



2010 Legislative Agenda

Both the state of Maryland and businesses across the Baltimore region face a challenging year due to the current state of the economy. In spite of that, Maryland needs to strengthen its business climate so businesses can generate new growth. For the 2010 General Assembly Session, the Chamber's priorities are:

- Promoting revenue growth through incentives that stimulate the economy.
- Supporting educational initiatives that promote workforce readiness, lifelong learning, and partnerships between businesses and educational institutions.
- Ensuring that Maryland becomes more physician-friendly.
- Seeking environmental and land use solutions that do not adversely affect businesses.
- Maintaining the integrity of the state's Transportation Trust Fund.
- Championing the county's transportation priorities and improvements to MARC train service.
- Opposing legislation that creates sanctions, penalties, and mandates for workforce regulation.

FISCAL RESPONSIBILITY

As Jim Collins writes in his best-selling book, *Good to Great*, good leaders manage crises well, while great leaders prevent crises from occurring. For too long, government has managed its way from crisis to crisis by raising taxes and fees and instituting one-time fixes, while avoiding the structural changes necessary. State and local governments must take advantage of opportunities for systemic change in government programs and operations, including a fundamental restructuring of its workforce.

At the same time, all reasonable steps should be taken to promote revenue growth — not through additional taxes — but through incentives that stimulate the economy, such as sales tax-free days to stimulate consumer spending and tax breaks/incentives for small business start ups.

Above all, businesses should not be further taxed as they represent the economic engine that generates growth.

EDUCATION

Education represents the single biggest cost of government and well it should. But at the same time, it is paramount that education at all levels be the best value possible for students and taxpayers alike. For higher education — from community colleges to public and independent four-year colleges and universities — this means taking aggressive action to control costs, adjusting tuition as necessary, and effectively managing funding that is stable, predictable, and consistent.

Baltimore County is fortunate to have an outstanding primary, secondary, adult, and higher education infrastructure, with the capacity to provide a high quality and competent workforce. However, businesses are expressing increasing concern that graduates lack the technical and workplace skills necessary to compete

in today's business environment. Worse yet, businesses 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 as mentors for educators and students alike. In return, we ask that standards like the High School Assessments be retained and expanded, social promotion be discontinued, and standards of attitude be established.

HEALTH CARE

Maryland needs to be more physician-friendly. With that in mind, the state needs to:

- Require carriers honor a patient's assignment of benefits.
- Restore the cap on non-economic damages after a recent court ruling said they don't apply to medical liability.
- Hold carriers financially responsible for services provided by non-participating providers for emergency services; when there is no participating provider who can perform the service; and when a non-participating physician provides the service in a hospital which is a preferred provider.

The Chamber urges legislators to pursue the enactment of reasonable False Claims legislation, thereby providing the state with enhanced tools to prosecute fraud and abuse. The legislation needs to require proof of intent to submit a false claim and cap the maximum amount of fines imposed, but should exclude the right of private action provision. Any funds recovered should go to the General Fund.

LAND USE

Real estate development in Baltimore County can be difficult. The existing Planned Unit Development (PUD) regulations for Baltimore County are complex and expensive and are becoming ever more difficult for businesses. Mixed-use development — which is only allowed under a PUD — must be protected.

There are several environmental issues pending in Baltimore County that, if enacted, will adversely affect businesses and citizens alike.

- Consideration is being given the regulation of solar panels and small wind turbines. Any effort to prohibit onsite alternative energy would be counterproductive.
- Under a new state law, Storm Water Management requirements will become more stringent and include renovations of existing buildings. This will dramatically affect businesses that either buy an existing building or own one and plan to renovate it, creating a disadvantage for our older developed areas. As a partial offset, the Chamber urges the County to permit Greywater recycling.

Baltimore County should take advantage of the Maryland Clean Energy Loan Program, like Baltimore City and Montgomery County. MCELP is a state-enabled program that authorizes loans to businesses and residents to implement energy efficient programs within their buildings.



TRANSPORTATION

The state must maintain the integrity of the transportation trust fund. With the decrease in state revenues, pressure has been building on the state's General Fund to continue to provide the same level of services with a much smaller revenue basis. One "solution" to the revenue dilemma would be to transfer monies from the Transportation Trust Fund to the General Fund. The Baltimore County Chamber of Commerce adamantly opposes any such transfer.

Transportation-related fees and revenues have decreased markedly and the Chamber supports the state Department of Transportation reducing its program to match expenditures with revenue. The General Fund needs to do the same and not look to transportation revenues (including the gas tax; vehicle titling, taxes and fees; and tolls on transportation facilities) as a source of revenue to make up shortfalls.

The Chamber supports the I-695 eastside improvements and the I-795 interchange at Dolfield Boulevard in the Consolidated Transportation Program. The decrease in Transportation Trust Fund revenues may necessitate project deferral in order to allow revenue to match expenditures. These deferrals, however, should not allow other projects to leap frog over the County's most important projects. All projects in the program should be deferred equally and nothing should be allowed to be "fast tracked" over the existing priority of other projects.

With alarm, the Chamber notes an increasing lack of service on the MARC train system. The Mass Transit Administration (MTA) needs to focus on providing an excellent level of service on its existing mass transit lines. BRAC expansion at both Fort Meade and Aberdeen Proving Grounds changes the economic axis in Maryland to a Fort Meade/Washington access. This corridor needs to be served by an efficient, reliable intercity train service like those in other large metropolitan areas. The MTA's primary focus should be on improving the service of MARC, even if that necessitates delaying the planning and design of new, non-corridor mass transit facilities.

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.

WORKFORCE REGULATION

The Chamber opposes legislation imposing sanctions and penalties for employers who unintentionally misclassify workers. There remains no single definition of an employee, making it difficult for employers to determine accurately a workers' status.

The Chamber also 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 reduces the incentive for employers to offer leave of absence options.

The Chamber encourages legislation that provides credit to employers for expanding wellness programs within their organizations. The Chamber 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.

