

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Chamber Communicates 2024 Legislative Agenda

Hagerstown, MD – The Washington County Chamber of Commerce communicated its 2024 legislative agenda today. Identifying policy areas that concern the local business community, the agenda outlines issues the Chamber will track throughout this year’s General Assembly Session. The Chamber, aligning with its strategic plan, is focusing on six key areas: supporting Job Growth and Workforce Development/Education, promoting Transportation Funding/Infrastructure Investment, advocating for Sound Energy Policies, advocating for a Competitive Tax Structure, and curbing Over-Regulation. “The individual agenda items are intentionally broad,” said Paul Frey, President and CEO. “We drafted this document in response to what’s on the minds of our members, factoring in the current economic environment that continues to be aggravated by inflation and by the existing staffing challenges. We want to be part of a unified and fiscally responsible strategy for dealing with the prevailing economic issues in Washington County and in the state of Maryland.”

Proposed legislation that falls into these broad policy areas will initiate action by the Chamber. The Chamber could issue statements either supporting or opposing specific legislation, release policy statements, or testify before the General Assembly in Annapolis. “The policy makers who pass laws affecting our businesses need to hear from us,” Frey said, “and this legislative agenda is part of the process to make that happen.”

Washington Chamber of Commerce 2024 Legislative Agenda

Support Job Growth

One of the Chamber’s goals is to be a unifying voice for positive change and community prosperity. Therefore, the Chamber supports sustainable economic development, tourism, and research and development to create and retain more jobs. We work to achieve a fair balance between the employer and employee in workers’ compensation claims. Similarly, we work toward policies to provide fair unemployment insurance benefits to workers without creating an undue burden on job creators. The Chamber will:

- Support and facilitate economic policies that create private sector jobs and investments and encourage economic growth.
- Support the development and execution of public and/or private incentives that attract and create job-producing businesses, positioning Washington County to be increasingly competitive within the region.
- Support fair and just employment practices for businesses and employees.
- Help ensure the fiscal soundness, benefit integrity, competitive position, and administrative effectiveness of Maryland’s insurance programs.
- Support initiatives that make available a variety of workforce housing opportunities, including adequate infrastructure, to support housing development.
- Support the investment in broadband infrastructure to promote work-at-home capabilities, while relieving stress on commuter infrastructure.
- Promote new and hi-tech industries in Washington County by leveraging the county’s connections with institutions of higher education, aerospace, and transportation industries.

Support Workforce Development/Education

A well-educated workforce is an essential component of the economic vitality and growth of Washington County. Access to high quality education at all levels is a vital concern for employers due to its impact on job retention and job creation. This will require coordinated advocacy and action at the local, state, and national level. We support an educational and vocational ecosystem focused on developing, retaining, and attracting a more globally competitive workforce. We believe in strategies that seamlessly link education and workforce development and embed skills-based learning into academic instruction. The Chamber will:

- Call for the State to honor its statutory funding commitments to pre-K–12 education and balance funding of additional initiatives, including the funds from the Blueprint for Education legislation.
- Support the WorkKeys “Work Ready Community” initiative in Washington County.
- Support predictable and sustainable funding for institutions of higher learning in order to maintain the affordability and quality of higher education in Maryland.
- Support all aspects of education with a cradle to career strategy. Encourage restorative practices within our education and prison systems, including supporting businesses in hiring previously incarcerated individuals.

