASSEMBLY:

In accordance with the provisions of Public Act 88-0404, the Business Assistance and Regulatory Reform Act (Act), the Illinois Department of Commerce and Community Affairs (DCCA) respectfully submits this calendar year 2000 annual report on the First Stop Business Information Center. As directed by the Act, DCCA's Small Business Office oversees the First Stop Business Information Center, a single statewide resource for new and existing business owners who have questions or concerns about state and federal business requirements, business assistance and the regulatory process.

First Stop was planned by a team of representatives from the business community, along with representatives from the Illinois Small Business Development Center Network and selected state regulating agencies. An ongoing team of state agency liaisons has been established and works with the First Stop Business Information Center staff on behalf of clients of the Center. Designed and managed with customer service as its highest priority, First Stop seeks to be the foremost resource for information, assistance and advocacy for businesses dealing with government red tape and bureaucracy.

Key Performance Measures

0Total First Stop Client Activity.....	14981
1Business Startup Kits Issued.....	7588
2Sources of Financing Cases.....	2530
3Licensing and Registration Cases.....	2682
4Regulatory Assistance Cases.....	44
5Market Research Cases.....	139
6Government Contracting Cases.....	197
7International Trade Cases.....	57
8General Business and Other Cases.....	1627

Clients Referred to:

0Small Business Development Centers.....	3,659
1International Trade Centers / NAFTA Opportunity Center...	103
2Procurement Technical Assistance Centers.....	241

620 East Adams Street
Springfield, Illinois 62701
217/782-7500
Fax: 217/785-6454 xTDD: 800/785-6055

Internet Address <http://www.commerce.state.il.us>
James R. Thompson Center
100 West Randolph Street, Suite 3-400
Chicago, Illinois 60601
312/814-7179
Fax: 312/814-6732 xTDD: 800/419-0667
Printed on Recycled and Recyclable Paper

325 West Adams Street, 3rd Floor
Springfield, Illinois 62704-1892
217/785-2800
Fax: 217/785-2618 xTDD: 217/785-0211

2309 West Main, Suite 118
Marion, Illinois 62959
618/997-4394
Fax: 618/997-1825 x TDD Relay: 800/526-0844

Customer Satisfaction

0Percent of customers surveyed indicating First Stop saved them Time and/or Money **94%**

1Percent of customers surveyed highly satisfied with products and services **98%**

Customer Comments:

- “I wish I remembered the name of the lady I spoke with because she was extremely helpful and patient answering every question I asked. I was very pleased with the service I received and will tell others of this service.”

- “The package was excellent, easily understood and covered areas of major importance. The operator was extremely nice which was a pleasant surprise.”

- “I hadn't heard of this service until I found it on the Internet. If more people knew of this service I believe it would save them countless dollars and time.”

- I was made aware of things I needed to check that I had never heard of. It gives me a good, general directional map for my business. Thank you!

- “Thanks to Pam McDonough and all the staff at DCCA. The great services, professional information I got from everyone and Sonia. Again thanks to everyone.”

Regulatory Relief Activities

In addition to the 44 clients assisted with various regulatory assistance requests through the toll-free Small Business Assistance Line, First Stop also reached out to serve clients through the Regulatory Flexibility Program. Better known as Reg Flex, this program calls for DCCA to be a regulatory watchdog for small businesses. Since hiring a full-time Reg Flex Specialist in April 1998, First Stop reviews every state proposed rule, then publishes a weekly *Regulatory and Information Alert* to business trade associations and specific businesses summarizing the rules that will impact small businesses. Both business and trade associations and individual businesses comment on the proposed rules. Their comments are used when analyzing the impact of the proposed rule. Written analyses are submitted to the Joint Committee on Administrative Rules (JCAR) and the issuing state agency to reduce or eliminate onerous aspects of the proposed rule. The following information is a summary of Regulatory Flexibility Program activities for calendar year 2000:

0Reviewed **552** Proposed State Regulations;

0Summarized **118** Proposed Regulations that affect small businesses;

1Published **52** issues of our weekly newsletter, *Regulatory and Information Alert*, which is received by over **400** small business owners, business and trade associations;

2Conducted **93** Small Business Impact Analyses for consideration by JCAR.

