



# 2022 Issues for Legislative Action

**Howard County  
Chamber of Commerce**

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# Introduction

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The Howard County Chamber of Commerce (Chamber) is the leading advocate for the employment community in Howard County, MD.

Through our legislative efforts, the Chamber looks to support legislation that assists economic development, private investment, and job creation.

The Chamber believes that legislation should be balanced between the needs of citizens and the employer community.

The ensuing topics are not meant to be exhaustive, but rather, The Issues for Legislative Action reflect key policy matters of interest, both locally and statewide, to the Chamber and members of the business community.

The following topics are of particular importance during the upcoming General Assembly session:

**Pandemic Legislation**

**Labor & Employment**

**Business Regulations & Operations**

**Education & Workforce Development**

**Environment & Land Use**

**Transportation**



# Pandemic Legislation

Due to policy decisions made by elected and appointed officials, Maryland is one of the leading states in vaccination rates. Despite the actions of public health officials, many Maryland employers are still reeling from the affects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The previous General Assembly session saw policy makers enact various support measures to aid business and stifle the pandemic's economic impact. While we are entering a recovery period, many businesses have yet to recover as workforce issues, supply chain disruption, and inflation are impacting many businesses' ability to economically recover.

Consequently, many employers will require assistance from the state as they continue to rebound and recover. This aid should come in three primary areas, highlighted below;

## "Safe Workplace" Guidelines

Many businesses have leaned on their professional associations and industry sector leaders for guidance and direction. However, each state and jurisdiction are different. Therefore, the state should create a framework or guidelines for businesses during and post-pandemic crises.

## Regulatory Reform

It has been widely documented how businesses have been impacted by the coronavirus. A revision of various regulations could assist in blunting the impact of COVID-19 and give the economy a much-needed boost.

## Essential Services

Some industries were able to weather the COVID-19 storm because they were classified as "essential," meaning they could remain open while many businesses were forced to close. The lack of a standard definition of what constitutes an "essential" service created significant hardship for many businesses. Moreover, many businesses found it difficult to plan and prepare, as there was lack of understanding as to how long the state government can require a business to provide services free of charge.



# Labor & Employment

Business owners are being subjected to additional, complex workplace regulations that increase the cost of doing business, including significant penalties and legal fees for non-compliance.

There is proposed legislation that would place additional burdens on employers that could potentially lead to increased employment costs and a decrease in jobs. Implementing requirements related to paid sick leave, minimum wage escalation, federal vaccine mandates, and other legislation have caused numerous administrative hardships for employers. There is continued concern that legislation such as “predictive scheduling” will cause labor costs to rise once again, potentially leading to a decrease in jobs.

In a state that has already enacted numerous local employment laws and is reeling from the Coronavirus pandemic, the Chamber supports state efforts to streamline labor and employment standards through preemption.

In efforts to keep labor and employment-related costs at a manageable level, the Chamber will support legislation that:

- **Promotes** workplace policies that will **enhance**, not inhibit, **economic growth** and **job creation**
- Is **cost-effective to administer**, and **financially feasible** for small and growing business
- Provides **resources that educate employers** about pertinent state labor and employment laws and regulations that affect business

## Issues to Watch

- **Predictive Scheduling** legislation limits employer flexibility in their ability to manage and schedule employees based upon market and business conditions
- **Second Chance Employment** aims to protect second chance employers from liability, improving the opportunities for ex-offenders to reintegrate into society
- **Paid Family Medical Leave Insurance (PFMLI)** would provide paid leave benefits for employees that need to take extended leave for a qualifying medical purpose. This leave is separate, and in addition to the current Safe and Sick Leave



# Labor & Employment

## Issues to Watch

- Maryland currently has a patchwork of laws as it relates to labor. Thus, we **support preemptive legislative language** that would allow for a single law covering statewide labor and employment laws
- Solvency of the **Maryland Unemployment Trust Fund** is of **major concern** to employers both large or small, and public or private. An exhaustive effort should be made by the state to ensure a healthy balance of the unemployment insurance trust fund as it rebounds from the COVID-19 pandemic, without further raising the premium rates for employers
- The business community supports an **unemployment insurance system** that provides transparency for employers and benefit recipients

