



2019 Position Papers

OUR VISION:

To be a leader and advocate for business, and provide an influential voice dedicated to economic success and quality of life.

OUR MISSION:

To serve the interest of its members, and promote economic prosperity in the region.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Halifax County Chamber of Commerce is a membership organization that develops its legislative focus from the priorities of its membership. The Chamber serves over 350 businesses employing approximately 11,000 people. The Chamber provides representation and advocacy for our membership on issues that have the ability to impact the business community. The Chamber will continue to serve as the ‘Voice of Business.’

The Board of Directors has adopted public policy positions on business issues affecting Chamber members as defined in this document. The Chamber’s government affairs committee uses these policies as a guideline when reviewing local development projects and legislative issues to determine Chamber support or opposition, as well as the type and intensity of Chamber response.

Six Issues that Frame the Legislative Agenda:

- Business and Economic Development
- Education
- Workforce Development
- Environment
- Health Care
- Transportation

The Chamber believes that the Commonwealth’s and region’s successes depend on investments and priorities that stimulate and advance economic growth and prosperity. Each year, the Chamber frames key policy goals for the year. The current plan includes:

- An environment where business can prosper;
- Talent development for the region’s workforce;
- Quality of life that attracts and retains residents and workers; and
- Collaboration that leads to economic prosperity in the region.

For the 2019 session, the Halifax County Chamber of Commerce respectfully requests our legislators support the following priorities:

- Investments in agriculture and forestry, healthcare, advanced materials and manufacturing, information technology, and energy.
- Continued support to maintain Virginia’s pro-business policies with an emphasis on support for the “right-to-work” law.
- Support of an effective workforce development strategy
 - Supportive of certified training and non-credit training with continued funding for the New Economy Workforce Credentials Act;
 - Consisting of internships, apprenticeships, and other work-based learning opportunities;
 - Occurring in partnership with our K-12 and higher education institutions.
- Encouragement for a well-funded system of public education that begins at birth and strengthens the focus on early childhood education.
- Legislation to support additional state funding for capital improvements through internet sales tax and a sales tax increase.

Business and Economic Development

Economic development initiatives are an essential component of a healthy business environment. The Halifax County Chamber of Commerce supports legislative policies and actions that provide businesses of all sizes the tools and talent they need to increase their competitiveness and stimulate growth while continuing to attract new industries to our region.

Business Climate

The Halifax County Chamber of Commerce supports:

- Protection of Virginia's business climate.
- Well-funded, cohesive, and aggressive economic development effort.
- An environmental regulatory climate that is consistent, predictable, and comprehensible by the regulated community, that is responsive to the needs of new and existing businesses, and that provides a level regulatory playing field in relation to surrounding states.
- A balanced economic development approach that acknowledges the value not only of industrial development but also of foreign trade, tourism, and assistance to small business.
- Continued responsiveness to the needs of small business and existing industry.
- State policy that encourages and promotes entrepreneurship development.

Incentives/Investments

The Halifax County Chamber of Commerce supports:

- Performance-based business incentives policy to keep Virginia competitive with other southeast states.
- Programs which encourage investments in technology infrastructure, support regional economic development planning, promote regional workforce training, or otherwise promote cooperative regional efforts to maintain or attract businesses considered essential for the continued future economic development of our region.
- Tax incentives and initiatives, especially during expansions, the start-up or relocation of a business.
- The Governor's Opportunity Fund and other state-directed incentive programs.
- The Southern Virginia Regional Alliance.
- Existing enterprise zones in Halifax County.
- GO Virginia's work to restore Virginia's position of economic leadership by growing and diversifying the state's economy through the creation of state financial incentives.
- Collaboration on private-sector growth and job creation by business, education, and government in GO Virginia region 3.
- Historical tax credits for the revitalization of towns and cities.
- Investments in SVHEC workforce development programs: Career Tech Academy, Center of Nursing Excellence, HVAC (new), IT Academy, Mechatronics and Welding.

Employer/Employee Relations

The Halifax County Chamber of Commerce supports:

- Virginia's "Right To Work" statute.
- Fairness, non-discrimination, economic security and health in the workplace.
- Legitimate right of employers to manage their employees.
- Unemployment compensation for the primary purpose of providing adequate and temporary financial assistance to employees who become unemployed through no fault of their own.

- Efforts to facilitate the ability of employers to give and receive information about former or prospective employees without exposing themselves to unwarranted civil liability.
- Adoption and implementation of substance abuse-free workplace policies.
- Employment-at-will doctrine.
- Voluntary efforts to reduce workplace accidents and illnesses.

