



Charleston Metro
Chamber of Commerce



LEGISLATIVE AGENDA 2021

charlestonchamber.org

STATE LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES:

The Charleston Metro Chamber urges the General Assembly to pass legislation this session that achieves the following outcomes:

Talent, Education, and Workforce

- Update and modernize South Carolina's state education funding model to ensure that every student has access to a high-quality public education.
- Support the Higher Education Finance Act to increase funding for state colleges and universities and relieve the tuition burden for South Carolina students.
- Make it easier for mid-career professionals to switch to teaching, specifically in STEM fields.
- Secure \$25.6 million to renovate Trident Technical College's Berkeley Campus, creating the Lowcountry Transportation and Logistics Center.

Criminal Justice Reform

- Review our state's current penal code to better align crimes and sentencing, expand the number of non-violent felony offenses for expungement and better prepare inmates for high-demand career opportunities, making it easier to transition into the workforce. These issues meet these directives:
 - Reform civil asset forfeiture laws
 - Pass a hate crimes statute
 - Expand expungement for non-violent offenders
 - Assist returning citizens with vital records so they have them upon release
 - Create a state tax credit for hiring returning citizens

Military Retention and Expansion

- Fully exempt military retirement benefits from state income tax.
- Ensure that development of offshore wind energy facilities do not threaten the mission, training or operation of state military installations

Business Climate

- Reasonable Liability Protections for Businesses: Businesses acting in good faith and following local, state and/or federal guidelines to prevent COVID exposure should be protected from liability absent clear and convincing evidence of gross negligence.

Economic Development

- Target industries from high tax states to relocate to South Carolina.
- Provide resources to make it easier for employees to work from home.
- Increase state investment in tourism advertising, which supports our current hospitality industry and can lead to tourists relocating and becoming employers or employees in South Carolina.

State Fiscal Health

- Support reforms to the current South Carolina Retirement System that will eliminate the unfunded liability by closing the state pension system to new employees and moving to a defined contribution plan.

COMPETITIVENESS ISSUES:

The Charleston Metro Chamber encourages the General Assembly to address the following economic competitiveness factors:

Talent & Education

- Fully fund the Education Finance Act (EFA) as required by state law. This year, an additional \$487 million is needed for the EFA to be fully funded.
- Support state funding for Career Technical Education (CTE) dual-credit programs, fostering more youth apprenticeships statewide.
- Increase teacher pay to the national average.

Taxes and Regulation

- Support tax reform efforts to make the tax code a more fair, equitable and competitive system for the business community.

Business Climate

- Re-institute joint and several protections for businesses to reasonably reflect fault in tort actions.

Environmental Stewardship

- Support funding for an updated State Water Plan to ensure adequate surface and ground water supplies for business, agricultural and residential use.

Invest in Rural Broadband

- Support long-term funding to extend access for education, healthcare and to support a remote workforce. We must support policies that promote private sector investment in next generation broadband technologies and infrastructure critical to accelerating our 21st century economy for our state.

PUBLIC POLICY GUIDING PRINCIPLES:

Attainable Housing

Support incentives and market-driven solutions to increase the housing supply, promote diverse housing types and price points region-wide to ensure attainable housing options for everyone in the region.

Business Creation, Recruitment, Retention and Expansion

Support legislation that helps the region create, attract, retain and expand businesses and industries that generate quality jobs. Advocate for a conducive business climate and balanced regulatory environment.

Competitive Tax Climate

Advocate for a state-wide tax climate that ensures fairness, predictability, accountability and compliance while balancing income, property and sales tax levies.

Education and Workforce Development

Advocate for the changes necessary in early childhood, K-12 and higher education to prepare all students for the careers of the future and to provide a skilled workforce to support the region's employers.

Energy

Support an energy regulatory climate that prioritizes the state's future energy needs with sufficient protections for electric utility ratepayers. Encourage energy generation from a variety of sources to produce reliable, affordable sustainable electricity for the state's businesses and citizens.

Environmental Stewardship

Promote a balanced approach to environmental regulation that embraces responsible stewardship without unreasonably burdening business and industry. The natural environment is important to our region's quality of place, economic competitiveness and overall wellness.

Healthcare

Promote workforce wellness and a culture of good health by supporting policies that ensure quality of healthcare, while helping reduce healthcare costs for business and expanding access to medical insurance coverage for state residents.