## Local Priorities

- Support labor, employment, and workforce development policies that are **competitive** with neighboring jurisdictions and **consistent** with state laws, thereby easing the burden of implementation and adherence for employers





# Business Regulations & Operations

While Maryland has enumerable assets that many states envy, it has struggled with its business reputation in recent years. Although many Maryland businesses have recovered from the effects of COVID-19, a hosts of businesses continue to struggle.

Questions have consistently been raised concerning the tax and regulatory climate. As such, the Chamber supports ongoing examination of the current tax base, tax rates, and compliance requirements to ensure the Maryland business environment is fair and competitive to current businesses, and for those businesses considering relocation.

This includes:

- Legislation that **removes burdensome and costly regulations**
- Legislation that **advances tax policy reform**, thereby **enhancing the state's business climate**. Possible reform includes, but is not limited to; legislation concerning single sales factor for all employers, reduction of the corporate income tax, tax relief for pass-through entities, and the defeat of combined reporting

## Issues to Watch

- Reform of how Maryland **small businesses and pass-through entities** are treated under the state's personal income tax policies
- **Filing Fees and Combined Reporting** affects corporate income tax reporting for retail sales and food services corporations, creating disadvantages for small businesses in the state
- Legislation that provides **economic analyses on proposed and drafted regulations** decreed by state agencies, so that the economic impact of these regulations on small business is understood
- Legislation that **advances 5G, broadband expansion, and related technologies**, thereby further closing the digital divide and allowing Maryland employers the opportunity to remain competitive, both domestically and globally
- **Sales tax expansion** has been a part of education reform for the past two general assembly sessions. While workforce development is paramount, over-burdening employers with new taxes should be avoided.



# Business Regulations & Operations

## Issues to Watch

- The CARES Act became law on March 27, 2020. This legislation, which created PPP loans and other forms of economic relief for businesses and individuals, also contained several income tax provisions that were intended to increase deductions, and therefore cash flow, for taxpayers. One issue that arose was how the state would handle decoupling. A thorough **evaluation of Maryland's current decoupling law**, related to the federal tax structure, should be reviewed and analyzed for the existing advantages and disadvantages
- Over the past 18 months, **remote work** has become common for many employers, yet only **temporary guidance** has been issued as it relates to nexus and apportionment rules. Permanent rules and guidance would assist business in future decision-making and budgeting
- In 2019, a **digital downloads tax** was passed, resulting in lingering implementation and interpretation issues. Legislation is encouraged that eases **business compliance**, **avoids unintended taxation**, and **safeguards legislative intent**

## Local Priorities

- Support and encourage the **adoption and passage of economic development policies and incentive packages** that serve as an economic development stimulus for Howard County
- Support the development and implementation of legislation that **advances 5G and small cell technologies**, which allows Howard County to remain competitive statewide and domestically
- Support **removing potential barriers** that may impede the continued deployment of wireline high-speed broadband and cable communications technologies throughout the county



# Education & Workforce Development

A sound and well-funded education system is paramount to business competitiveness, thriving communities, and an enhanced quality of life. Institutions of higher learning, such as technical colleges, community colleges, and traditional four-year schools, must receive adequate support for operating and capital budgets so they can prepare our current and future workforce.

We believe in strategies that actively seek out individuals in need of family sustaining career opportunities, provide training and wraparound services to eliminate barriers, and connect individuals with viable job opportunities that offer a living wage. We view workforce development as an economic imperative for the state.

The Chamber supports legislation that:

- **Funds institutions of higher learning**, thereby allowing them to educate and train students for high-demand careers; this would include expanding apprenticeships with a pathway from non-credit to credit offerings. Students would then graduate with an AA degree, in addition to their apprenticeship experiences.

