



2009 Legislative Agenda

Fiscal Responsibility

Once again, Maryland faces a severe financial situation. More tough choices must be made. This time, however, fewer options remain.

Last year, the Baltimore County Chamber of Commerce promoted “equality of sacrifice” to solve the problem, with no more than 50 percent of the solution coming from taxes and at least 50 percent coming from sustainable government cost reduction initiatives. That principle was employed, albeit with a couple of significant variations: businesses picked up a disproportionate share of the tax increases and a significant portion of the government cost reductions were “one time actions.”

What worked in 2008 will not work now nor in the future. Therefore, the Chamber proposes:

- Business not be further taxed, as they represent the economic engine that generates growth.
- State and local governments must seek opportunities for systemic change in government programs and operations, not one-time fixes. Like a business, Maryland must use and implement the best practices of other states that reduce waste and improve overall efficiency.
- The state should use options already available, such as last year’s House Bill 484, which allows businesses to submit unsolicited proposals for providing government services better and cheaper.
- Aggressive support for the referendum on slots, which will be decided on Nov. 4.

Eco-Business

Government must work in a way that allows appropriate economic development, while also protecting the environment.

The Chamber supports an investment in energy supply and increasing energy delivery to consumers to eliminate the possibility of blackouts. We support the education of consumers to find ways to reduce energy and practice conservation. And, when fiscally feasible, tax incentives should be provided to encourage good environmental behavior.

Goals to address emissions should be market oriented, economy-wide, and equitable along all industries and global in scope.

All regulatory programs must be based on sound science, be no more stringent than federal requirements, and justify the increase in expense by demonstrating the benefits to human health and the environment.

Education

Baltimore County is fortunate to have a high quality primary, secondary, adult, and higher education infrastructure, with the capacity to provide a high quality and competent workforce. However, business people are expressing increasing concern that graduates lack the technical and workplace skills necessary to compete in today's business environment. Worse yet, business people lament the significant variability in performance of graduates at all levels.

The Chamber supports educational initiatives that promote workforce readiness, lifelong learning and partnerships between business and educational institutions.

The Chamber stands ready to work with our school system to identify the skills required for tomorrow's workforce, to translate skill needs into course requirements, to establish standards of performance for each step of the education process, and to serve a mentoring role for educators and students alike. We ask, in return, that standards like the High School Assessments (HSAs) be retained and expanded, social promotion be discontinued, and standards of attitude be established

Workforce Development

The Chamber opposes state legislation that oversteps federal law, including mandates on how employers should pay sick, vacation, and other employee leave programs. Enacting or expanding this type of legislation forces employers to leave Maryland or reduce their operation locally, resulting in budget short falls.

Within the above, we strongly oppose legislation that expands the Wal-Mart law or any attempts to spread the "pay to play" employer health care premium tax. Our position remains that this law violates ERISA, pre-empted under reasoning in the 4th Circuit Court of Appeals. The employer tax does nothing to control the cost of health care or improve accessibility.

The Chamber supports legislative efforts that provide credit to employers for expanding Wellness programs within their organizations. We also support any legislation that better insulates employers from employee litigation when the goal is to incentivize employees attempting to improve their health while others fail to take basic steps to make healthier choices.

Health

The Chamber supports programs that promote voluntary employer-provided health coverage systems, rather than disincentives for employers to offer coverage, such as employer mandated health coverage at state and local levels.

We support efforts to reduce the cost of premiums by shifting funding priorities to preventive services and disease management programs. We promote the expansion of workplace wellness programs.

The Chamber supports efforts to curb the expansion of litigation in the health care system and encourage medical discoveries that improve the quality of care. We are opposed to policies that suffocate research into new therapies.

The Chamber also actively supports legislation and policies that promote the expansion of health savings accounts.

We see the following as important issues for hospitals:

- Find creative solutions to address health manpower shortages through recruitment, elimination of unnecessary barriers to licensure, and establishment of a reimbursement climate that attracts and retains physicians and other health professionals.
- Work to strengthen the continuum of mental health services in order to decrease over-reliance on hospital emergency rooms.

Transportation

Maryland must continue to work toward a balanced transportation system that allows business to remain competitive and grow.

The Chamber supports finding creative solutions for the delivery of transportation in light of the \$1.1 billion deficit in transportation funding. We believe that we must move toward implementing more public-private partnerships that have been successful throughout the country.

The Chamber also supports efforts to support walking and bike riding by making local communities more pedestrian friendly. Communities that have implemented such policies typically see a strong economic return.

Because of its large economic impact on our community, the Chamber also support all efforts to modernize the Port of Baltimore, such as widening channels to allow for larger cargo ships and finding new solutions to the disposal of dredge material.