2021
TACOMA-PIERCE COUNTY CHAMBER
WASHINGTON STATE LEGISLATIVE AGENDA

 IMPROVE THE BUSINESS CLIMATE | GROW BUSINESSES
CREATE PRIVATE SECTOR JOBS | PROMOTE ANTI-RACISM AND BUSINESS

The mission of the Tacoma-Pierce County Chamber is to make the South Sound the most equitable and inclusive place to do business in Washington State. Through this mission, the Chamber will provide businesses in the South Sound strong advocacy efforts in order to protect the rights of business owners, grow business and the economy, increase our private sector workforce, and improve the overall business climate. In this legislative cycle it is critical we have a strong presence by uniting our business community at the state capitol.

Racism has no place in our business community. We can no longer just be against racism, rather we need to take action and work toward implementing anti-racist policies. This will be good for our community, good for our economy, and therefore, good for our businesses. Just as our communities have rallied to address the COVID-19 crisis, we need to rally to address the crisis of racism.

With an eye on anti-racist policies and actions as the backdrop, the Chamber asks the 2021 Legislature to keep the following guiding principles in mind as it goes about its work for the people of the state of Washington during the 2021 Legislative Session.

THE CHAMBER’S TOP LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

1) Protect the Puget Sound Gateway Package
2) Support Urban Data Center Legislation
3) Oppose Restrictive Scheduling
4) Support Streamlining Process to Vacate Criminal Records
5) Extend and Expand Multi Family Tax Exemption
6) Adopt Innovating Methods of Infrastructure Financing
GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The Legislature should strive for the creation and retention of private sector jobs by adopting a sustainable budget, prioritizing spending and implementing spending controls and reforms to provide long-term financial stability. At the same time the Legislature should focus on adopting legislation to streamline regulatory policies, promote job growth, and enhance the business climate. Doing so will help to narrow the education and workforce gaps in the globally competitive environment we live in today.

The Chamber will support legislation that:
• Positively impacts Pierce County’s economy
• Promotes job growth
• Enhances the business climate

The Chamber supports policies that:
• Attract private investment
• Fund STEM education and workforce development
• Build infrastructure
• Decrease the regulatory burden (decrease duplication, increase predictability and decrease the cost of permitting and regulations) on businesses.

Such legislation and policy initiatives will help all Pierce County businesses to be successful and globally competitive.
TOP PRIORITIES

1) **Protect the Puget Sound Gateway Package**: The Chamber will protect the Gateway/SR 167 project, its funding, and the reforms adopted to implement the overall Transportation Package adopted by the 2015 legislature. The Chamber will continue to protect the project’s early implementation legislative proposals (adopted in 2019), authorize necessary tolling on the corridor, and ensure project cost savings are reinvested in the corridor.

2) **Support Urban Data Center Legislation**: The Chamber will advocate for a sales and use tax exemption to qualifying businesses and their tenants for the purchase of eligible server equipment, power infrastructure and related labor, material, equipment and services, for eligible data centers in counties like Pierce. SB 5414 / HB 1473

3) **Oppose Restrictive Scheduling**: Policies restricting employee scheduling place additional costs on employers to meet changing environmental conditions. Often conditions are out of their control, like weather, protests, pandemics, and ever-changing government regulations. Restrictive scheduling also removes long held systems in place for employees to work together to swap shifts and gain additional hours when and where they want rather than creating additional burdens on businesses that would preclude employees collaborating on scheduling.

4) **Support Streamlining Process to Vacate Criminal Records**: A policy allowing the court-driven process for reviewing and vacating criminal convictions based on current statutory eligibility requirements will create employment access to thousands of individuals across Washington. Currently, these individuals qualify to have their convictions vacated under state law, but are unable to seek relief due to cost, complexity, and lack of legal assistance. Governor Inslee vetoed this legislation due to COVID/budgetary constraints, and The Chamber intends to advocate for its passage.

5) **Extend and Expand Multi Family Tax Exemption**: Support legislation extending and expanding the property tax exemption for new and rehabilitated multiple-unit dwellings in urban growth areas: Cities and counties who plan under the Growth Management Act are allowed to use the multifamily tax exemption (MFTE), authorizing them to adopt qualifying guidelines that extend the existing 8 year and 12 year MFTEs.

