



HOWARD COUNTY  
CHAMBER

2026

# LEGISLATIVE AGENDA

Message from the

# LEGISLATIVE AFFAIRS CO-CHAIRS

Howard County's business community continues to demonstrate resilience, innovation, and leadership during a time of rapid economic and policy change. As we prepare for the 2026 General Assembly session, our focus remains on ensuring that public policy supports, rather than constrains, the ability of businesses to grow, hire, and serve our community.

This Legislative Agenda reflects the priorities and concerns we hear from employers across industries. We recognize the pressures businesses face—from rising costs to regulatory complexity—and we are committed to advocating for balanced, thoughtful policies that enhance Maryland's competitiveness.

We are deeply grateful for the dedication of our Legislative Affairs Committee members, whose expertise and commitment strengthen the Chamber's voice. We also appreciate the many Chamber members who share their experiences and challenges, helping us shape an agenda that reflects the realities of doing business in Howard County.

We look forward to working with policymakers at every level to advance solutions that support a thriving, inclusive economy for all.



Shaun Eddy  
Oxford Planning Group  
Legislative Affairs Co-Chair



Lynda Ellis  
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## 2026 LEGISLATIVE TEAM

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Nicholas Barrick, PE (KCI Technologies)  
Jennifer Blondo (Key Process Partners)  
Tom Cormier (Giant – Ahold USA)  
Phillip Dodge (Downtown Columbia Partnership)  
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Cory Flere (Howard County Association of Realtors)  
Andrew Griffin (Providence Strategies LLC)  
Rohini Gupta (Howard County Library System)  
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Jennifer Jones (Howard County Economic Development Authority)  
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Steve Miller (Howard County Association of Realtors)  
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Kimberly Prescott (Prescott HR)  
Chrystopher Robinson (Chrystopher Robinson Photography)  
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Tami Watkins (Comcast)  
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# About the #HoCoChamber's BUSINESS ADVOCACY



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Strong business advocacy ensures that the voices of Howard County employers are heard at the local, state, and federal levels. As policies evolve—from labor mandates to tax changes to major investments in infrastructure—businesses need a trusted, consistent advocate working to protect their interests and support economic growth.

The Howard County Chamber fulfills this role by:

- Monitoring legislation and regulations that impact employers
- Communicating nonprofit and business community perspectives to policymakers
- Supporting policies that promote investment, entrepreneurship, and job creation
- Helping members navigate complex and changing compliance requirements

Advocacy is most effective when informed by real-world experience. That's why member involvement is essential. *By sharing insights, participating in committee work, or engaging directly with elected officials, Chamber members play a critical role in shaping policies that strengthen the business environment.*

## LEGISLATIVE AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

The Howard County Chamber's Legislative Affairs Committee is the policy engine behind the Chamber's advocacy work, allowing the Chamber to be the voice of the business community. The Committee reviews proposed legislation, identifies emerging issues, and recommends policy positions to the Chamber's leadership. Through collaboration with regional partners, statewide business organizations, and local stakeholders, this committee ensures that Chamber advocacy is strategic, credible, and impactful.

## ABOUT THE 2026 LEGISLATIVE AGENDA

This Legislative Agenda outlines the Chamber's public policy priorities for the 2026 Maryland General Assembly session. It serves as a roadmap for our advocacy efforts and a reference for policymakers, members, and community partners.

The agenda reflects:

- Feedback from Chamber members and industry experts
- Economic trends and business climate considerations
- Priorities identified by the Legislative Affairs Committee
- Alignment with the Maryland Chamber of Commerce's statewide objectives

Each section summarizes the core issues affecting local employers and identifies the Chamber's positions on legislation and regulatory matters anticipated during the legislative session.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

LABOR & EMPLOYMENT	1
<hr/>	
BUSINESS REGULATIONS, OPERATIONS & TAXATION	2
<hr/>	
EDUCATION & WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT	3
<hr/>	
ENVIRONMENT & LAND USE	4
<hr/>	
TRANSPORTATION	5
<hr/>	
CYBERSECURITY & TECHNOLOGY	6
<hr/>	
HEALTHCARE	7

# LABOR & EMPLOYMENT

Maryland employers continue to face rising labor costs, administrative burdens, and evolving workplace mandates that affect operations, hiring, and competitiveness. The Chamber supports a labor environment that is predictable, uniform, and aligned with economic realities. Policies should promote fairness, reduce excessive mandates, and maintain a balance between employees and employers.

## POLICY PRIORITIES

- Ensure labor laws are consistent statewide to reduce regulatory fragmentation.
- Promote workplace policies that support job creation and are financially sustainable for small and mid-sized employers.
- Improve employer access to clear, timely guidance on compliance requirements.
- Align state laws with federal standards where possible to streamline operations.
- Maintain fair and consistent application of public accommodation laws, noncompete agreements, and minimum wage standards.
- Advocate for predictable scheduling practices and clarity around paid sick leave and mandatory paid leave policies.