## Issues to Watch

- **Funding recommendations and implementation** will continue to impact how education is funded in Maryland for decades to come. Of particular interest is whether there will be grants and dedicated funding for K-12, colleges, and library systems to sustain the innovation that these entities and others have achieved because of one-time federal stimulus funds such as scholarships, computers, educational/tutoring supports, etc.
- **Kirwan Commission (Blueprint) implementation** may impact local school system funding when compared to other districts. The Chamber will work with Howard County School System Officials to advocate for appropriate funding
- **Childcare issues** have been mounting annually, yet it was not until the pandemic that we were able to see how dire the issue is. Thus, legislation should be passed to incentivize the opening of new childcare facilities and the expansion of existing ones



# Education & Workforce Development

## Issues to Watch

- **Apprenticeship and Intern Tax Credits** expand the pool of apprenticeship and career technical education opportunities for the next generation of workers
- **Apprenticeship Statutory Definition** is expanded to capture a greater segment of the work training population and increase the number of employers who can access the related incentive programs
- **Fund institutions of higher learning**, thereby allowing them to educate and train students for high-demand careers
- **Create a pathway for the transferability (in total) of Associate Degree credits earned at Maryland-based technical colleges toward baccalaureate degrees offered at Maryland state colleges**

## Local Priorities

- The Chamber will closely monitor education initiatives to ensure that local education is adequately funded, yet does not stifle economic development
- **Grant Technical Colleges equal access to students enrolled in the Howard County Public School System (classroom visits/presentations/college fairs) in support of alternative educational opportunities** that help to address the state's skills gap
- Encourage the development of **collaboration opportunities** for Howard County Public School System and local technical schools as part of efforts to **present alternative education opportunities**



# Environment & Land Use

Preparing for future population and business growth means protecting our state's lakes and streams, investing in alternative energy sources, and encouraging eco-friendly and sustainable development.

Advancing these principles means supporting legislation that:

- Protects statewide access to sustainable, reliable, and affordable energy supplies
- Promotes regulatory reform to encourage greater infrastructure investment and the integration of new technologies
- Secures water supply, enhances access to water, and promotes investment in critical infrastructure

## Issues to Watch

- **Climate Change** will continue to impact the environment, and our current and future way of life. Thus, it will be important to monitor and review policies including, but not limited to; initiatives regarding renewable energy portfolio standards, clean energy goals, and transportation sector requirements. The development of clean and renewable energy sources and transportation initiatives will be key, all the while ensuring that reasonable timetables for businesses are set to protect various sectors, including manufacturing, distribution, and logistics





# Environment & Land Use

Locally, Howard County is at a crossroads regarding growth management, commercial land preservation, and economic development. In the months ahead, the Chamber will monitor and support legislation that promotes and encourages smart growth, yet fosters an economically competitive environment leading to the increase of the commercial tax base.

## Local Priorities

- Support the implementation of a housing plan that encourages housing options at varying price points for a growing and diverse workforce, but **not to the detriment of commercial land** that will be important for existing and future employers
- Support legislation that **incentivizes and promotes the continued development of designated growth areas and the future and continued redevelopment of Downtown Columbia, all village centers, and other commercial districts**
- Support the **adoption of a General Plan** that clearly articulates and dictates the **future direction of the county** when it comes to growth and development. The plan should incorporate **smart growth policies**, yet encourage and promote economic and community development



# Transportation

The ability to move goods and products in an efficient and timely manner is critical for industry. Moreover, access to jobs and employment centers is key for Maryland families seeking better wages, leading to improved opportunities. Businesses and communities prosper when streets and arterials are properly maintained.

The Chamber will support legislation that:

- Institutes a **streamlined procurement process**, thereby enabling the state's money to work faster in building infrastructure and creating jobs
- Calls for the development of a **comprehensive transportation plan** that sets forth related funding priorities for roads and transportation alternatives, such as Bus Rapid Transit
- **Improves Maryland's infrastructure** through efficient use of current revenue sources and provides adequate funding for transportation
- **Does not impose external demands** on transportation planning or restricts the use of transportation funding