The Halifax County Chamber of Commerce opposes:

- Any attempt to repeal or modify the “Right To Work” statute.
- Collective bargaining for public employees.
- Permitting direct and formal employer/employee negotiations to include “meet and confer” authorization.
- Payroll deductions for public employees to support labor organizations whose primary focus is collective bargaining.
- Efforts to extend benefits to workers who through their own actions or inactions become unemployed as a result of an employer initiated lockout or an employee strike.
- Expanded government regulation of the workplace and legislation, which would limit an employer's right to operate during a strike.
- Changes in the worker's compensation insurance law that will undermine the law’s basic concept and sound balance.
- Limiting an employer’s ability to ensure a substance abuse-free workplace.
- Wrongful discharge claims that seek to impose common law remedies on employers in lieu of or in addition to existing statutory remedies.
- Government mandates that require the payment of a set wage, often with benefits, as a condition for obtaining contracts with that government.

General Laws

The Halifax County Chamber of Commerce supports:

- Retention of the common law doctrine of contributory negligence.
- Ending accelerated sales tax collection for retailers.

The Halifax County Chamber of Commerce opposes:

- Expanded reporting requirements beyond those in current law.

Agriculture

The Halifax County Chamber of Commerce supports:

- Agricultural diversity within the Commonwealth.
- Tobacco Region Revitalization Commission’s efforts to foster economic development in the tobacco dependent communities of Southside and Southwest Virginia.

Tourism

The Halifax County Chamber of Commerce supports:

- The strengthening of programs that support tourism product development and infrastructure.

- Additional funding for tourism marketing for the VTC to ensure that Virginia remains a top destination for tourists and that the sizable contributions to the economy from tourism revenues continue.
- The state's efforts to maintain and expand domestic and international travel market, and motion picture production.
- The Halifax County Chamber of Commerce supports investment in Virginia State Parks and the state park systems' priority to improve and expand outdoor recreation and access, and strengthen state and local community recreation, tourism, and economic goals.

Government Operations

The Halifax County Chamber of Commerce supports:

- Tax reform that is equitable and broad-based, fosters a favorable business climate, encourages economic development, and promotes prosperity for all Virginians.
- Local authority to restructure, reduce, or eliminate the local business, professional and occupational license (BPOL) tax.
- Regional cooperation among adjoining localities particularly where significant economies of scale can be achieved, thereby reducing revenue requirements and resultant tax burden.
- Protecting Virginia's fiscal integrity and preserving the AAA bond rating.
- Full funding of state mandates on localities.

The Halifax County Chamber of Commerce opposes:

- Expansion of legislative sessions beyond present Constitutional constraints as well as other departures from Virginia's tradition of a part time legislature.
- Any increase to the machinery and tools tax.

Energy

The Halifax County Chamber of Commerce supports:

- Reliable, cost-effective and alternative renewable energy sources while keeping Virginia competitive in the energy market.

Broadband

The Halifax County Chamber of Commerce supports:

- Efforts to deploy universal affordable access to high speed Internet services ("broadband") particularly in underserved and rural areas to ensure competitive economic advantages.

Industry Sectors

The Halifax County Chamber of Commerce supports:

- A strong environment for research and development and new company formation.
- The Southern Virginia Higher Education Center R&D Center for Advanced Manufacturing & Energy Efficiency.
- Innovation hubs around concentrated areas of activity to grow new companies.
- Expanded opportunities in agriculture and forestry, advanced materials manufacturing, healthcare and information technology.
- Public/private partnerships.

Small Business / Entrepreneurship

The Halifax County Chamber of Commerce supports:

- The integration of small business and entrepreneurship development in statewide economic planning efforts.
- More small business development financing, venture capital formation, and tax incentives.
- Strengthening access to Virginia's current incentive programs for small businesses and entrepreneurs.

Education

The Halifax County Chamber of Commerce recognizes that quality public education is essential to business and the economic vitality of the region. Therefore, the Chamber supports programs, policies, and legislation that enables and fosters collaboration between the education and business communities.

Our Commonwealth's economic growth and prosperity will be fueled by the ability of our workforce to be productive, adaptable, and continuous learners. While money alone cannot solve all of our educational needs, adequate funding for education is essential if we believe that our students deserve a well-rounded, high quality education that is supported by student performance and achievement.

As decisions are made, our elected officials must recognize and acknowledge the diversity across our Commonwealth and the absolute necessity of ensuring that all areas of Virginia have equal opportunities for the educational systems in their regions. Plagued by declining population and resources in our communities, the Commonwealth must support and develop funding formulas that adequately address the educational needs of all regions of our Commonwealth.

Early Childhood Education

The Halifax County Chamber of Commerce supports:

- Continued commitment to early childhood education to enhance the likelihood of future academic success.
- Improved access to high quality, evidence-based early childhood education, which is a key determinant of both school readiness and third grade reading attainment.