Hospitality

Support the investments and workforce needed to ensure the continued vitality of the region's hospitality industry.

Immigration Reform

Support comprehensive immigration reform at the federal level that helps businesses attract and retain talented individuals that fuel our globally connected economy.

International Trade

Support international trade agreements that are fair, accountable, consistent and that reduce barriers to free and open markets.

Military and Federal Facilities

Advance legislative priorities in the South Carolina Military Base Task Force comprehensive plan. Support policies and investments that promote the retention and expansion of military operations and federal facilities in the Charleston region.

Port Development

Support the continued growth and expansion of South Carolina's ports.

Regional Land Use Planning

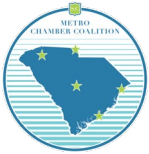
Support coordinated decisions among jurisdictions that align the core values of Choice, Balance and Stewardship as described in the Sustainable Growth Ethic and that promote the efficient use of land essential to economic growth and prosperity.

Transportation Infrastructure

Enhance the capacity of our multimodal transportation network including roads, mass transit, pedestrian systems and freight movement facilities. Support funding to complete every project listed in the Chamber's Infrastructure Priorities report.

COMPETING TO WIN: A BLUEPRINT FOR BUSINESS

2021 South Carolina Metro Chamber Coalition Agenda



THE SOUTH CAROLINA METRO CHAMBER COALITION is poised to be the leading voice of the business community throughout the state. It is composed of Charleston Metro Chamber, Charlotte Regional Business Alliance, Columbia Chamber, Greenville Chamber and the Myrtle Beach Area Chamber of Commerce.

Reform Education and Workforce

COVID-19 has given us the opportunity to reform our education system to better serve students and educators. The Metro Chamber Coalition supports:

- Study moving teacher pay to a “pay band” system to reward teachers for skills and expertise, rather than simply years in the classroom;
- Allow lottery tuition assistance to be used for those seeking high-quality industry credentials;
- Commit to a path toward raising teacher pay to the national average;
- Allow more than one school in a district to be deregulated so districts may experiment with new educational ideas;
- Allow high-performing schools to have up to 10% of their teachers be non-certified;
- Offer tax credits to businesses that hire teachers as summer employees.

Reform Our Criminal Justice System

Criminal justice reform is an economic development imperative. The Metro Chamber Coalition realizes this and believes South Carolina should continue our efforts in leading the nation on this issue. The Coalition urges the General Assembly to review our state’s current penal code to better align crimes and sentencing, expand the number of non-violent felony offenses for expungement, and better prepare inmates for high-demand career opportunities making it easier to transition into the workforce. Addressing the following issues we will meet these directives in the future.

- Reform civil asset forfeiture laws;
- Pass a hate crime statute;
- Expand expungement for non-violent offenders;
- Assist returning citizens with vital records (such as IDs and birth certificates) so they have them upon release;
- Create a state tax credit for hiring returning citizens

Addressing the issues above will not only make life better for all residents but would improve South Carolina statutory climate so that our state will be better positioned for future economic development opportunities.

Boost post-COVID Economic Development

Our strategy for bringing new jobs to South Carolina should match the diverse nature of our state and her people. A 21st century approach will recognize the importance of providing employers with the tools they need to tap into our talented workforce. Strategies like dedicating an existing tax stream to offset the cost of relocating or expanding to/in South Carolina should be explored. Other Economic Development opportunities include:

- Provide resources to make it easier for employees to work from home, particularly those with young children;
- Target companies from high-tax states to relocate to South Carolina;
- Support efforts to effect non-discrimination statutes to extend protections to all citizens and mitigate economic losses.
- Restructure our state’s incentives so we may better attract office, headquarter, and R&D jobs that may have a large number of stay-at-home employees;
- Support measures to assist high-growth startup companies by making it easier to attract early-stage capital;
- Increase state investment in tourism advertising, which supports our current hospitality industry and can lead to tourists relocating and becoming employers in South Carolina; and
- Support the development of high-speed broadband infrastructure in cities and rural areas.

Provide Reasonable Liability Protections

Businesses or institutions acting in good faith and following local, state, and/or federal guidelines to prevent COVID exposure should be protected from liability absent clear and convincing evidence of gross negligence. These protections should also be expanded to provide “Good Samaritan” protections for manufacturers that have switched production to provide products to fight COVID-19.

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