Promote Transportation Funding/Infrastructure Investment

The Chamber is an ambassador for economic growth. Because well-maintained and efficient transportation infrastructure is critical to our business community, the State needs transportation policies that benefit businesses, workers, quality of life, environment and safety needs, and the general economic development of Washington County (this includes roads, rails, and air transportation). The fields of cyber and technology are important and growing sectors of Maryland’s economy. We support sustainably funded solutions that safely and reliably transport people and goods, as well as the development of policies that encourage and facilitate entrepreneurship and innovation. The Chamber will:

- Advocate for the integrity of the Transportation Trust Fund by ensuring transportation funds are not diverted for other uses.
 - Continue restoring funds previously transferred, including local Highway User Revenues.
 - Identify appropriate funding streams designated for all transit system infrastructure, which does not penalize competing modes of transportation.
- Encourage our state legislature to continue working with our Congressional delegation to apportion and expend the funds allocated to Washington County for its transportation and infrastructure priorities.
 - Proactively identify and raise awareness to heavily trafficked areas where there are higher volumes of traffic congestion and accidents.
 - Support initiatives that explore light rail transportation to Washington County.
- Support broadband funding programs designed to provide service to the unserved and underserved in Washington County.
- Encourage funding of multi-modal transit in congested corridors. Promote local, state, and federal investment in the significant existing road, rail, and air infrastructure in Washington County, connecting workers with jobs and our state’s supply chain with the rest of the country.

Advocate for Sound Energy Policies

- The Chamber will monitor initiatives regarding climate policies and clean energy goals, supporting the development of clean and renewable energy sources that are cost-effective with reasonable implementation timetables. We support community and business endeavors that sustain, enhance, protect and conserve Maryland’s natural resources for present and future generations. At the same time, we work to maintain the balance between economic need and environmental concern.
 - We support a diversified, equitable and inclusive energy portfolio, which enhances energy security, reduces dependence on a single source and ensures a reliable energy supply for all.

- We believe that any proposals to make Maryland more reliant on electricity must consider the current electrical grid, its capacity to handle increased demand, and must not substantially increase the cost of both living and doing business in Maryland.
- We encourage the expansion of the electric vehicle charging infrastructure in Washington County.

Advocate for a Competitive Tax Structure

As Maryland’s FY 2024 budget remains uncertain alongside expectations of budget deficits in the coming years, the Chamber supports responsible government spending alongside targeted cuts to maintain key government programs while avoiding new cost burdens on businesses. We urge Governor Moore and the General Assembly to develop well-balanced fiscal strategies that promote economic stability and foster job creation, without disproportionately impacting Maryland’s business community. We support tax policy reform that reduces the cost of doing business. It is our goal to strengthen the state’s competitive tax climate to help attract and retain businesses, talent and investment. Policy makers must consider the trade-off between generating new revenue and enhancing Maryland’s economic competitiveness. The Chamber monitors and advocates for key issues and concerns affecting business, and supports economic development, research and development, and tourism to create and retain more jobs.

The Chamber will:

- Advocate for economic policies and incentives that create private sector jobs and investments and encourage economic growth.
- Support a sensible and fair state tax code, benefiting and providing economic relief for Maryland businesses and taxpayers.

Curb Over-Regulation (Support Appropriate Regulation)

As the voice of business, and representing the interests of business, the Chamber urges the General Assembly to balance the needs and obligations of employers and employees in enacting workplace-related laws and avoid unnecessary regulations and reduce excessive mandates in the market or workplace. We will address regulatory issues affecting daily operational activities and support legislation that allows market force principles to work in the state’s economy. The Chamber will:

- Maintain awareness that Washington County businesses regularly must operate in a three-state radius due to geography.
- Support employers’ ability to manage their workforce and to create wage and benefit policies that balance their own needs and those of their employees.
- Encourage modernization of the regulatory system in the state in making opening and running small businesses easier, including increasing access to capital and technical assistance.

About The Chamber

The Chamber promotes and facilitates cooperation and collaboration among elected officials at all levels of government. We value the diversity of our business and nonprofit community and encourage participation, inclusion, and collaboration.

Washington County Chamber of Commerce members include more than 640 organizations, representing over 40,000 local jobs in a wide variety of industries: Retail, Manufacturing, Healthcare, Skilled Trades, Service and Hospitality, Technology, Government, Nonprofit, and Education. For more information, call 301.739.2015 or visit www.hagerstown.org.

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