

CHAMBER OF COMMERCE
BRYAN/COLLEGE STATION

2023 State Legislative Action Plan

Presented to the 88th
Texas State Legislature by the
Bryan/College Station
Chamber of Commerce

WELCOME

The Bryan/College Station Chamber of Commerce has, as its foremost mission, the continuation and cultivation of a vigorous local economy. Through many of its programs, the Chamber enhances the ability of companies in the Brazos Valley to grow and prosper.

As the voice of local business, we take a proactive approach to ensure that those who represent us nationally in Washington D.C., state-wide in Austin, and locally in Bryan/College Station hear about the business interests of our community. The purpose of the State Legislative Action Plan is to summarize the important legislative goals and areas of concern to our community. We respectfully request your support on the issues outlined in this plan.

Please contact the B/CS Chamber of Commerce if you need clarification or additional information.



Jason Cornelius
Chairman of the Board



CHAMBER OF COMMERCE
BRYAN/COLLEGE STATION



Glen Brewer
President/CEO

HEALTHCARE

We support solutions that will allow the most efficient use of public, group and individual insurance arrangements to reduce the number of uninsured Texans.

Texas continues to lead the nation in the number of uninsured residents, and the end of the Public Health Emergency declaration is expected to see up to 1 million Texas residents disenrolled from the Medicaid program. There are proposed pathways to expansion coverage that may be cost neutral or lead to savings in state spending. Expansion may focus on private insurance options that require personal accountability and engagement to control costs, but it is critical that any health insurance option will include coverage of pre-existing conditions and all essential health benefits.

We support increased state funding to ensure timely and appropriate access to inpatient and outpatient, community-based services and supports for Texans with a behavioral health diagnosis.

Bryan/College Station/Brazos Valley has significant behavioral health needs, yet the region's 350,000 residents do not have a local inpatient mental health facility to support residents in crisis. Recent surveys show that 1 in 5 residents struggled with behavioral health issues, yet access to providers and facilities remains challenging with a lack of providers and coordination of care.

We support continued state funding for physician, nurse, behavioral health professional and allied health professional education and training as a part of workforce development.

On the front lines of the earliest days of the COVID Pandemic, healthcare workers (nurses, therapists and technicians) faced personal exposure, long hours and emotional exhaustion and left their healthcare jobs in record numbers during the pandemic. The Texas legislature should look at a broad range of programs and funding to help educate the next generation of healthcare workers, rebuilding the aging healthcare workforce.

We support local funding options to secure a Medicaid rate enhancement without using additional state funding.

Texas must find ways to work with the provider community to draw down additional federal dollars to improve Medicaid reimbursement rates, allowing for improved access and reducing the losses that providers encounter when caring for Medicaid patients.

REGULATORY/TAXES

We support discontinuing unfunded mandates on local governments.

State officials do not fund local services they create and require through legislation. These unfunded state mandates on local governments have placed an increased strain on local government budgets and increased local property taxes paid by **local** taxpayers.

We support restricting new and reducing existing state regulatory burdens, taxes and fees imposed on Texas businesses.

Excessive regulations on the local, state, and federal level cause businesses to drive up product and services prices to consumers. Maintaining the current "No Tax Due" threshold amount of \$1.23 million on the Texas Franchise Tax would provide Texas small businesses the opportunity to prosper and grow.

We support preserving local regulatory authority.

Locally elected officials should be allowed to decide, based on the needs of their constituents, how to provide appropriate services.

We support encouraging increased collaboration between State agencies to reduce waste, fraud and duplication.

The Texas Legislature needs to redouble its efforts to reduce expenditures by eliminating government mission creep and duplication of State programs.

We oppose additional property tax Revenue Caps on local governments.

We oppose property tax revenue caps on local government entities that apply any cap less than the current Voter Approved Rate (3.5% increase) requiring a mandatory referendum.

We support legislation that maintains internet/online sales tax sourcing as the point of purchase rather than point of distribution.



