



# 2024 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.

## Public Policies

### Address Local Education and Workforce Development Needs

The Chamber and Chamber Foundation collaborate with Franklin County Area Development Corp., SCPaWorks, educators and business partners to develop ways to enhance student readiness for the workforce. The Chamber and Chamber Foundation also collaborate with the Susquehanna Regional Transportation Partnership as part of PA Commuter Services to identify workforce development strategies in the Cumberland Valley. The Chamber encourages conversations to address local education and workforce development needs and will continue to collaborate with other community stakeholders as invited to do so.

### 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

### 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

### Labor

The Chamber supports labor, workplace and employment standards that help foster a productive and safe work environment, and which are structured to promote fair resolution of disputes and avoid negative unintended consequences. This includes eliminating misuse of the unemployment compensation program and facilitating a workers' compensation system that focuses on returning injured workers to full health and function and roots out abuse. Employers oppose excessive mandates; artificial wage inflators, forcing individuals to pay union dues as a condition of employment, or labor relations policies that unfairly tilt the playing field.

### Civil Justice

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 give employers predictability and certainty; prevent unfair tactics like "venue-shopping," and change the judicial system to achieve greater efficiencies and unbiased justice, while always providing for full and timely compensation of parties legitimately injured.

### Energy and Environment

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. The Chamber supports a regulatory approach that encourages greater investment in the Commonwealth, including for projects that facilitate voluntary emission reduction strategies.

### Transportation and Infrastructure

Pennsylvania must construct and maintain reliable transportation, telecommunications, wireless and utility systems, and other infrastructure, as these assets provide for a modern economy that will attract employers and facilitate the movement of goods and people. 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 efforts to help the Commonwealth meet its infrastructure needs in a manner consistent with the imperative for fiscal restraints.

## Education

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 fit the specific education needs of students, so they are best qualified to ultimately enter the workforce.

## Responsible State Spending and Smart Government

The Chamber urges the legislature and Governor to work collaboratively on a responsible, on-time state budget that exhausts all opportunities for cost-savings and more efficient spending. Lawmakers should continue to focus on reforming state government operations, particularly where the investment of resources is greatest, including public pension systems, the criminal justice system and mandated programs. The Chamber also supports collaborative and thoughtful public-private partnerships and opportunities to privatize those government services that could be more efficiently provided by the private sector.

## Taxes

Policymakers should build on recent tax policy improvements and continue to reform the Commonwealth's tax structure with pro-growth initiatives that will make Pennsylvania more competitive. We urge lawmakers to accelerate, or at least maintain, the scheduled phase-down of our corporate net income tax rate, as provided in Act 53 of 2022. We further urge improvements to Pennsylvania's treatment of Net Operating Losses to at least achieve parity with other states and the federal government and end Pennsylvania's "start-up tax penalty." The PA Chamber will advocate for comprehensive changes to the state tax structure that embody the principles of competitiveness, predictability, fairness, and simplicity and that better align our laws with the pro-growth provisions of the Internal Revenue Code. These changes include addressing the manner by which local taxes are levied and administered and reforms that specifically benefit small businesses.

## Workforce

Employers in Pennsylvania continue to experience severe 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 students prepare for a future career; facilitate upskilling opportunities for incumbent workers; encourage those on the sidelines to transition back into the workforce including eliminating impediments to employment; and make Pennsylvania an attractive destination for individuals starting careers or relocating.

## \*General Business

The Chamber's policy priorities reach beyond the Legislative Agenda to encompass issues ranging from state/local government concerns and liquor reform, to technology and general commerce – all of which have implications for Pennsylvania's job creators and overall economy.