



**GEORGIA CHAMBER**  
**CENTER FOR COMPETITIVENESS**

**2017 Policy Statements**

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## Overview

“What’s good for business is good for Georgia” drives the policy and legislative direction of the Georgia Chamber and the Chamber’s Center for Competitiveness. The Chamber represents the unified voice of Georgia’s business community and is also an advocacy arm for businesses in the development and promotion of public policies to ensure the future of economic mobility for all Georgians.

2017 will be the tenth year of operation for the Chamber’s policy committees and marks the fourth year of formal operation of the Georgia Chamber Center for Competitiveness. Chamber leadership believes the Center provides an increased opportunity for the Chamber to play an expanded role in the research and development of policy recommendations to improve Georgia’s economic competitiveness. While the policy positions remain important guideposts for the Chamber’s legislative advocacy, the Center’s work will advance beyond written positions to formal research and recommendations.

## Business & Industry

**Workplace/Employment Regulations** -- The Georgia Chamber of Commerce seeks to maintain a harmonious balance in the relationship between employees and employers in our state. The Chamber works to ensure policies are created that benefit the employer-employee relationship and allow businesses to be competitive with their workforces.

Accordingly, the Chamber **supports** efforts to strengthen and protect Georgia's "Right to Work" law and employment-at-will doctrine. Standards governing the relationship between independent contractors, employees, and employers should be balanced and fair to all parties.

The Chamber also **supports** employees having appropriate information readily available to them regarding their rights, and **supports** measures ensuring that their safety is protected during union organizing efforts or demonstrations.

The Chamber specifically **opposes** legislative or regulatory efforts to create imbalance in the workplace, including Federal proposals that would:

- eliminate secret ballot elections in the workplace;
- impose mandatory first contract binding arbitration;
- target small numbers of employees within a company for the purpose of organizing them into micro bargaining units;
- drastically speed up the union election process by limiting pre-election legal challenges;
- call for an injunction against an employer where there is a "reasonable cause" to believe that the employer is engaged in an unfair labor practice;
- institute treble back pay for employees discriminatorily discharged during an organizing drive;
- impose excessive civil fines; and
- allow electronic signatures on union authorization cards.

**Workplace Safety** -- The Georgia Chamber of Commerce **supports** safe, healthy, and productive work environments, which are conducive to efficiencies, morale and speed-to-market. In supporting these areas, Georgia companies can avoid significant cost associated with workplace accidents and injuries as well as costly litigation. In addition to state and federal compliance mandates, most Georgia businesses voluntarily adopt and adhere to standards that meet or exceed Federal and state requirements. As part of a safe working environment, the Chamber **supports** the rights of business and property owners to determine appropriate policies and regulations regarding access to weapons in the workplace and on their property.

**Workers' Compensation** -- The Georgia Chamber of Commerce **supports** legislation and policies that ensure a balanced and equitable system of handling claims for on the job injuries. An efficient Workers' Compensation system is the exclusive, non-presumptive remedy and should be fair to the employee and employer and designed to return the employee to work as soon as medically appropriate.

**Business Regulations** -- The Georgia Chamber of Commerce **supports** legislation that allows market force principles to work in the state's economy. More competition, rather than increased government intervention, best serves Georgia's economy and consumers, and speeds products and innovation to the market. The adoption of policies that eliminate duplicative work and streamline procedures will provide long-term efficiencies and budgetary predictability.

The Georgia Chamber of Commerce **opposes** legislation, policies, or the use of symbols that support or promote, or appear to support or promote, discriminatory practices. Georgia is home to a diverse business community of large and small companies across various sectors, which employ and serve a multicultural demographic. The establishment and practice of discriminatory policies will jeopardize the state's ability to grow its economy and negatively impact Georgia's reputation as a leader for global commerce.

While the Georgia Chamber of Commerce opposes discrimination in any form, decisions to remove historical monuments or symbols, should largely be made at the local level. The Georgia Chamber of Commerce **supports** a balanced and fair representation of the state's diverse history.

**Competitive Fairness** -- While the Georgia Chamber encourages and supports competition in the open marketplace, government entities often have inherent economic and regulatory advantages over the private sector. That is why the Chamber **supports** requiring all market competitors to adhere to a similar regulatory framework when offering retail consumer services.

