

ABOUT MARTINSVILLE-HENRY COUNTY CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

The Martinsville-Henry County Chamber of Commerce is a five-star accredited member of the US Chamber of Commerce. Our Chamber represents almost 700 businesses in the Southside Virginia region. The MHC Chamber supports public policies that strengthen free enterprise and regional collaboration efforts that promote economic development.

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2021 LEGISLATIVE AGENDA



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & REGIONALISM

The Chamber is strongly committed to results-oriented programs that attract investment in technology infrastructure, enhance regional economic development planning and workforce training, and promote cooperative city and county efforts to maintain or attract job growth to the Southside Region. **THE CHAMBER SUPPORTS:**

- A strategic plan for additional Virginia Telecommunications Initiative (VATI) funding for public-private partnerships to expand affordable broadband and telecommunication services in unserved areas to support economic development, telework, telemedicine, and tele-education access necessary for a modern workforce.
- Funding for economic development programs available through the Virginia Economic Development Partnership and GO Virginia particularly in rural areas.
- Tax reform measures to strengthen and defend Virginia's business climate.
- Expand grants and resources available to fiscally stressed localities to aid in the encouragement of entrepreneurship.
- Expanded incentives for angel and venture capital investments in Virginia businesses and increased funding to commercialize regional research spinoff and startup businesses.
- Protection of Virginia's existing Right-to-Work laws so that employees are not compelled to pay union dues as a condition of employment.
- Investment in job training, education, and in-demand skills as means to higher earning potential.
- Delaying the minimum wage increase as passed during the 2020 General Assembly session until the economy recovers to pre-pandemic levels.
- The continued safe development of cost effective, traditional and renewable energy sources to meet business needs.

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT & EDUCATION

The Chamber recognizes the vital importance of maintaining and developing new and innovative workforce and job development programs to enhance and attract human capital. **THE CHAMBER SUPPORTS:**

- Increased FastForward program/New Virginia Economy Workforce Credentials Grant at Patrick Henry Community College as well as restoration of funding to community colleges since 2009 cuts.
- Continued support and funding of the New College Institute in its current location as a premier site for industry relevant training and certification, academic programming, and distance learning to prepare learners for employment in high-demand occupations.
- Initiatives that strengthen connections among students, parents, educators, and guidance counselors of career and technical education (CTE) opportunities and regionally in-demand careers beginning in middle school or earlier to increase talent pipelines.
- Efforts to improve coordination between Virginia's employers, job training programs, and education communities to meet industry, workforce, and student needs.
- Funding for regional career and technical education communities.
- Emphasis on science, technology, engineering, math and health (STEM-H) courses in K-12 and Virginia's colleges and universities, in addition to coursework in areas of business and economics to encourage the next generation of small business owners.
- Funding to ensure quality and affordable childcare to support needs of our workforce.
- Immigration policies that support workforce needs.
- Increase the amount and flexibility of Lottery funding for both at-risk and per-pupil accounts which is critical.

TRANSPORTATION

Transportation is a core service of government that is critical for economic development and facilitating the efficient delivery of goods and services. The Commonwealth must remain pro-active in meeting the challenge of growing demand on its aging infrastructure. **THE CHAMBER SUPPORTS** a coordinated and equitable strategic transportation plan, to include:

- Support and funding for the Martinsville Southern Connector project, which would create a direct route from the North Carolina line and Commonwealth Crossing Business Centre to the Route 58/Route 220 bypass.
- Funding and completion of widening US 58 between Stuart and Hillsville.
- Proposed funding for the construction of Interstate 73.
- Recognizing the economic impact and recruitment potential of the Blue Ridge Regional Airport by funding two critical projects: (1) Expand runway to 6,000 feet to serve the larger business aircraft and increase revenues in the region and the Commonwealth of Virginia, and (2) Aircraft apron expansion to handle visiting aircraft.
- Continued exploration of innovative and sustainable funding mechanisms and additional VDOT SMART SCALE weighting to meet transportation needs in Southside region.
- Initiatives to expand air service at regional airports in our Southside communities.

HEALTHCARE

The Chamber remains concerned about the uncertainty surrounding the implementation of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (PPACA) and its impact on Virginia's business community. The Chamber believes steps must be taken to limit the shifting of uncompensated care onto the business community and other unsubsidized users of Virginia's hospitals and health care providers. **THE CHAMBER SUPPORTS:**

- Legislation that allows the creation of Multiple Employer Welfare Arrangements (MEWAs) which offer health plans to support health care affordability and accessibility for employers and employees.
- Initiatives and additional resources to address the future of mental and behavioral health treatment in the Commonwealth including expansion of mental and behavioral health telehealth.
- Initiatives and additional resources to assess and address the need for telehealth medical services as a current need and in the future, as a long-term strategy.
- Implementation and administration of Drug Court as a more effective and sustainable means of rehabilitation for substance abusers.

COVID-19 AND OTHER HEALTH EMERGENCIES

The Chamber continues to push for measures to help businesses recover and operate during the COVID-19 pandemic and other public health emergencies. **THE CHAMBER SUPPORTS:**

- Continued funding and implementation of COVID-19 vaccine development and distribution programs.
- Funding accurate and prompt COVID-19 testing and contact tracing.
- Legal liability protections for businesses who follow health protocols.
- Continued affordable and reliable access to Personal Protective Equipment.
- Measures to reshore manufacture of critical medical equipment and pharmaceuticals.
- Continued recognition of regional differences as they relate to potential outbreaks and strategies to mitigate viral spread.
- Reducing roadblocks for permitting/licensing childcare providers so that parents can continue to work during public health emergencies.
- Maintaining the 2020-2022 formula-based re-benchmarking without any negative changes for the biennium.
- Establishing the 2019-2020 March 31 ADM as a floor for Basic Aid and holding school divisions harmless for any changes.
- Fund the \$118 million in projected sales tax funding reductions to local school divisions by the Virginia General Assembly.
- Funding to assist schools moving from in-person to virtual instruction and vice versa.