TRANSPORTATION



The Bryan College Station Chamber of Commerce, in collaboration with all 15 major transportation planning partners in Brazos County, including local governments, general public transit provider Brazos Transit District and the Texas A&M University System, developed the following Transportation Vision for Brazos County: Through community consensus, plan, develop and operate a quality transportation system for people and goods that promotes safety, enhances quality of life and supports economic opportunity throughout Brazos County.

The Bryan-College Station Chamber of Commerce has worked with all of our planning partners to leverage local resources to address congestion and transportation safety. This infrastructure need is not just maintenance. Funding must allow for infrastructure expansion in our area of high growth, rapid economic development, and population expansion. With the population of Texas expected to double by 2050, the Bryan-College Station Chamber of Commerce supports:

- Development of the Interstate Highway 14 in Texas with a priority on the Brazos County section which includes the I-214 corridor identified in the federal Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act.
- Using available legislative tools to eliminate or extend sunset provisions for Proposition 1 and Proposition 7 **AND** legislation to increase transportation funding for top priority projects across all transportation modes as approved by local elected officials via their Metropolitan Planning Organization and Rural Planning Organization and reinforced by public-private partnerships and regional mobility authorities.
- Legislation that equalizes the costs for road use consumption by alternatively fueled vehicles.
- Using available legislative tools to ensure that the Texas Electrical Grid does not become vulnerable to energy shortages with increased electric vehicle charging during periods of high demand.
- Additional state funding to rural and small urban public transit programs to assist local communities in meeting their mobility needs.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Protect the Economic Development Sales Tax for Economic and Community Development Purposes

The economic development sales tax, commonly known as Type A and B sales tax, meets the needs of both large and small communities. The flexibility provided by this tax gives cities the opportunity for both economic and community development activities, while enabling their community to compete for jobs and investment. The future prosperity of communities in Texas is enhanced by the Type A and Type B sales tax and it has long been the indispensable asset that allowed Texas to remain at the forefront of success in economic development. Projects that received location, expansion, or retention assistance from this sales tax have generated an overall impact of nearly \$110 billion in annual gross state product and nearly 1.2 million jobs.

Support Reauthorization of Chapter 313 of Texas Tax Code

The Texas Economic Development Act (Chapter 313) has helped attract billions in new investment to Texas and helped create thousands of high-paying jobs, while increasing property tax base for school districts and local governments. Chapter 313 allows for a 10-year limitation on the appraised property value for a portion of the school district property tax and in exchange, the business agrees to build or install new property and create jobs in the school district. This act makes money for the state by helping attract and generate new tax revenue from new sources of business activity that otherwise may not be in the state.

Support Continued Funding of the Texas Enterprise Fund

The Texas Enterprise Fund (TEF) has invigorated the states' renewed economic development efforts and allowed Texas to compete globally for new jobs and high-impact investment. Since 2004, the TEF has awarded over \$679 million towards projects creating over nearly 104,256 direct jobs and capital investment of more than \$34 billion. For example, Apple's expansion in Williamson County will add 4,000 direct jobs and \$400 million in investment to that area.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Maintain Funding for Texas Workforce Development Programs

The Texas Workforce Commission has administered funding to job training programs, such as the Skills Development Fund, the High Demand Job Training Program, and others since its inception. The Skills Development Fund is the only customized job training program for economic development in Texas. Through this fund, 120,947 jobs have been created, 4,572 employers have been helped, and 398,125 workers have been trained. Programs and funds like the Skills Development Fund will continue to pay dividends in this great state for years to come.

Support and Promote Innovation and Entrepreneurship

In order for Texas to stay competitive in a global economy, it is very important to support and invest in technology and innovation that will lead to business investment and high-paying jobs for Texans. Programs like the Governor's University Research Institute (GURI) and the Cancer Prevention Research Institute of Texas (CPRIT) ensure continued innovation and investment in Texas.

Promote and Protect Local Control including Preserving Local Tax Incentives like Chapter 312 of the Texas Tax Code

The degree to which local leaders, institutions and governing bodies can make independent decisions about the governance and operation of their community, influences how much a community can shape their own destiny, manage their own growth, and better represent their citizenry. Chapter 312, known as the Property Redevelopment and Tax Abatement Act, allows communities to attract new jobs and grow tax bases without any cost to the state or to local taxpayers. Programs, including Chapter 312, will ensure more successful communities throughout the State of Texas.

