



# 2020 Public Policies Agenda

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The Greater Chambersburg Chamber of Commerce accepts the responsibility to represent its members as the voice of business. Our goal is to ensure that the business community's best interests are always represented in the region's governments. A pro-business climate is critical to the superior quality of life we enjoy in the greater Chambersburg area. It allows us to attract new businesses to our community and expand the ones currently hiring, serving and producing. It also allows us to grow.

The Chamber's professional staff and board of directors monitor borough, county, state and federal activities and represent our members on issues and legislation affecting the welfare of businesses and the quality of life in the Chambersburg area. When there is cause to advocate publicly on an issue, our president and representatives from the board of directors meet with decision-makers to ensure the position of the thousands of businesses and employees that we represent are being accounted for.

The Chambersburg Chamber Public Policies Agenda is updated annually to reflect the issues currently facing our community. In addition to specific priorities outlined below, the board of directors may identify key issues throughout the year that the Chamber will advocate for on behalf of the business community.

*Approved by the Board of Directors – May 2020*

## **Public Policies**

### **Address Local Education and Workforce Development Needs**

The Chamber will continue to work diligently with local stakeholders, businesses and organizations to open up a community conversation to help create the framework for a long-term workforce development initiative. This vision-based effort has led to a Community Education Coalition that works to create workforce development initiatives addressing the education and economic needs of Franklin County.

### **Combating the prescription drug and opioid epidemic**

Pennsylvania is facing a prescription drug and opioid abuse epidemic, particularly with injured workers. The Chamber seeks to improve Pennsylvania's workers' compensation system and help address prescription drug overuse and opioid addiction. The Chamber advocates implementing a prescription drug formulary for workers' compensation, which has helped mitigate prescription drug over-prescribing and addiction in many other states. Formularies offer a flexible approach that makes treatment of typical patients more efficient, facilitates exceptions for unique cases and addresses the outlier instances of over-prescribing. The Chamber also supports the proper certification of Utilization Review

Organizations to ensure qualified experts are holding all parties accountable to properly apply the formulary.

### **Opposition of Minimum Wage Increase**

While all businesses would feel the impact, small business employers would be especially hit hard: on average they make just \$50,000 a year. Businesses with such thin profit margins may not be able to absorb an employee wage hike, regardless whether their employees are full-time or part-time. Small businesses are the most common employers to pay minimum wage and would be most likely to halt hiring or cut jobs as a result of the wage hike. With more than 60 percent of Chamber membership comprised of small businesses, the Chamber is dedicated to representing businesses and advocating for no increase in the minimum wage that would be harmful to local small businesses.

### **Opposition of Reverse Tax Appeals**

The Chambersburg Area School District initiated an effort in 2015 to reassess the value of commercial properties to increase the property taxes owners must pay. A third-party consultant identifies properties as being appraised too low, and then the school board initiates a Reverse Tax Assessment Appeal. While this may provide financial benefits for the district in the short-term, it will have long-term negative consequences on the district, local businesses and the community.

Reverse Tax Appeals could lead to companies moving to other locations in the region where the taxes are significantly less. Property taxes paid by warehouses comprise a significant tax base for the school district and support over 1,000 jobs. If these companies leave Chambersburg for better tax rates and benefits, it could have a major negative impact on our business climate, and ultimately the entire community.

### **Widening of Interstate 81**

Interstate 81 has grown in its importance as a major north-south economic engine to our region. The explosive increase in truck movements has occurred and will certainly continue to grow as both intermodal and distribution centers come online. The highway provides access to major markets on the east coast. While the Chamber represents the interests of the business community, we can unequivocally express the desire of the residents of the county to see action to expand the highway. It has been 14 years since PennDOT studied the corridor, but little in the study has been implemented. We need to move immediately toward the expansion of the highway. While we wait for action, congestion grows. The Chamber supported the 2013 PA transportation bill (Act 89) to raise approximately 2 billion when the five-year phased-in tax increases are fully implemented. We are also supporting a long-term federal highway solution.

## **Legislative Agenda of PA Chamber Adopted by the Chambersburg Chamber**

### **Affordable and Accessible Health Care**

High health care costs remain an impediment for many businesses who wish to offer a high level of quality care and accessibility for employees at affordable prices and without undue bureaucracy. The Chamber will continue to advocate for policies that will encourage competition in the provision of health care while also giving employers the most flexibility when making health care decisions.

### **Balanced labor and employment laws and regulations**

The Chamber supports labor and employment public policy that helps facilitate a fair work environment without triggering unintended consequences that hurt employers. The business community supports eliminating misuse and improving the unemployment compensation system; and facilitating a workers' compensation system that roots out abuse and, most importantly, focuses on returning injured workers to full health and function. Employers oppose excessive mandates; artificial wage inflators; laws that force individuals in the private sector to pay dues to a union as a condition of employment; and allowing public resources to be used for collecting union dues and political contributions.

### **Creating an equitable civil justice system**

Pennsylvania's legal climate lacks protections that create a fair, balanced and common sense civil litigation system. The business community supports legal reforms that help prevent lawsuit abuse while protecting the right of legitimate plaintiffs to seek justice. The Chamber supports lawsuit abuse reform proposals that provide for full and timely compensation of parties legitimately injured; give employers predictability and certainty; and change the judicial system to achieve greater efficiencies and unbiased justice.

### **Flexibility in energy markets and science-based environmental requirements**

Numerous state and federal environmental regulations and energy mandates are hindering the state's economic positions. The Chamber opposes the imposition of new, and the expansion of existing, mandates and will continue to advocate for thoughtful, science-based development and flexible implementation of environmental law.

### **Improve the business tax structure**

Policymakers should reform and align the Commonwealth's tax structure with pro-growth initiatives enacted at the federal level. Our corporate net income tax rate must be reduced in order for our employers to prosper in a global economy. The Chamber will advocate for comprehensive changes to the state tax structure that embody the principles of competitiveness, predictability, fairness and simplicity. These changes include addressing the manner by which local taxes are levied and administered.

## **Modern, safe, efficient and reliable infrastructure systems**

Pennsylvania must construct and maintain reliable transportation, telecommunications, wireless and utility systems and other infrastructure. The Chamber will continue to advocate for greater efficiencies in their construction, maintenance and delivery, including streamlined permit and regulatory processes. The business community supports expanded reliance on public-private partnerships to help the Commonwealth meet its infrastructure needs in a manner consistent with the imperative for fiscal restraints.

## **Quality Educational Opportunities**

The Chamber supports a public education system based on rigorous standards, with appropriate transparency and robust accountability measures, to help ensure Pennsylvania students graduate high school as prepared as possible for the next phase of their lives. The Chamber further supports initiatives that help provide families with options to best fit the specific education needs of students.

## **Responsible State Spending and Smart Government**

The Chamber urges the legislature and Governor to work collaboratively toward enactment of a responsible, on-time state budget that exhausts all opportunities for cost-savings and more efficient spending. We urge lawmakers to build on the public pension reform achieved in Act 5 of 2017 and focus on fairly mitigating the unfunded liability providing for long-term solvency and addressing municipal pensions. The Chamber also supports public-private partnerships and opportunities to privatize those government services that could be more efficiently provided by the private sector.

## **Workforce Development and Career Readiness**

Employers in Pennsylvania continue to experience workforce challenges that are detrimental to our economy and prospects for growth. We urge lawmakers to build on past efforts and focus on policies that will help Pennsylvania's youth prepare for the jobs of the future; help facilitate upskilling opportunities within the incumbent workforce; encourage those on the sidelines to transition back into the workforce; and make Pennsylvania an attractive destination for individuals starting careers or relocating.