**Trade** -- The Georgia Chamber of Commerce **supports** free trade agreements to expand worldwide market access to U.S. companies and their products.

The Chamber **supports**:

- the elimination of duplicate layers of regulation that are overly burdensome and stifle economic growth;
- changes to state, Federal, and local regulatory processes that will help ensure government rule-making and regulations are based on sound science, rigorous peer-reviewed technical analysis, and the best available data;
- subjecting proposed rule-making and regulations to appropriate cost-benefit analysis and regular review to evaluate their efficacy and to eliminate costly, arcane and antiquated requirements; and
- efforts to provide businesses credit for all good faith efforts to comply with laws and regulations and the expeditious correction of any violations of self-imposed or mandated requirements.

**Immigration** -- The Georgia Chamber of Commerce understands that immigration is a pressing issue for Georgia businesses. Immigration challenges impose restrictions on retaining and hiring talented professionals and laborers. If such challenges are not addressed, the U.S. will see a decline in the availability of skilled workers. The lack of skilled workers will result in the off-shoring of businesses.

In 2011, the General Assembly passed HB 87 to address securing the state's borders and reducing the economic strain of illegal immigrants. The General Assembly took further action in 2013 to revise the Illegal Immigration Reform and Enforcement Act in SB 160 to deal with the administrative responsibilities of employment eligibility.

On this issue, the Chamber continues to encourage and **support:**

- efforts led by the Federal government to establish a national, lawful, manageable, and monitored guest and essential worker program to fill the growing gaps in our state's workforce -- recognizing that, in some cases, permanent immigrants will be needed to fill labor shortages;
- efforts by Georgia businesses to comply with current immigration laws and regulations;
- efforts to combine strict enforcement of employment verification with accurate employment eligibility information. The current E-Verify process is flawed and inconsistent and needs to be improved. While employers should not be placed in the position of policing Federal immigration laws, those that knowingly hire illegal workers should be punished; and
- efforts to ensure border security as a priority designed to prevent anyone -- and especially those who pose security threats to this country -- from entering illegally. That said, it is imperative that the border remain open to allow for commerce and documented citizens to easily pass through our borders.

**Military Installations and Defense Industry** -- Military installations and the defense industry are important and growing components of the Georgia economy. We support any efforts that promote Georgia as a pro-military state and help the state prepare for growth should another Base Realignment & Closure Commission (BRACC) convene.

**Alternative Work Options** -- The Georgia Chamber of Commerce supports efforts by its members and government to encourage telecommuting, teleworking, and alternative work schedules that can be practical solutions to human resource constraints, employee quality of life and environmental issues. These arrangements often benefit Georgia businesses through increased employee productivity and motivation, improved employee work-life balance, reduced vehicular pollution and traffic, government-sponsored financial incentives, and increased employment opportunities for disabled, rural, and older workers, as well as spouses of those in the military.

**Rural Economic Development** -- Georgia's interstate infrastructure and geographical landscape hinders the ability of our rural areas to locate projects and create jobs. The lack of economic development results in a young workforce fleeing to metropolitan areas for opportunities while the older workforce is without transferable skill sets. The current situation has crippled the ability of rural areas of the state to revive staple industries and attract new industries. To improve this situation, the Chamber supports:

- policies that promote the necessary education and training;
- new transportation infrastructure needed to move goods; and
- the organizing of regional efforts and shared resources.

**Georgia's Enterprise** -- Georgia's state and local governments rely on the private sector to provide products and services that contribute to efficient and effective processes. The state should ensure a

competitive environment where all government vendors are treated equally based on technically sound and cost conscience solutions. The Chamber believes continued use of companies with a significant Georgia presence, when feasible, will further promote the state's enterprise.

**Minimum Wage** --The Georgia Chamber *opposes* proposals to raise the minimum wage. The organization believes that this type of government interference in a business' market-driven activities could jeopardize existing and future employment for Georgians. The Georgia Chamber of Commerce seeks to promote job growth and security for Georgians, and, in doing so, trusts the business community to make the necessary decisions pertaining to its operations in the free market.