6) **Adopt Innovating Methods of Infrastructure Financing**: Create tools to allow the development of infrastructure before systems are in overwhelmed in order to spur additional development. Tax increment financing (TIF) is one type of tool that has worked well in other communities.
TRANSPORTATION

- Maintaining and preserving the existing transportation system should be highly prioritized by the legislature.

- Support road repair and methods for reducing road congestion, enabling easier access to businesses. This includes, but is not limited to, increased bus and light rail.

- Reduce the patchwork regulatory systems which cause inefficient use of our transportation network. Additionally, provide uniform state licensing of rideshare operations with common statewide standards.

- Support local transportation infrastructure policies and investments for Pierce County, improving freight mobility. Additionally, provide congestion relief and transportation system(s) reliability.

- Support legislation that encourages the use of multimodal commutes. Suggestions include the continuation of the commute trip reduction [CTR], credit for businesses who provide employee incentives to ease traffic congestion, and the creation of increased road capacity.

- Support the funding and implementation strategies from the WDOT SR 162 Study including completion of the design and construction work for the SR 410/SR162 interchange.
TAX AND FISCAL POLICY SIMPLIFICATION - SUPPORTING TAX POLICIES THAT ENCOURAGE INVESTMENT AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN WASHINGTON

As taxes collected by the State are used to fund State services, they also reduce the amount of money available to invest in research, innovation, and staff. Higher taxes not carefully considered can further discourage investment in Washington state. A set of simplified tax policies targeting specific growth sectors while reducing administrative burdens allows for a more acceptable tax code.

- Support efforts to achieve a balanced state budget while promoting economic development opportunities, job growth and strengthened competitiveness.
- Oppose fund transfers from dedicated funds and accounts to the general fund or unrelated programs. Support efforts to restore previous diversions of these funds.
- Support tax code administrative simplification that reduces administrative costs and tax burdens to Pierce County’s businesses.
- Retain, extend and expand tax incentives that benefit the economy and support job growth in Pierce County.
- Support tax and regulatory policies which result in the increased movement of goods through the Puget Sound gateway.
- Oppose a Washington State income and capital gains tax as well as advocate for profits rather than gross revenues to be taxed. Doing so will create a better representation of earnings.
- Oppose efforts to reduce or change the existing funding formula for the state’s association development organizations (ADOs).
- Support legislation to assist the Port of Tacoma and other industrial areas in their efforts to expand and preserve jobs and streamline the regulations affecting their operations.

UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

The Chamber will work to preserve previously adopted legislative changes and oppose increasing unemployment insurance rates. Additionally, we will encourage the adoption of cost controls within the unemployment insurance system, avoid benefit enhancements and eligibility standards, and support the maintaining of reasonable reserves to reduce the cost to businesses.
ENVIRONMENT - IDENTIFY OPPORTUNITIES TO SUPPORT INNOVATION WITH STREAMLINED ENVIRONMENTAL POLICIES

From timber to tourism to our drinking water, our natural environment is a major driver of our local economy. With Washington businesses’ share of the greenhouse gases decreasing over the last 20 years, businesses should be applauded for helping the economy grow while decreasing impacts. Washington state must continue to encourage innovation in sustainability rather than new regulatory burdens and taxes. State policy makers should not be more aggressive than their counterparts in other states by adopting climate change-related policies that will adversely impact the construction industry, our utilities and our transportation infrastructure. Enactment of any such additional policies to regulate GHG emissions threatens investments in Washington’s economy.

- Oppose efforts to impose GHG policies at the state or local level that go beyond those required by the Federal Clean Air Act.

- Support efforts to expand upon Washington’s current innovation sectors. This includes encouraging and supporting research and development for emerging technologies that reduce GHG and create jobs in Washington State.

- Support policies to improve and incentivize the use of alternative fuels and the infrastructure necessary to supply those fuels in Washington.

- Streamline the process for state government land use and environmental review processes, eliminating unnecessary delay, duplication, and expense.

- Support policies that incentivize and further the safe, reliable and efficient use of electricity and natural gas transportation in Washington State. Doing so will ensure the alternative fuels are taxed in parity with traditional transportation fuels.