3Regulatory Flexibility staff attended hearings on various proposed rules where agencies elicited public input regarding the impact rules will have on businesses.

4The Governor's Small Business 2000 Summit held in January 2000 led to 80 recommendations on how state government can ease the burden on the small business community. First Stop along with the Small Business Division / Small Business Development Center, is incorporating some of these recommendations into its strategic plan and DCCA will be including some of these recommendations as well in our 5 year economic development plan.

5Tracked legislation that would impact small businesses from the time the bill is introduced, through veto session. Maintained a log of the status of each bill on DCCA's Small Business web page available for the general public to access.

6Attended the National Small Business United, 2000 Small Business Congress

7Solicited business and industry organization participation at the Small Business Regulatory Fairness Board hearing held in Rockford, Illinois. The hearing was an opportunity for organizations and business owners to testify before a Regulatory Fairness Board comprised of small business owners and advocates about unfair enforcement practices of federal government agencies.

First Stop Products and Services

- Business Specialists: The key to First Stop's success and high customer ratings are the professionals that handle the thousands of inquiries that come in via the toll-free business help line, e-mail, standard mail and walk-ins. When a business encounters difficulty with the state regulatory process, the Business Specialists serve as ombudsmen for small businesses, working to find a solution that both the business and agency find mutually acceptable. The Specialists are helping to dispel the common perception that government is inaccessible to small businesses.
- Privatized Call Intake Center: Calls into First Stop via the toll-free number are received by three highly trained customer service representatives with a small firm that specializes in call center activities and is under contract to First Stop. The call center handles the high percentage of requests for basic information as well as mail fulfillment of the business startup kits. Requests for in-depth assistance, advocacy and research are seamlessly forwarded to the Business Specialists at First Stop who have the time to thoroughly assist the customer.
- Hispanic Outreach: As an outreach effort to educate prospective entrepreneurs in Illinois' growing Hispanic population, First Stop began the first stages of its Hispanic outreach efforts by making its Step by Step Guide to Starting a Business in Illinois available in Spanish. January 2000 First Stop added a bilingual customer service representative, in order to serve their Spanish speaking clients. The bilingual customer service representative has translated the Child Care Start-up Profile into Spanish and is currently working on translating several other First Stop publications.

- eCommerce Conference: First Stop along with Illinois Manufacturing Extension Center sponsored the *Building Your Business in a Fast Changing World* eCommerce conference at Southern Illinois University Small Business Development Center. The full-day conference on eCommerce delivered a full agenda of timely eCommerce issues. The day began with comments from Brad Cole of Governor Ryan's office. He highlighted the state's initiatives and goals with respect to technology, infrastructure, and economic development. After these remarks, the keynote speaker Dr. Leo Coleman, delivered an address titled "Change 2000: It's the P.I.T.S. (People, Information, Technology, Science). Participants were able to attend four breakout sessions throughout the rest of the day that were targeted to beginner and advanced levels. Breakout sessions included: eCommerce: A Beginner's Guide, Web-Site Development, Image is Everything, Harnessing the Power of Search Engines, Hands-On Web Page Design using Netscape Composer, Developing Your eMarketing Strategy, Budgeting for eCommerce Initiatives, Security Issues Panel Discussion, and eBusiness Round Tables. The event was marketed using a direct mailing of a brochure, e-mail, press releases, and via the SBDC web site. Approximately seventy people attended the event.

- eCommerce Business Start-up Profile: This booklet is a combined effort by the College of Business and Technology at Western Illinois University and DCCA's First Stop office. This publication is intended to give prospective business owner a resource to facilitate the startup process and to help existing business owners make decisions about expansion into the e-commerce arena.

- Illinois Child Care Resource Guide: This publication is a joint effort between, Illinois Department of Human Services, Department of Children and Family Services, USDA Rural Development, Illinois State Treasurer's Office, University of Illinois Champaign-Urbana, Illinois Network on Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies and the Illinois Department of Commerce and Community Affairs. Once publication is completed First Stop will make it available through the network of Small Business Development Centers, DCCA's Web site, compact disc and in hard copy to clients throughout Illinois. The guide is a four-part publication made up of the following:

- **Illinois Child Care - A Guide for Family Providers**: outlines the steps necessary for family providers to start a home child care program, and includes a variety of agency and organizational contacts who can provide technical and other assistance throughout this process.