The Chamber would consider alternative proposals that would expand the federal earned income tax credit or Georgia's low-income tax credit, which supplements the federal credit. These tax credits encourage and reward work in addition to offsetting payroll and income taxes.

**Overtime Pay** -- The Georgia Chamber *opposes* proposals to narrow the exemptions from overtime pay. This includes USDOL's pending proposal which would more-than-double the current minimum salary which is necessary for certain categories of employees to be treated as exempt under the executive, administrative, or professional exemptions from FLSA overtime pay.

**Unemployment Benefits** --The Georgia Chamber *opposes* any additional extension of unemployment benefits. Because the unemployment-insurance (UI) program is an experience-based system, the amount of UI taxes employers pay varies; however, the state's expedited repayment of Federal loans has resulted in higher UI taxes for most Georgia employers. While the Chamber supports job creation and returning Georgians to the workforce, additional increases to the UI program through the extension of benefits will be unsustainable for many employers throughout the state.

## Education & Workforce

**Mission** -- An important objective of the Georgia Chamber of Commerce is to team with local businesses, chambers and communities, state officials and other organizations to build the nation's best workforce and ensure employers have the talent they need to stay competitive. We believe strategies that link education and workforce development in a seamless system and the embedding of skills-based learning into academic instruction are vital to that objective.

**Graduating High School** -- Georgia continues to underperform our potential in K-12 student performance. The Georgia Chamber of Commerce recognizes that our state cannot produce the skilled workforce of tomorrow unless our schools successfully educate the students of today. To achieve that goal, and to help Georgia attain a better return on its investment in education, the Chamber **supports** efforts to:

- maintain rigorous academic standards that work in concert with national and international standards while supporting teachers and students as needed to ensure these standards are met;
- sustain and improve Georgia's student information system, tracking performance through high school and beyond to measure the progress and achievement of students, teachers, schools and school systems while establishing statewide security protocols to protect student privacy;
- improve performance in appropriate competency measures, increase high school and post-secondary graduation rates, and reduce the need for remedial education;
- attract, train and retain high-quality teachers, especially in high-demand subject areas, and to link teacher compensation with improvements in student performance;
- develop and hold accountable strong educational leaders and administrators;
- hold school districts, local boards of education, and charter school governing boards accountable for student achievement to ensure quality governance;
- create public and private-sector incentives that, with appropriate accountability, empower students to attend the public or private school of their choice;
- promote school readiness by increasing the quality and availability of early care and education for children from birth through age 5;
- create and sustain state- and locally authorized charter schools that enable greater academic and fiscal flexibility tied to greater accountability;
- enable innovative academic and fiscal flexibility tied to greater need, accountability, and transparency across all public schools;
- create public and private-sector online learning opportunities and accreditations that are individually tailored, adequately funded, and available in both full-time and hybrid applications;
- prepare students for life and work through early introduction of critical workforce competencies such as leadership, teamwork, communication and time management;
- assist at-risk and under-served students in their pursuit of academic success and social well-being; and
- prepare students for postsecondary education and career success through on-site and virtual programs that measure necessary knowledge, understanding and skills, allow students to earn college credit and career credentials/certifications, and offer students opportunities to practice essential skills for college and career preparedness.

**Transitioning to the Workplace** -- The Georgia Chamber of Commerce supports efforts to improve workforce readiness in order to improve lives and promote economic mobility and prosperity. To

achieve that goal, Georgia's secondary and post-secondary institutions must effectively prepare current and future workers for careers in a variety of technical and professional disciplines. These institutions rank highly among their peers in many areas, but face significant challenges in others. Therefore, the Chamber ***supports:***

- efforts of K-12, University, technical schools, and employers to solidify a closer working relationships among these institutions to achieve a more seamless transition from high school to post-secondary education and the workplace;
- efforts to help high school students get a jump-start on college and careers through "Move On When Ready," Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, College-Career Academies and other programs that enable them to earn post-secondary credit prior to graduation;
- efforts to support secondary career and technical education programs and certifications, and to create career academies, developing educational opportunities that focus on needed workforce competencies;
- efforts to implement work readiness assessment programs throughout the state to enhance workforce competencies and provide the ability to clearly demonstrate those competencies to employers;
- efforts to improve on-the-job training and retraining programs and incentives to meet the needs of employers; and
- efforts to protect and expand post-secondary access through Georgia's merit-based and needs-based student financial aid programs.

