

2024

STATE LEGISLATIVE AGENDA



Springfield
Area Chamber of Commerce

The Springfield Area Chamber of Commerce represents more than 1,500 business, professional and community organizations that employ more than 230,000 people living in and around Missouri's third largest city.

Our advocacy efforts are member driven. The priorities of the regional business community focus on improving the state's business climate in order to grow jobs, develop the workforce, and drive investment to make Missouri a great place to live and work.





2023 LEGISLATIVE ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Through volunteer-led and member-driven advocacy efforts, the Chamber thanks elected officials and celebrates the success of legislation and budget appropriations passed during each legislative session. In 2023, several policies and investments were approved that will benefit the Springfield region and business community.

- Allocating significant budget investments to address workforce barriers, including childcare and mental health services.
- Increasing core funding of higher-education institutions, including Ozarks Technical Community College and Missouri State University.
- Increasing funding for transportation infrastructure, including additional investments in the Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP), Interstate 70 and Interstate 44.
- Funding several regional capital projects, organizations, initiatives and programs.
- Reducing the cost to apply for expungement of qualifying offenses.
- Increasing childcare provider reimbursement rates and early childhood investments.
- Prohibiting the use of handheld devices while operating a vehicle.
- Securing funding for the expanded Medicaid population.
- Expanding the Hand-Up Pilot Program statewide, which aims to offer transitional childcare benefits for individuals whose incomes exceed the maximum allowable amount for a full childcare subsidy benefit.
- Designating the City of Springfield as a Qualified Local Program provider for land disturbance, which has eliminated the redundancy of state and local permits and fees.

BUSINESS CLIMATE

WORKPLACE ISSUES

Missouri's business climate should foster job creation and economic growth. Balancing and strengthening the state's employment laws will protect both employers and employees through fairness and transparency.

The Chamber supports:

- Shoring up the unemployment insurance trust fund, including linking unemployment benefits to the rate of unemployment.
- Right to work legislation because of the impact it would have on Missouri's future economic prosperity.
- Allowing employers to access prior workers' compensation claims for prospective employees to screen for a history of fraudulent claims.
- Clarifying that in order for a specific medical treatment to be covered under workers' compensation, a work injury must be the prevailing factor causing the need for that medical treatment, mirroring the standard for determining the workers' compensation claim.
- Continued review of Missouri's existing prevailing wage laws to further improve certainty and predictability.
- Simplifying and clarifying the test to determine independent contractor status.

- Continued efforts to ease applicable statutory and regulatory burdens to streamline processes and promote business efficiency.
- The protection of intellectual property and safety balanced with an appropriate level of consumer access and ability to repair off-highway equipment.
- Reforming the state Alcohol Tobacco Control excise tax and labeling reporting requirements to align with federal standards.
- An employer's ability to designate safety-sensitive positions where the use of Tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) would be prohibited in order to mitigate safety concerns and reduce employer liability.
- An employer's right to make workplace and employee policy decisions without intervention from the state.

The Chamber opposes:

- State requirements related to prompt payment terms for private construction contracts.
- Mandating limitations on an employer's ability to fully screen a job applicant at any time during the hiring process.
- Increasing workers' compensation costs by requiring employers to cover the cost of care provided by employee-selected healthcare providers.

LEGAL CLIMATE & TORT REFORM

Continued improvement in Missouri's legal climate is critical to business attraction and retention.

The Chamber supports:

- Ending joint and several liability and holding a defendant liable for only the percent of harm the defendant has caused.
- Implementation of a reasonable statute of repose in Missouri.
- Strengthening requirements for making claims under the Missouri Merchandising Practices Act (MMPA).
- The establishment of an Asbestos Transparency Act in Missouri.
- Reducing Missouri's statute of limitations in certain civil cases.
- Requiring written notice to employers about wage rate discrepancies and a reasonable amount of time to correct the error before a claim for attorney fees can be made.
- Missouri's non-partisan court plan and encourages continued analysis of the plan to identify opportunities for improvement, including additional citizen participation.



Over 500 Chamber members attend the 2023 State of the State luncheon.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Strong economic development policies are critical in competing for jobs and fostering growth.

The Chamber supports:

- Proven tax credit programs that are competitive, performance based, regionally equitable, and provide a positive return on the state's investment and are not subject to the appropriations process.
- Programs that leverage private investment and stimulate employment and efforts to encourage capital investment and job retention in the state.
- State investment in infrastructure, including rail lines and spurs, to increase the availability of development-ready commercial and industrial building sites to foster local and statewide economic growth.
- Innovative state solutions to supply chain issues impacting businesses of all sizes and sectors, including review and implementation of the recommendations from the Governor's Supply Chain Task Force.
- Equitable access to economic development tools among all regions of the state.
- Continued full funding of the Missouri Partnership.
- Policies that strengthen domestic agriculture, promote exports and ensure a safe and stable food supply.