## KEY ISSUES TO WATCH

**Family and Medical Leave Insurance (FAMLI):** Advocate for delayed implementation until alignment with FMLA, clear payroll guidance, and administrative readiness. Seek clarity on eligibility, support policies that balance employee benefits with employer capacity and operational feasibility, and encourage the Department of Labor to prioritize employer education and outreach.

**Cannabis Testing in the Workplace:** Support employer protections, consistent testing standards, and exemptions for safety-sensitive roles.

**Workers' Compensation & Unemployment Insurance:** Ensure system solvency while avoiding cost increases that disproportionately affect businesses.

# BUSINESS REGULATIONS, OPERATIONS & TAXATION

Maryland's regulatory and tax frameworks greatly influence business growth, investment decisions, and the state's overall competitiveness. The Chamber advocates for reforms that create a predictable, affordable business environment while allowing market forces to operate effectively.

## POLICY PRIORITIES

- Reduce unnecessary regulatory requirements and modernize outdated processes.
- Streamline permitting processes to shorten approval timelines, reduce costs, and encourage investment.
- Support comprehensive procurement reform to increase competition and provide consistency across government levels.
- Oppose changes to state antitrust laws that place Maryland businesses at a competitive disadvantage.
- Oppose new or expanded taxes—including service taxes—that increase operating costs.
- Promote economic impact analysis for major regulatory proposals.
- Expand opportunities for small, minority, and emerging businesses through streamlined procurement.
- Maintain competitive civil liability standards and oppose policies that increase exposure or insurance costs.

## KEY ISSUES TO WATCH

**Permitting Reform:** Monitor efforts to streamline permitting, reducing unnecessary delays and costs for businesses.

**Procurement Reform:** Advocate for consistent, transparent processes that encourage competition and equitable access for diverse businesses.

**Antitrust & Regulatory Expansion:** Oppose new regulations or premerger notification requirements that disadvantage Maryland businesses relative to other states.



# EDUCATION & WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

A strong talent pipeline is essential to Howard County's economic success. Employers need access to a skilled workforce that keeps pace with evolving industry needs. The Chamber supports an educational and vocational ecosystem that develops, retains, and attracts a globally competitive workforce, linking academic instruction with practical, skills-based learning.

## POLICY PRIORITIES

- Sustain funding for K-12, higher education, and career readiness programs.
- Expand apprenticeships, internships, and work-based learning.
- Simplify access to apprenticeship and intern tax credits and reform eligibility to broaden participation.
- Expand statutory definitions of apprenticeships to include more industries and increase employer participation.
- Support childcare availability and affordability to improve workforce participation.
- Recognize and retain skilled military retirees by supporting elimination of state income tax on uniformed services retirement pay.
- Encourage partnerships between employers, community colleges, and technical schools to strengthen career pathways and meet workforce demands.

## KEY ISSUES TO WATCH

**Apprenticeship Expansion:** Broaden statutory definitions and increase opportunities in high-demand sectors.

**Second-Chance Employment:** Expand access for justice-impacted and recovery-community individuals, balancing opportunity with employer protections.

**Military Retention:** Implement policies to retain veterans and military retirees to address workforce shortages in critical industries.

# ENVIRONMENT & LAND USE

Environmental stewardship and land-use planning must balance sustainability, housing needs, and economic growth. Policies should protect natural resources while enabling responsible development.

## POLICY PRIORITIES

- Ensure reliable, affordable access to energy during Maryland's clean energy transition.
- Support a diversified, equitable, and inclusive energy portfolio to enhance energy security and reliability.
- Encourage voluntary, incentive-driven clean energy initiatives that minimize costs to businesses and consumers.
- Modernize permitting to reduce delays, eliminate unnecessary obstacles, and attract investment.
- Promote smart growth that preserves commercial land, supports mixed-use development, and accommodates housing needs.
- Support science- and market-based approaches to chemical regulation and recycling that balance environmental goals with business needs.
- Encourage balanced strategies for climate goals that consider cost, grid capacity, and timelines.

## KEY ISSUES TO WATCH

**Electrification & Clean Energy Transition:** Advocate for realistic timelines and cost-effective implementation to avoid undue financial or operational burden on businesses.

**Chemical & Recycling Regulations:** Support practical, science-based regulations that protect safety and the environment while considering economic impacts.

**Permitting Reform:** Monitor efforts to modernize and streamline permitting, reducing unnecessary delays and costs.

**Housing Supply & Affordability:** Encourage diverse housing options while protecting commercial tax bases and ensuring responsible growth.

**Climate & Greenhouse Gas Policies:** Encourage voluntary and incentive-based approaches that drive innovation without imposing excessive costs and penalties on businesses.



# TRANSPORTATION

Efficient transportation systems support workforce mobility, supply chains, and business growth. Maryland must address long-term infrastructure funding needs to ensure reliability while supporting inclusive economic development.