**Growing the Economy** -- One of Georgia's strongest assets is its system of public and private colleges and universities. In addition to filling workforce needs, higher education enhances individual citizens' prosperity and creates new industries and jobs. Therefore, the Chamber ***supports:***

- efforts to improve the hireability, earning potential and overall quality of life for Georgia citizens and reduce their reliance on government services through significant investment in higher education and its affordability; and
- efforts to ensure Georgia's future as a leader in business and research through the development of new ideas and innovations at Georgia colleges and universities and their transition to profitable enterprises.

## Energy & Natural Resources

**Mission** -- The Georgia Chamber of Commerce *supports* community and business endeavors that utilize Georgia's natural resources in ways that sustain, enhance, protect and conserve these natural, historic and cultural resources for present and future generations, while at the same time, recognizing the importance of promoting the development of commerce and industry that utilize sustainable business management practices.

The Chamber supports detailed analysis of the economic, social and environmental benefits, impacts and ramifications to the Georgia economy of all energy and natural resources policies, programs and proposed legislation, rules and regulations.

The Georgia Chamber of Commerce recognizes that access to sustainable, reliable and affordable energy is a major competitive advantage that industry and communities currently enjoy across the State. To protect and enhance this competitive advantage, the Chamber actively promotes the development and maintenance of a diversified and competitive energy generation and distribution capability that capitalizes on the intrinsic values of all energy sources available across Georgia.

The Chamber *supports*:

- a commitment to implementing a comprehensive state energy plan with protection of Georgia's environment and use of its natural resources as key elements;
- a competitive marketplace, regulated where appropriate, that promotes network investment and growth and the provision of reliable and affordable energy;
- voluntary efforts to optimize energy efficiency and demand-side management in government, communities and business that will lead to the adoption of long-term and sustainable energy stewardship practices;
- the expansion of domestic offshore oil and gas exploration while remaining diligent in protecting estuarine and marine habitats;
- shifting consumption away from a dependency on fuels globally sourced outside of North America to a more balanced and competitively priced energy portfolio of fuels available in Georgia and the United States, including responsible use of nuclear energy, solar, geothermal, hydro, wind, propane, natural gas, coal, biomass from our forests, and other renewable alternatives such as fuels produced efficiently by a new generation of agricultural crops and new energy technologies;
- creation of additional broad-based tax incentives for energy development and infrastructure, including retrofitting and conversion of current vehicles and investment in new vehicles for use of alternative fuels;
- ongoing investment in new infrastructure and enhancements to existing infrastructure that will meet our supply needs in an environmentally-sensitive manner -- part of this effort must be a streamlined path for siting and permitting new infrastructure facilities;
- public data sources that track energy usage and conservation practices, and scientific measures that monitor the benefit/impact of business and consumer actions on our environment; and
- adoption of a state plan that ensures a reliable energy supply at the least possible cost increase to the rate payers in Georgia in the event that litigation to overturn the Clean Power Plan is rejected by the courts.

The Chamber opposes:

- a renewable portfolio standard that creates economic imbalance nationally, regionally or for Georgia;
- policies that are not based on sound science or current data or existing technology immediately available for effective implementation; and
- efficiency standards that do not recognize and reward the efforts of early adopters.

**Water Policy** -- Access to high-quality, affordable water supply is critical for continued community and business growth and investment across Georgia. Water supply security is essential for the promotion of the state as a competitive business destination.

The Georgia Chamber of Commerce supports state and regional water planning initiatives and the rigorous promotion of a statewide “culture of conservation” that, together, continue to drive the expansion of water-use efficiency and sustainable community and business water-use management practices.