- As utilities continue to face a transformational change in their industry, responding to evolving customer expectations and rapidly changing technological advancements, policy makers need to ensure utilities can be more nimble in a rapidly changing market place. Utilities must be responsive to market changes, as well as customer desire for real-time adoption of emerging technologies that allow for greater control over energy choices, cleaner and greener power – all while maintaining an affordable low cost. Policies encouraging the use of performance and incentive-based regulation, along with appropriate glide paths and compliance tools - to aide in the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions on the electric grid - must be advanced to allow for the transformational changes in the utility sector.
VETERANS & MILITARY AFFAIRS - RECOGNIZE OPPORTUNITIES TO IMPROVE PARTNERSHIPS WITH VETERANS AND THE MILITARY

Joint Base Lewis-McChord is the single largest employer in Pierce County. Fortunately, we are also one of the preferred locations of transitioning service members. This provides a unique opportunity to show our support for federal investment and retain a high-quality workforce.

- Improve support for veteran’s and their family members’ transition into the civilian workforce. This includes providing opportunities for higher education or training and streamlining the transfer of professional certificates and licensures of service members from other states.

- Support funding for “clear zone” studies and purchases to reduce encroaching land uses located within the McChord Field Clear Zone.

- Advocate for community compatible land use proposals to support the military mission of defense installations identified in the 2005 BRAC Report and the JBLM Joint Land Use Study (JLUS).

WORKFORCE TRAINING & EDUCATION - INVEST IN WORKFORCE TRAINING EFFORTS TO ADDRESS TALENT SHORTAGES AND SKILL GAPS

Employers are choosing where to locate in part due to the availability of a skilled workforce. To maintain competitiveness, we must continue to invest in workforce training and educational opportunities beyond K-12. The Chamber believes policies and investments to address talent shortages in key industry sectors are crucial. It’s necessary to support flexibility in implementing workforce development and job training programs through Pierce County based entities. This includes the workforce development councils, school districts, community-based organizations, community and technical colleges, universities (especially the UWT), and local apprenticeship programs.

- Support programs that foster alignment of education curriculum, including career and technical educational opportunities. Implementation includes increased funding to skilled trades and vocational certifications, especially in the health care, building and construction trades and behavioral health areas.

- Support expansion of University of Washington Tacoma to better serve residents outside of the Seattle area.
HEALTHCARE - SUPPORT INNOVATIVE PRIVATE SECTOR APPROACHES AND PARTNERSHIPS TO HEALTHCARE

Healthcare is a critical service as well as a major sector of the Pierce County economy. With roughly 30,000 people in Pierce County working in healthcare, it provides one of the major sources of wages for our region. As the methods of providing and paying for care change, we must be flexible enough to respond while not placing increased burdens on our employers and their employees. While increasing access to medical services is a major goal of the Affordable Care Act, lowering costs and keeping coverage affordable for consumers and employers is also part of the Triple Aim. Policymakers should balance access with cost containment measures, so coverage remains affordable for both the consumer and the employers. For Pierce County specifically, the behavioral health needs in our community have grown, and we need to address the complex issues surrounding this need. To accomplish this, the Chamber will

• Oppose legislation that increases the cost of healthcare coverage borne by businesses and individuals.

• Support legislative efforts to encourage innovative, private sector approaches to cost containment, including health care cost transparency.

• Support policies that encourage, enhance or expand medical and behavioral health services - especially in the rural areas of Pierce County.

• View Association Health Plans (AHPs) as a viable market option for small business to provide affordable healthcare to their employees.

• Avoid adoption of policies that impose duplicative governing structures, mandates, and restrictions on the ability of providers to care for their patients.

• Support legislative strategies for increasing recruitment of health care professionals.
BACIS EDUCATION (K-12) - IDENTIFY FUNDING FOR BASIC EDUCATION OF ALL STUDENTS WHILE SUPPORTING INNOVATIVE SCHOOLS

A skilled workforce starts with basic K-12 education. Furthermore, quality workers are often choosing where to reside based on the quality of the educational opportunities for their families. We must ensure schools continue to provide high quality education by providing them with sufficient resources. To achieve this the Chamber will:

• Support the state constitutional requirement for provision of basic education for all children. This provision will allow appropriate allocation of resources and corresponds to expectations of such funding, including local control by the principal, performance reviews, higher pay for positions of higher demand, and the like.

• Ask the Legislature to properly prioritize career and technical education within the K-12 curriculum.

• Prioritize capital and operational funding in programs that have demonstrated an ability to enhance student learning.

• Support legislation that encourages innovative learning models and provides the greatest student achievement and performance-based management policies for teachers and principals.