Preserve Chapter 380 and 381 Agreements for Economic Development Projects

Economic development agreements have empowered both Texas cities and counties to negotiate favorable deals for their residents while attracting investment, development and creating jobs. Chapter 380 of the Local Government Code authorizes municipalities to offer incentives designed to promote economic development such as commercial and retail projects. Chapter 381 of the Local Government Code allows counties to provide incentives encouraging developers to build in their jurisdictions. Using such agreements, cities and counties may promote state and local economic development and stimulate business all at little cost or risk to taxpayers.

TEXAS PUBLIC EDUCATION

School Finance

- Advocate for an adequate and equitable school finance system that raises per pupil funding to the national average.
- Support sustainable state funding for HB 3.
- Advocate for local discretion with spending to ensure that the needs of students, staff, and communities are met.
- Support the use of enrollment vs. attendance as the standard for school funding.

Transparency and Accountability

- We support ensuring that all private, charter, and home schools that receive state funding are held to the same accountability standards for student performance and financial transparency as public schools.
- Increase the transparency and accountability of private, charter, and home schools that receive state funding.

Use of Public Tax Dollars

- We oppose any state plan that would divert public tax dollars from public schools to private entities, homeschooled students, or parents with no academic or financial accountability or transparency to the state, taxpayers, or local communities.

Ballot Language Honesty

- Allow school district bond and voter-approved tax ratification propositions to include ballot language that accurately informs voters of what the measure seeks to accomplish.
- Current laws surrounding ballot language requirements create confusion and do not allow for clarity.



TEXAS PUBLIC EDUCATION



Accountability - Measure what matters

- Advocate for the establishment of a comprehensive accountability system that looks beyond high-stakes, one-day, multiple-choice exams to meaningful assessments that have value for students, parents, and teachers, as well as measures what each community deems important in promoting college and career readiness.
- Advocate for the removal of A–F campus and district ratings that oversimplify the complex work of schools and teaching to the test.

School Safety

- Advocate for increased funding of the School Safety Allotment and local flexibility to ensure districts can adequately meet student and staff safety needs.
- Advocate state funded support for increased counseling services and campus based mental and behavioral health services for students. The academic needs of students cannot be separated from the social, emotional and behavioral needs of students and vice-versa.

Teacher Recruitment and Retention- Increase support

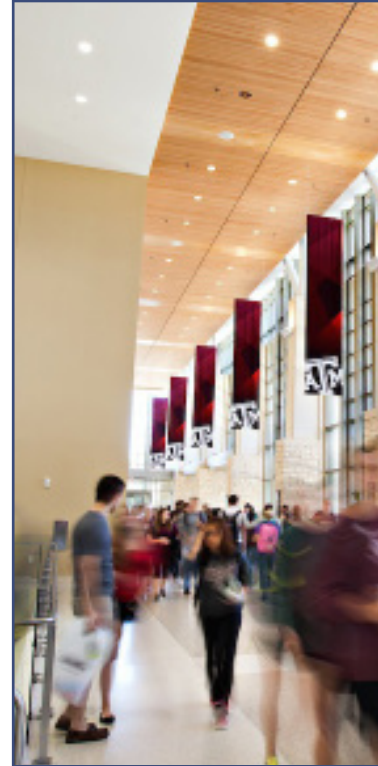
- Elevate the profession of teaching by providing more substantial financial aid and other programs to incentivize students to enter the field
- Increasing educator and staff compensation
- Improve staff health and retirement benefits
- Decreasing the burdensome state mandates that increase an educator's workload
- Increase state (not district or retiree) support of the Teacher Retirement System (TRS) pension to ensure the system remains solvent and provides for all retirees. Account for Cost-of-Living Adjustment (COLA).