The Georgia Chamber of Commerce ***supports*** implementation of statewide and regional water planning initiatives that:

- rely on sound science on water quality and surface and groundwater availability and usage and current population and business and employment growth projections;
- support current and future community and economic growth across the state;
- allow for continued use of effectively managed interbasin transfers;
- promote the implementation of market-driven or incentive-based conservation practices by all water users. The Chamber opposes government-mandated conservation policies that impede the free market;
- create partnership opportunities -- including public/private where appropriate -- to stimulate investment in new reservoirs, infrastructure refurbishment, aquifer storage and recovery, and water efficiency technologies;
- encourages innovation in and the adoption of new technologies and management practices that enhance sustainable water resource management across all industry sectors and the wider community;
- creates an environment that enables Georgia to become a national and global leader in water resource management; and

are fully funded.

**Infrastructure** -- Modern, efficient and well maintained energy and water infrastructure is critical to the delivery of high quality, economical, cost effective and timely energy and water resources to the point of consumption or areas of major demand.

To stimulate business investment and growth, infrastructure must be continually expanded, refurbished and renewed to ensure that supplies are reliable and costs of access are competitive. The Georgia Chamber supports public and private investment in infrastructure projects across the state and believes that public private partnerships should be explored to build, own and operate critical infrastructure.

New energy and water infrastructure projects should co-locate with existing utility corridors when possible, while balancing impacts to communities, environmental conditions, public safety and reliability.

**Sustainability** -- Sustainability is a complex global challenge that is capturing the attention of business and community leaders around the world and is being driven by numerous socioeconomic megatrends such as: global population growth, food production and food security, access to and management of water and natural resources, recycling, and solid waste management.

Sustainability encapsulates business strategies that focus on economic, social and environmental outcomes -- the Triple Bottom Line benefit -- and is an emerging element of business competitiveness, now being reflected across internal management strategies and wider supply-chain and industry relationships.

Public policy initiatives that seek to introduce regimes to sustainably manage natural resources, must ensure equitable access to all available resources for all users, including recreational and commercial interests. This applies to:

- federal or state legislation;
- rules and regulations; and
- industry best management practices.

Each initiative must be based on sound science, be subject to regular review and be developed and reviewed through public consultation with all relevant industries and interested parties.

The Georgia Chamber ***supports and promotes*** voluntary initiatives to incorporate sustainability principles and practices into business operations in a manner that:

- enhances business efficiency, competitiveness and profitability;
- achieves better understanding and measurement of business processes and operations;
- stimulates technological and process innovation;
- demonstrates business stewardship of resource management;
- delivers measurable Triple Bottom Line (TBL) outcomes; and
- promotes community development.

## Health & Wellness

**Benefit Design Freedom for Employers** -- Legislative mandates increase the cost of health plans by up to 45 percent, eliminate innovation and flexibility in plan design, dissuade employers from providing this voluntary benefit and hinder employee participation. To ensure that Georgia employers can continue to be the primary providers of cost-effective and valuable health care benefits to their employees, the Georgia Chamber of Commerce **supports**:

- maintaining employers' flexibility in determining how to best meet the needs of their employees and retirees;
- efforts to eliminate the many legislative mandates currently imposed on health plans and to remove artificial barriers that restrict competition.

In contrast, the Chamber **opposes**:

- all coverage and procedural mandates on regulated health plans and the entities that administer them;
- any federal effort to weaken or eliminate the Employee Retirement Income Security Act (ERISA), and
- any state effort to erode the ERISA protections for employer-sponsored health plans.

**Coverage, Cost and Quality** -- The Georgia Chamber of Commerce supports meaningful reforms or initiatives that make care and coverage available to more Georgians and reduce costs and improve quality for Georgians already insured. The Chamber believes strategies to address the uninsured in Georgia must be targeted based on the diverse groups of individuals who make up the uninsured, such as those who can afford insurance but choose not to purchase it, those who cannot afford insurance without assistance, and those who are uninsurable in the individual market due to their medical condition or past medical history. To decrease the cost of health insurance and increase access, the Chamber **supports**:

- the pursuit of waivers and/or block grants to expand healthcare access through innovative state-driven programs that encourage flexibility, affordability, and sustainability;
- enhancing consumer-driven health plans (HSAs, HRAs, FSAs, etc.), that offer quality and price transparent options making them more flexible and appealing to consumers and plan sponsors;
- expanding coverage options for employers and employees through a privately managed health insurance exchange governed by market principles rather than restriction or duplicative regulation;
- incentives that reward health care providers based on outcomes and overall care and should not be negatively impacted when patients, with government sponsored insurance, are not compliant with their prescribed treatment plan;
- modernizing the medical tort system to eliminate the incentives for the practice of defensive medicine while preserving civil justice reforms that reduce the growth of medical liability awards and insurance costs;
- continuing elimination of fraud and waste in existing government plans such as Medicare, Medicaid or PeachCare and enabling enrollees in those programs to instead enroll in private plans;