K-12

The Halifax County Chamber of Commerce supports:

- A stronger engagement of the K-12 system in workforce development initiatives and strategies that focus on a reduction in the high school dropout rate, an increase in the number of students who graduate from high school or receive a GED, and high school graduates who are prepared for higher education and/or the workforce with the skills required in a global economy.
- Policies and practices in which students are expected to achieve at internationally competitive levels within an educational system that ensures the highest levels of quality in instructional content and learning strategies.
- Active involvement of businesses and business people in the administrative, teaching, and enrichment activities of schools and on state and local boards, policy-making bodies, and advisory groups.
- Virginia's Constitutional commitment to provide a quality public education.
- A coherent, integrated system of education that provides lifelong quality learning opportunities for all individuals.
- A strong, accountable K-12 program with indicators of academic success.
- Providing sufficient resources to ensure the best buildings, equipment, materials, and instructional personnel to include teacher recertification.
- Elevating the educational respectability and academic rigor of technical education to a status which encourages workforce development at all levels.
- The concept that all public education personnel should be held accountable for results.

- Encouragement and facilitation of parental involvement in all aspects of their children's education.
- Efforts to provide adequate funding for education by developing more equitable sources of revenue.
- Exposing students to an array of career options and paths that favor ones interests, goals, strengths, and abilities.
- School-to-work transition services that equip students to navigate paths to be more productive.
- School board members making the decisions for which they are charged without undue influence from other elected and/or governing bodies.
- Classroom teaching opportunities on a supplemental, adjunct, part-time, or fulltime basis to those prepared by business, trade, professional, and life experiences.
- Legislation to support additional state funding for capital improvements through internet sales tax and a sales tax increase.

The Halifax County Chamber opposes:

- Any adjustment in the Standards of Quality funding formula which would result in a reduction of state support for K-12 education.
- Any reduction in state funds flowing to local school divisions for K-12 education which would have a significantly negative impact on small rural school systems.

Post-Secondary/Higher Education

The Halifax County Chamber of Commerce supports:

- Continued funding and support of the New Economy Workforce Credentials Act that endorses credentials that are valued by the business and industry community.
- Continued support for the Southern Virginia Higher Education Center.
- Minimize program duplication and competition for scarce resources.
- Increase higher education focus on requirements associated with future workforce needs.
- Support the Virginia Community College's Rural Virginia Horseshoe Initiative in their efforts to reach rural students and transition them into higher education.
- National competitiveness of Virginia's public institutions.
- Efforts to make higher education more affordable and accessible.
- Increasing the Virginia Tuition Assistance Grant Funding as a tuition equalization plan.
- Mobilizing institutions of higher education to contribute systematically to the economic growth of the Commonwealth.
- Providing more state support for certified training programs and non-credit workforce training programs.

Workforce Development

An educated and skilled workforce with a strong work ethic and sense of values is the foundation of a competitive economy. Communication skills, math, science, and other academic fundamentals, as well as the practical skills of today's workplace, are imperative for the economic health of Halifax County.

The Halifax County Chamber of Commerce encourages legislation that will support and create workforce programs, as well as initiatives that address labor supply and demand. The Chamber supports an emphasis on incumbent and transitioning worker training and workforce skill development.

Demand-Driven

The Halifax County Chamber of Commerce supports:

- The recognition of the National Career Readiness Certificate (NCRC) as an industry-recognized credential.
- The recognition and designation of localities and regions that achieve the “Certified Work Ready Community” goals as established by ACT, Inc.
- A Workforce Investment system that functionally and effectively serves all regions of the Commonwealth focused on matching the skill and employment needs of businesses with the training and education provided to recipients to help ensure employment needs match employee availability within the WIB's region.
- Workforce development services that streamline efficiencies and work cooperatively to maximize access to and delivery of workforce development programs and services.
- Continued involvement by business to ensure services are focused on skills development that is responsive to the current needs of businesses.
- A multi-faceted approach to workforce development involving K-12, vocational and proprietary schools, internships, apprenticeship programs, and public and private two and four-year institutions, with an emphasis on industry-recognized credentials.
- The utilization of the expertise of public and private sectors in redesigning curricula, identifying relevant credentials, and developing training programs for both technical and “soft skills” education.

Regional Solutions

The Halifax County Chamber of Commerce supports:

- A stronger linkage between workforce and economic development at the state and regional levels.
- Increased capacity of regions to develop and support industry sectors and sector strategies that address specific industries' needs.

Training

The Halifax County Chamber of Commerce supports:

- Expanded funding for certified training programs and non-credit workforce training.
- Continuation of funding of the Virginia Jobs Investment Program for training of new workers and re-training of existing workers.