HIGHER EDUCATION

Making a transformational difference is a hallmark of Texas A&M University and Blinn College District students, staff, faculty, and graduates. The legislative priorities of both Texas A&M and Blinn College reflect and reinforce their commitment to continue providing a quality, accessible, and affordable education.

Texas A&M University

- Significant investment in the university's core mission, academic education, by increasing per-student formula funding, specifically to account for added costs per significant enrollment growth.
- Secure investment in the state's 1943 Hazlewood Act tuition waiver for eligible students by covering costs incurred by universities, currently an unfunded mandate, to honor a 2009 legislative commitment for dependents of military service veterans, known as "legacy" beneficiaries.
- Sufficient investment in the university's student mental health services by directing funding to expand counseling resources to effectively and efficiently increase retention of mental health professionals and improve recruiting.



HIGHER EDUCATION



- Sustainable investment in the university's research programs by enhancing certain funding levels especially increasing the rate for the Texas Research University Fund (TRUF) and maintaining the funding for the Governor's Research University Initiative (GURI).
- Substantial investment in the university's professional workforce development ecosystem for all industry sectors, especially high-demand related to semiconductor chip manufacturing, by dedicating funding to leverage available federal programs specifically the U.S. CHIPS and Science Act, as well as recommendations from the Governor's National Semiconductor Center Task Force.

Blinn College District

- We support increasing state funding for both academic and workforce training in order to meet the education needs of Texas students at an affordable rate.
- We support the expansion of workforce training to fill the critical workforce needs of our state and provide ongoing support to the Texas economy.

ENERGY & NATURAL RESOURCES

The continued production of energy and stewardship of our natural resources is vital to a sustainable national and local economy.

Electricity

- We support preserving local regulatory authority.
- We oppose legislation that would require municipally-owned utilities to transition their customers to customer choice in ERCOT.
- We support easing regulatory requirements to support targeted expansions of the transmission system.
- We oppose legislation that would restrict municipalities and municipally-owned utilities from engaging in the legislative process including, but not limited to, contracting with a legislative professional, paying dues to an association that contracts with one, or by implementing excessive disclosure and reporting requirements.

ENERGY & NATURAL RESOURCES

Water

- We oppose legislation that would (1) require Groundwater Conservation Districts to transition groundwater management to a surface-acreage based correlative rights system; or (2) limit the ability of Groundwater Conservation Districts to protect historic use for well owners and their reasonable investment-backed expectations in their water wells.
- We support legislation that would allow a municipality or Special Utility District to count their service territory as part of an area legally controlled as far as acreage and drilling wells, and we oppose legislation that would amend Section 36.116(c), Water Code, to limit the ability of a Groundwater Conservation District to consider the service area and needs of a retail public utility.
- We support legislation that would expand the use of Aquifer Storage and Recovery projects and oppose legislation that would attempt to undermine in any way House Bill 655 passed in the 2015 session, which gave the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) exclusive jurisdiction for regulating and permitting of Aquifer Storage and Recovery (ASR).
- We support continued legislative funding of the Texas Water Development Board's programs for planning and financing implementation of projects in the regional and state water plans and the regional and state flood plans.

THANK YOU TO OUR SPONSORS



**BRAZOS TRANSIT
DISTRICT**



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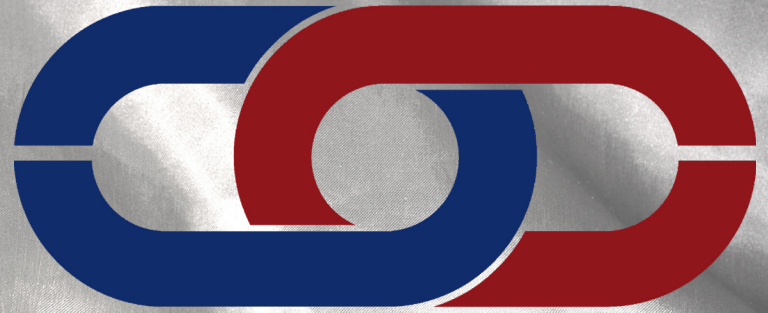
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