- ensuring adequate reimbursement when providing services financed by Medicare, Medicaid or PeachCare in order to reduce the shifting of these costs to other parties, thus reducing the cost of insurance for all Georgians; and
- full tax deductibility of health plan premiums for individuals and small businesses.

In contrast, the Chamber **opposes**:

- new direct or indirect health care taxes on employers and employees -- including taxes on insurers, on small businesses, or on employers that do not provide coverage;
- new mandatory fees on private health plans and health care providers to supplement Medicare, Medicaid or PeachCare funding; and
- reducing the tax deduction for employer-sponsored health plans.

**Prevention and Wellness** -- The Georgia Chamber of Commerce **supports** voluntary prevention and wellness initiatives that create cost savings for employers, employees and providers; assist employees in leading healthier, more productive lives; and reduce the incidence and associated costs of chronic conditions such as obesity, heart disease, cancer and diabetes. This may include premium reductions, tax credits, rewards programs, provider discounts and other incentives, in addition to employer and employee education and programmatic offerings.

**Health IT and Transparency** -- To improve the value employers and employees receive for every health care dollar spent, the Georgia Chamber of Commerce **supports** providing Georgians, employers and providers with access to timely, accurate, appropriate, uniform and user-friendly information on the quality and cost of their health care. In order to help maximize that value, health information technology (health IT) that meets federal standards developed through public-private collaboration must be more broadly adopted.

The use of such technology, coupled with greater transparency for consumers, employers and providers, will result in a more competitive and efficient consumer-driven health care environment in which individuals will be able to make informed decisions about where and how to best spend their health care dollars. As additional transparency measures and health IT systems come online, it is imperative they foster Georgians' "right to know" without sacrificing consumer, employer and provider privacy protections.

**Trauma Care Network** -- Georgia's inadequate trauma care network has resulted in the needless loss of hundreds of lives each year -- a death rate well above the national average -- posing a danger to Georgians everywhere and increasing costs for the state, its citizens and its businesses.

Because the deficiencies in Georgia's trauma care network are primarily due to insufficient funding, the Georgia Chamber of Commerce **supports** legislative efforts to stabilize and enhance the network. The network should be supported either by existing government funds or additional revenue sources which are dedicated, predictable, broadly imposed and government-collected. Further, the allocation of such funds should be made in accordance with the formula established by the Georgia Trauma Care Network Commission.

## Innovation & Technology

**Entrepreneurship and Innovation** -- The fields of life science and technology are important and growing sectors of the state's economy, and the Georgia Chamber **supports** the development of policies that encourage and facilitate the growth of entrepreneurship and innovation within these sectors. The Chamber supports policies that address commercialization, research activity, funding, and collaboration among the private and public sectors. Attention to these areas will further develop the state's value chain from concept to market.

**Venture Capital** -- Increasing access to capital in Georgia will boost the entrepreneurial activity within the life science and technology sectors across the state. Currently, start-ups and growth-stage companies seek funding from both inside and outside of Georgia. The Chamber **supports** efforts to identify and create means to improve the availability of capital in Georgia, attract more venture capital firms to our state and create a healthy ecosystem for keeping Georgia-grown companies in our state. To achieve such goals, in the 2013 General Assembly, the structure for *Invest Georgia* was enacted to promote investment in Georgia start-ups. We support the appropriation of resources to fund Invest Georgia, while exploring other initiatives to accelerate angel and venture capital investment for GA companies.

**Entertainment** -- The state of Georgia is home to award-winning films, chart topping music, and video game blockbusters. The state's assets have been well received by all industry related sectors. As the industry evolves, so should the tax credits that companies obtain to continue to grow these industries. For the industries to thrive in the state, credits should support all involved entities in producing various entertainment outlets. The Chamber **supports** policies that support the "full work" -- production and post-production work -- of a film, digital, and recording projects.