- Statutory reforms to the state's low-income housing tax credit program.
- Maintaining the current structure of local economic development tools, including Community Improvement Districts (CID), Transportation Development Districts (TDD) and Tax Increment Financing (TIF).
- Amending current voluntary state annexation requirements to give greater local authority for land annexation.
- Funding for LeCompte Road/Eastgate Extension for industrial park transportation connections and to increase the inventory of land for development.

The Chamber opposes:

- Legislation that would allow businesses to discriminate based on sexual orientation and gender identity.



ENTREPRENEURIAL & TECHNOLOGY SUPPORT

The Chamber supports initiatives that would positively enhance the small business, entrepreneurial and technology climate in the state to encourage growth and development in these critical sectors.

The Chamber supports:

- Programs that incentivize capital investment, startup and small business assistance and access to early-stage capital and support.
- The development of an angel investor tax credit to increase entrepreneurial access to risk capital.
- Strategic investments to support Missouri's research base.
- A climate that fosters entrepreneurship and innovation, including continued funding and increased spending authority for the Missouri Technology Corporation.
- Policies and initiatives that promote Missouri's position as an emerging technology hub.
- Evidence-based Artificial Intelligence (AI) regulations that prioritize responsible development, employer and employee well-being, and risk mitigation.

The Chamber opposes:

- Artificial Intelligence (AI) regulations that may result in unintended consequences due to inadequate consultation with experts.



GO CAPS Engineering & Manufacturing students touring Springfield Nobel Hill Sanitary Landfill.

EDUCATION & WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

A key obstacle to economic development in Missouri is access to qualified workers. The need to develop and train workers in every sector is key to growth.

Missouri has made significant progress to enhance the state's workforce efforts and become more competitive with other states by taking a more flexible and innovative approach to workforce development. As we look to the future, investment in workforce will continue to remain key to the state's economic success.

The Chamber supports:

- Robust and predictable funding for Missouri One Start to ensure a comprehensive approach to workforce development that incentivizes industry to grow or expand in Missouri and meets employers' current and future needs.
- Continued funding for the Fast Track Workforce Incentive Grant program to increase degree and certification attainment among adults and enhance Missouri's workforce.
- Increasing the maximum gross income for the Fast Track Workforce Incentive Grant eligibility to enhance program accessibility.
- Supplemental state funding to match federal workforce training dollars to remain competitive and meet expanding employment needs.

- Increased funding for apprenticeships and efforts to streamline processes, as well as the use of Industry Recognized Credentials to enhance skills, better train individuals and increase workforce productivity.
- Funding the Upskill Credential Training Fund for employers to invest in prospective and current employee upskilling.

BARRIERS TO WORKFORCE

Given the current workforce challenges, the Chamber supports efforts to evaluate and develop innovative solutions to current workforce barriers that include, but are not limited to, access to quality affordable childcare, housing availability, support for mental health services and transportation.

The Chamber supports:

- Innovative solutions to childcare challenges, including tax credit programs and recruitment and retention programs for childcare providers.
- Establishing a process for automatic expungement of certain criminal histories.
- The implementation of a work release pilot program in the state.
- A one-time capital funding expenditure for the Alliance for Healthcare Education, a partnership aimed at improving the healthcare workforce shortage.

EDUCATION

Continued investment in all levels of public education will ensure that a properly trained workforce will be available to meet the needs and expectations of Missouri employers.

EARLY CHILDHOOD, ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

The Chamber supports:

- Continued full funding of the current foundation and transportation formulas for K-12 public education to ensure Missouri's educational system is competitive and capable of effectively preparing tomorrow's workforce.
- A set of rigorous standards for the fundamental coursework that students encounter at each grade level, while preserving local control of curriculum and instructional choices by educators to achieve such standards.
- The protection of the authority of locally elected school boards to make decisions that impact students and families within their districts.
- Innovative approaches to education that encourage more students to move into high-demand fields such as IT, including support for programs such as GO CAPS and the availability of a computer science teacher certification.
- Funding for teacher professional learning at the K-12 level, including externships.
- Increased funding for the Parents as Teachers program.
- Only those charter schools that are authorized by local boards of education and subject to the same accountability standards as other Missouri public schools.
- Efforts to incentivize school districts to partner with businesses to improve employability and life skills beyond standardized test scores of academic standards.
- The current structure of the Springfield Public Schools Board of Education comprised of seven at-large positions with three-year terms that expire in April.
- Decreasing the minimum number of petition signatures to certify a candidate to run for the Springfield Public Schools Board of Education to 250.

- The completion of the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) as a high school graduation requirement with appropriate exemptions.
- Enabling legislation to allow voters within Greene County to consider a ballot measure to fund early childhood education initiatives.

The Chamber opposes:

- Efforts to establish programs that would divert state dollars from Springfield Public Schools or other high performing districts.

HIGHER EDUCATION

Investment in higher education is key in developing Missouri's workforce. The state's current level of funding for higher education puts Missouri at a disadvantage to peer states that invest at significantly higher levels.