## POLICY PRIORITIES

- Restore and protect the Transportation Trust Fund and address structural deficits to ensure sustainable funding.
- Invest in multimodal transportation, including roads, transit, pedestrian, and bicycle networks.
- Streamline procurement and permitting to accelerate infrastructure delivery and attract private investment.
- Support expansion of broadband, 5G, and small cell technology to improve connectivity and complement mobility and economic development.
- Promote equitable transportation solutions that connect underserved communities to jobs and services.

## KEY ISSUES TO WATCH

**Key Bridge Recovery & Rebuilding:** Support full funding and expedited reconstruction of the Key Bridge to restore critical regional mobility. Prioritizing recovery is essential to sustaining Maryland's workforce and supply chain competitiveness.

**Long-term Funding Solutions:** Prioritize sustainable revenue strategies that don't disproportionately burden businesses, including highway user revenues and alternative funding mechanisms.

**Vehicle Emission Standards:** Ensure policies balance environmental objectives with costs and operational impacts on businesses, considering differences across states and communities.

**Infrastructure Investment:** Monitor initiatives to expand and maintain critical transportation assets that support commerce, logistics, and workforce mobility.

**Technology & Connectivity:** Encourage policies that support rapid deployment of digital infrastructure to reduce the state's digital divide and enable economic growth.

# CYBERSECURITY & TECHNOLOGY

As cyber threats grow and digital systems evolve, Maryland must support innovation while protecting consumers and businesses. The Chamber believes that technology and cybersecurity are critical to Maryland's economy, and that policy should encourage growth, entrepreneurship, and infrastructure investment.

## POLICY PRIORITIES

- Strengthen cybersecurity readiness, especially for small and mid-sized employers, to better protect against evolving threats.
- Promote equitable broadband access across urban and rural areas.
- Support responsible, innovation-friendly data privacy standards that reduce compliance complexity and align with broader national or multistate norms.
- Encourage AI adoption while establishing clear, flexible oversight frameworks.
- Advocate for industry investment tax credits that support biotechnology, cybersecurity, and other high-tech sectors.

## KEY ISSUES TO WATCH

**Statewide Data Privacy Legislation:** Work to address inconsistencies and compliance challenges in Maryland's privacy law (especially in comparison to other states), to provide clarity and reduce regulatory burden for businesses.

**AI Regulation & Cybersecurity Risk:** Ensure that AI policy includes robust cybersecurity considerations, reflecting the growing convergence of AI risk and security threats.

**Net Neutrality:** Monitor any efforts to reinstate federal net neutrality rules in a way that could create business uncertainty or disadvantage companies with multistate operations.

**Technology Infrastructure Expansion:** Promote policies that support the rapid deployment of broadband, 5G, and small cell infrastructure in a transparent, competitive way, ensuring all communities benefit.

**Taxation on Tech Services:** Support significant amendments to (or full repeal of) the "Tech Tax," which has already prompted some businesses to leave Maryland and pushed others to consider relocating. Reform or repeal is critical to maintaining a competitive business climate, especially in Howard County due to the high concentration of tech-related businesses.



# HEALTHCARE

Ensuring a stable, innovative, and cost-effective healthcare system is vital for Howard County businesses. As employers navigate rising healthcare costs and changing regulation, the Chamber supports policies that promote affordability, protect innovation, and maintain flexibility in benefits.

## POLICY PRIORITIES

- Avoid unnecessary healthcare mandates that increase employer costs.
- Support transparency and affordability in pharmaceutical pricing.
- Invest in healthcare workforce development and retention.
- Maintain competitive insurance markets to keep employer-sponsored coverage affordable.
- Advocate for increased access to aggregated health plans via Professional Employer Organizations (PEOs) to help small and mid-sized employers manage costs more effectively.

## KEY ISSUES TO WATCH

**Pharmaceutical Fees & Mandates:** Any expansion of payment limits should be weighed carefully against the impact on innovation, access, and the biopharma industry.

**State Regulation on Biopharma:** Avoid overly restrictive or burdensome regulation on pharmaceutical development, manufacturing, and biomanufacturing that could drive investment out of Maryland.

**Health Care System Reform:** Monitor potential changes to Maryland's health care financing or delivery systems, especially in response to federal reforms. Advocate for transparency and predictability in health plan changes so employers can budget and plan for benefits without surprise mandates.

**Behavioral Health Needs:** Support programs that reduce workforce disruptions and improve community well-being.



# SHAPE THE FUTURE OF BUSINESS IN HOWARD COUNTY.

**BECOME A MEMBER.  
GET INVOLVED IN BUSINESS ADVOCACY.  
MAKE YOUR VOICE HEARD.**



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**YOUR BUSINESS MATTERS. YOUR VOICE MATTERS.  
LET'S BUILD THE FUTURE OF HOWARD COUNTY — TOGETHER.**