**Expansion of Gaming** -- There are currently three legal forms of gaming in Georgia: bingo, the Georgia Lottery, and raffles. Proposals to expand legalized gaming in Georgia including, but not limited to, pari-mutuel betting and destination casino resorts should be decided by statewide referendum where local voters are given the opportunity to decide what is best for their communities.

## Law & Judiciary

**Mission** -- The Georgia Chamber of Commerce views the laws of the state of Georgia and the judiciary that interprets those laws as critical components of the infrastructure necessary to make the state of Georgia an attractive place to live and work. A transparent rule of law, interpreted by a competent and engaged judiciary, is essential for a civil society that protects the liberty of its citizens and the strength of the state of Georgia.

The Chamber has established its Law & Judiciary Committee to monitor Georgia's judiciary, and laws and regulations affecting business in the state, to ensure these laws and regulations have a rational and sound basis and that Georgia's judiciary interprets those laws in a predictable and well-reasoned manner. The Law & Judiciary Committee will monitor the judiciary, laws, regulations and related developments to ensure a competitive economic climate for business and an economic environment that creates opportunities for all Georgians.

The Georgia Chamber of Commerce **supports** the rule of law as a foundational principle of civil society in Georgia. The Georgia Chamber of Commerce supports laws and regulations that are fair, transparent and easy to understand, and based on sound facts and policy.

**A Strong Judicial System** -- The Georgia Chamber of Commerce continues to **support** efforts to protect and enhance our State's judicial system to make sure it is adequately staffed and funded, with a judiciary that interprets laws as they have been written, without trying to impose new causes of action on Georgia businesses. The Georgia Chamber of Commerce continues to support and wants to strengthen and preserve civil justice reform; we believe that the Georgia legislature should be vigilant to ensure that our civil justice system promotes predictable results and is efficient -- businesses cannot thrive in an environment that does not enable timely and certain means of resolving disputes. The Georgia Chamber of Commerce **supports** the notion of arbitration of cases without judicial involvement and business courts to resolve matters that primarily affect business issues.

**Civil Justice System Improvements** -- The Georgia Chamber of Commerce will monitor pending legislation and cases, promote legislation and offer amicus support, as needed, to protect important business positions, including the protection of Georgia citizens, investors and businesses from punitive judicial decisions that are not based on actual harm or loss. The civil law system should not be a system that punishes lawful commerce. The Georgia Chamber of Commerce **supports** reasonable caps on non-economic damages and Constitutional amendments, as necessary, to support these positions.

**Business Climate** -- To help further advance Georgia's legal system, the Georgia Chamber of Commerce **supports**:

- upholding the sanctity of contracts by enforcing contracts according to their terms so that a level of certainty and predictability exists for businesses who have expended extensive resources during the negotiation process;

- commercial laws that promote clarity of agreements between the parties, and the adoption of uniform commercial laws that further intra- and interstate commerce, as well as in-bound and outbound foreign investment;
- regulations that are based on rational public policy and sound science and fairly balance the state's legal regulatory needs with the interests of business and the rights of Georgia's citizens to pursue individual enterprise;
- creation of a statewide Georgia business court network that specializes in hearing business disputes;
- legislation that would overhaul and modernize the Civil Practice Act consistent with best practices; and
- equitable cost sharing for discovery of electronically-stored information.
- continued protection of private property rights, balanced by legitimate eminent domain needs with prompt, adequate and effective compensation;

**Judicial Elections** -- While the General Assembly creates and maintains the laws and regulations necessary for an effective civil justice system, the judiciary interprets those laws and oversees the enforcement of the laws. The Georgia Chamber of Commerce *supports* educating its members and the electorate on the experience and background of candidates seeking election to the judiciary. A well-informed and engaged public, including the business community, can help ensure the election of qualified judges who will render wise decisions that support the rule of law in the state of Georgia and the development of our civil society. The development of a judicial ranking system is an important tool that can assist in these education efforts.