Targeted Sectors & Populations

The Halifax County Chamber of Commerce supports:

- Providing funding for adult and continuing education with the goal to increase the percentage of adults with high school equivalency.

- State policy that aggressively tackles the skills gap, especially in the ‘middle skill’ occupations which require more than high-school, but not a four-year degree.

Environment

The Halifax County Chamber of Commerce supports initiatives to ensure a clean and healthy environment. The Chamber welcomes collaboration with other community partners to inform both individuals and businesses about costs, distribution, and renewable opportunities.

Regulations

The Halifax County Chamber of Commerce supports:

- Streamline and simplify regulatory procedures, where possible.
- State regulations should not be more stringent than federal regulations unless there is a specific need to protect public health and environment.

Environmental Services

The Halifax County Chamber of Commerce supports:

- Expanding environmental services, such as solid waste disposal, at locations where there is an existing acceptable facility, capable of being fully served by fire, water, sewer and other established municipal services.
- Recycling at all levels.
- The development of alternative fuels to decrease reliance on foreign sources of energy.

Interbasin Water Transfer

The Halifax County Chamber of Commerce supports:

- Legislation protecting a locality's water resources.
- A basin-wide approach to solutions with one organization overseeing the Dan River Basin and the Roanoke River Basin that represents all involved localities in both Virginia and North Carolina.

The Halifax County Chamber of Commerce opposes:

- A statewide permitting agency that would allow a locality to transfer water between drainage basins.

Uranium Mining and Milling

The Halifax County Chamber of Commerce supports:

- The continuation of the moratorium on uranium mining and milling in the Commonwealth of Virginia.

The Halifax County Chamber of Commerce opposes:

- The development of a uranium permitting program and regulatory framework that would effectively end the state's moratorium.

Health Care

To maintain a healthy and productive workforce and to preserve the quality of life in Halifax County, it is imperative to address the well-being and human service needs throughout the region. The Halifax County Chamber of Commerce separates health care into two major areas: (1) the ability to foster initiatives that support healthier communities and (2) access and cost containment.

Wellness

The Halifax County Chamber of Commerce supports:

- The use of population health improvement as a key lever in cost containment and a driver for savings.
- Public policy and private efforts to improve individual wellness and population health, including, but not limited to, managed care for public health program participants, employee wellness efforts, and community health efforts.

Accessibility and Cost

The Halifax County Chamber of Commerce supports:

- Efforts to reduce health care costs, including pooling, medical savings accounts, and other measures that make health care more affordable for businesses and individuals.
- Minimizing additional health care mandates on providers by the General Assembly.
- Expanded access to care as a means of controlling costs and improving quality, recognizing that the hospital emergency room is the least appropriate and most expensive place to provide routine access to care.
- Strengthening the individual and small insurance market and access to competitive health insurance options.
- Caps on medical malpractice liability awards.
- Continuation of dialogue between state and federal lawmakers on flexibilities surrounding the Medicaid program in the Commonwealth to help reduce cost shifting onto insured patients and employers for the cost of treating the uninsured. This includes supporting rate adequacy through inflation adjustments and options for increasing the rate to the Upper Payment Limit.
- The Virginia Certificate of Public Need (COPN) program's aim to ensure that market inequities do not restrict access to necessary healthcare services in the Commonwealth for all payor populations.
- Further options for increasing the number of residency slots in the Commonwealth in order to train the physicians necessary to provide adequate access for Virginians.
- The growth and funding of local workforce training programs to help address the current shortage of nurses and allied health professionals in Halifax County and rural Virginia.

The Halifax County Chamber of Commerce opposes:

- Mandated percentage of healthcare costs to be paid by businesses for their employees.

Transportation

Transportation needs are statewide in scope and must be addressed on a statewide basis. Virginia's regions are interdependent - each region benefits from the economic health of every other region. The statewide economy and regional economies are best served by a transportation system that is cohesive, integrated and interconnected. The Halifax County Chamber of Commerce regards transportation issues as central to its ability to maintain a healthy business climate. The Chamber focuses on transportation issues that facilitate movement of product and the mobility needs of employees.

The Halifax County Chamber of Commerce supports:

- Retention of the present Transportation Trust Fund Allocation formula.
- Identification of long-term, sustainable resources to build and maintain a strong transportation network that meets current and future needs, without placing additional burdens on local governments.
- The consideration of rural areas of the Commonwealth in the continued process of planning for future roads and transportation needs.
- The upgrade of U.S. Route 501 to a four-lane highway from the North Carolina line to link with the Interstate network in Virginia with immediate emphasis on spot safety improvements as agreed by the Rt. 501 Coalition.
- Efforts of the SoVA CME regional transportation project to expand bus service throughout Southern Virginia.

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