The Chamber supports:

- Inflationary increases in core appropriations for all public colleges and universities.
- An equity appropriation increase to address the per student funding disparities between institutions around the state, specifically for Ozarks Technical Community College and Missouri State University.
- Appropriations for public higher education capital projects and MoExcels grant proposals at Missouri State University and Ozarks Technical Community College.
- Increased support for Missouri's A+ program and the ability to maximize access among high school students.
- Need and merit-based scholarship programs such as Access Missouri and Bright Flight.



2023 Chamber Board Chairman Joselyn Baldner meets with Governor Mike Parson

FISCAL RESPONSIBILITY, GOVERNANCE & TAXATION

FISCAL RESPONSIBILITY & GOVERNANCE

The Chamber encourages responsible stewardship of state finances and a balanced state budget without placing undue tax burdens on the business community or reducing the effectiveness of essential state programs.

The Chamber supports:

- Improving the existing initiative petition system, including a higher threshold to amend the state's constitution, while ensuring a fair and transparent process.
- Developing an effective fiscal note process that accurately measures the total fiscal impact of proposed legislation, including an accounting of the anticipated revenue gains from proposed tax credit programs.
- Lessening term limit restrictions for members of the Missouri Senate and House of Representatives.
- Preserving the April option for municipal elections and keeping local elections nonpartisan.

TAXATION

The current tax rate is not a detriment to business attraction efforts for the state. State tax reform should be reasoned, data-driven, consider the long-term impact on the economy and support crucial state investments.

The Chamber supports:

- Limiting the expansion of local permitting and regulatory requirements that add expense to business in excess of the cost to provide necessary government services.
- Modifying Missouri's timely sales tax filing discount for retailers and directing the savings to fund key priorities.
- Increasing the taxing authority for municipalities and eliminating the current need for enabling legislation.

The Chamber opposes:

- The retroactive application of a new interpretation in taxation of businesses.

HEALTHCARE

The Chamber supports policies that make the delivery of health care services less costly and more efficient, address the needs of patients, providers and payers and protect the interests of business, without shifting the cost of the uninsured.

The Chamber supports:

- Consumer-driven solutions that will help to control costs through the use of incentives and wellness and preventive programs.

- Reasonable reforms to the Medicaid program that improve health outcomes and reduce costs.
- Equity between managed care insurance companies and providers.
- Funding for the implementation of Family Connects as a pilot program in Greene County.



Leaders of CoxHealth, Missouri State University, Ozarks Technical Community College and Springfield Public Schools announce the Alliance for Healthcare Education.



PUBLIC SAFETY

The Chamber supports statewide solutions improving public safety because of the impact on economic growth and workforce development.

The Chamber supports:

- Adequate funding for Greene County Judicial Courts and facilities to ensure safe and efficient access to justice, including an increase in the state's allocation to jail inmate per diem funding and adequate funding for the public defender system.
- Continued funding of the Pretrial Witness Protection Services Fund.
- Continued and innovative funding to support law enforcement recruitment, including the Missouri Blue Scholarship program.

QUALITY OF LIFE

TOURISM, ARTS & CULTURE

The Chamber supports tourism, the arts, libraries, and cultural organizations for the economic health and quality of life in the region.

The Chamber supports:

- A dedicated funding mechanism for the Division of Tourism to provide consistent travel industry promotion.
- Allocation of the non-resident professional athletes and entertainers income tax to the Missouri Cultural Trust and the Missouri State Library Networking Fund as defined by state statute.
- Allowing communities to establish a Land Bank Trust.

ENERGY & ENVIRONMENT

The region's natural resources and unique geologic setting are incredible assets. It is critical to our state's vitality to protect those assets without placing undue burden on the business community.

The Chamber supports:

- Reasonable environmental, water and energy policies that provide a balance between protecting the sustainability of natural resources while encouraging economic growth and promoting quality of life.
- Regulatory reform that reduces administrative requirements and the economic burden of regulatory compliance and considers the sometimes conflicting compliance requirements between state and federal regulatory bodies.

The Chamber opposes:

- Unfunded and underfunded legislative mandates.

TRANSPORTATION & INFRASTRUCTURE

Given the state's geographic advantage as a transportation hub, safe and efficient transportation infrastructure is a crucial element in supporting our continued growth and development.

The Chamber supports:

- Continued consideration of alternative sources of funding for transportation infrastructure to ensure increased long-term investment in the statewide system; such funding should not negatively impact the state's limited general revenue budget.
- Evaluating the viability of raising auto license and registration fees in order to fund transportation.
- Partnerships between MoDOT, the region's local governments, and the private sector, including the cost share program.

- Increased funding for multimodal transportation to improve port, rail, aviation and a dedicated source of state transit funding for Missouri's public transit providers.
- The continued investment in expansion of broadband throughout the state.
- Increased funding for Interstate 44 infrastructure improvements, to include \$28 million for capacity upgrades along I-44 in Springfield.

The Chamber opposes:

- The transfer of state-owned roadways to local ownership and maintenance.



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The organization listed for each board member reflects their employer at the time of the January 2024 publication.



Springfield
Area Chamber of Commerce

Springfield Area Chamber of Commerce

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