- **Illinois Child Care - Developing Center-Based Programs**: outlines the steps necessary for starting a center-based child program, and includes a variety of agency and organizational contacts who can provide technical and other assistance throughout this process.

- **Illinois Child Care - Options for employers** outlines available option for assisting employees with child care, as well as provide agency and organizational contact who can provide technical assistance to employers throughout this process.

- **Illinois Child Care - Developing Community Programs**: outlines the step necessary for developing community child care programs, and includes a variety of agency and organizational contacts who can provide technical and other assistance throughout this process.

- Business and Industry Data Center (BIDC): Funded by First Stop, this integrated service provides Small Business Development Center Network and small businesses with various market, industry, census and similar demographic data to help them make planning decisions. The BIDC and its seven affiliate regional offices handled nearly 3500 requests for information in 2000.

- Directory of Business Profiles, Requirements and Assistance Programs: This comprehensive database of more than 450 profiles of state business permits, licenses, certifications and

assistance programs has been enhanced to include profiles of the top 100 most popular business startups. It is available on DCCA's Internet web site (www.commerce.state.il.us/doingbusiness) in an easy to search application or by calling First Stop through its toll-free business help line.

- Starting a Business in Illinois (*Cutting Through the Red Tape for Small Businesses*) Handbook: This 42-page booklet, heralded by the business community as one of the most useful publications of its kind, features answers to the basic questions and issues facing new business ventures. Included is a business feasibility checklist, a business plan outline, listings of essential state, federal and local agencies and much other useful information. More than 20,000 are distributed annually, 7588 directly to clients from First Stop and the remainder through the network of Small Business Development Centers, small business expositions, chambers of commerce, and other business service providers.

- Step by Step Guide to Starting a Business: This abbreviated version of the handbook is less expensive to reproduce yet provides a more concise and colorful publication useful in mass marketing activities such as small business expositions, chambers of commerce throughout the state, library reference sections and similar venues.

- Restaurant Startup Profile: This 46-page booklet, is a combined effort by the Illinois Institute for Rural Affairs at Western Illinois University and the Illinois Department of Commerce and Community Affairs. This publication is a resource to facilitate the startup process for a restaurant and to help existing restaurant owners to make decisions about expansion.

Marketing and Promotion

First Stop:

0Direct mailed promotional and informational material to Small Business Development Centers, libraries, chambers of commerce, county clerks, mayors, regional planning commissions, local economic development offices and state representatives, senators and Congressional offices.

0Cosponsored, participated in and/or attended the following: the Illinois CPA Business and Technology Exposition; the Women's Business Development Conference and Exposition; the Illinois Librarians Annual Conference and Exposition; the Illinois Petroleum Marketers Association Annual Conference; the Chicago Business Opportunity Fair; the Women's Business Ownership Council and the Illinois Small Business Development Association meetings.

0Mentioned in newspapers, trade association newsletters and several magazines.

1Participated in numerous public-speaking engagements with various business groups, chambers, libraries and other intermediary organizations.

Strategic Plans

First Stop, as a part of the DCCA Small Business Division, established a strategic plan in 1999 to better serve the small business community. Predicated on the fact that small businesses in general desire to comply with regulations. However, heavy handed enforcement practices, lack of clear or conflicting guidelines, and less than helpful state agency staff are cited by businesses as a persistent problem.

What is needed is a complete change in the attitude and culture of the state's regulating agencies. To this end, First Stop is working with the Illinois Dept. of Revenue, the Secretary of State and other state agencies on developing ways to improve communications, reduce the regulatory burden and adopt less onerous compliance methods.

Conclusion

First Stop has proven to be effective and successful in working with entrepreneurs, small business owners and organizations that historically view government as an impediment to business growth. It is a fact that the majority of net new jobs created are by small companies. This being so, it is imperative that government continue to responsibly lessen the regulatory burdens faced by our state's small businesses. The First Stop Business Information Center is one of Illinois' greatest assets for improving business competitiveness through regulatory relief.

Sincerely,

Pam McDonough
Director

PM:mg