## Tax & Finance

**Tax Policy** -- The Georgia Chamber of Commerce recognizes the impact of global competition on businesses and *supports* tax proposals that encourage job creation and retention in Georgia. We recognize that businesses are the key to jobs, economic development and an improved quality of life for all Georgians. We also recognize that business investment decisions are seldom made in a vacuum, but are decided based on a number of economic and quality-of-life variables.

The Chamber supports ongoing examination of the current tax base, tax rates and compliance requirements to ensure a Georgia business environment that is fair and competitive -- not only for the state's current businesses but also for businesses considering relocating here.

As Congress and the General Assembly contemplate tax reform, the Chamber *supports* changes to tax policy that:

- are competitive with other states and internationally to encourage the location and expansion of businesses in Georgia;
- provide a sustainable, predictable and competitively neutral revenue system (one that does not unfairly single out specific industries or products);
- are balanced and draw revenue from a broad base without relying disproportionately on business revenues;
- reduce income tax rates to the extent of fiscal responsibility;
- avoid the negative impact of taxing business inputs or business-to-business purchases;
- relieve industries from the burdens of subsidizing their competitors;
- avoid the negative economic impacts of double taxation;
- allow the administration of all aspects of state and local sales taxes at the state level;
- carefully consider dynamic economic modeling when analyzing the impact of proposed tax changes; and
- encourage economic growth, entrepreneurship and prosperity.

**Tax Compliance** -- The Georgia Chamber of Commerce recognizes that a distinct component of state tax policy is the cost of compliance. As a result, the Chamber *supports*:

- the adoption of legislation, rules and regulations, and administrative procedures that provide for ease of compliance by tax filers and access to meaningful anonymized data based upon such filings;
- prioritizing collection of taxes legally due the state before looking to new sources;
- state use of technology to help automate routine processes along with funding for adequate staff and equipment to process and audit returns; and
- adequate audits to ensure proper collection and disbursement of tax revenue.

**Tax Tribunal** -- The Georgia Chamber *supports* the state's independent tax tribunal and will continue to monitor the important role it plays in providing an expert review of complicated tax issues to provide more transparency and predictability in state tax decisions.

**Banking and Finance** -- As a state disproportionately affected by the housing crisis and recession, efforts to protect real estate values, conserve and replenish bank capital and enable lending will result in much-needed job creation.

The Chamber recognizes the role of dynamic capital and lending markets in economic recovery and, as such, *supports* policies that encourage the availability of capital to fund new business growth or expansion and promote a healthy real estate market.

The Chamber also recognizes that an appropriate level of regulation and supervision is necessary in the banking industry, but that regulation and supervision should be reasonable and balanced so it does not create undue burdens that discourage lending to creditworthy individuals and businesses.

The Chamber also *supports* the continued enforcement of debt contracts and personally guaranteed loans to continue the accepted practice of note transfers among lenders.

The Chamber *opposes* efforts to alter the current non-judicial foreclosure process in Georgia. Once foreclosure is eminent, a thorough, efficient process is key to restoring the health of our real estate market and works well for governments, taxpayers, borrowers and lenders.

## Tourism & Travel

*\*The Georgia Travel Alliance serves as the official Tourism & Travel Policy Committee of the Georgia Chamber Center for Competitiveness.*

**Discrimination** -- The Georgia Travel Association (GATA) **opposes** policies or legislation that support, promote, or are perceived to encourage or condone discrimination. The establishment and practice of discriminatory policies, or those that appear discriminatory, will jeopardize the state's ability to grow its economy and will negatively impact Georgia's reputation as a leader for hospitality and tourism.

**Tourism Marketing** -- Tourism is a vital economic engine for Georgia. A better-funded tourism promotion campaign led by the Georgia Department of Economic Development will encourage greater visitation, generate new tax dollars, and create jobs for local communities. Therefore, GATA **supports** policies that increase state investment in travel marketing.

**Workforce Development** -- GATA **supports** efforts to improve workforce readiness in order to improve career opportunities and promote the long-term viability of Georgia's hospitality-related businesses. To achieve this goal, Georgia's secondary and post-secondary institutions must effectively prepare current and future workers for careers in a variety of technical and professional disciplines.

**Gateway Entrances for the State** -- GATA **supports** the sufficient funding and enhanced management of key entrances for the State of Georgia with modern signage and welcome centers for the purpose of enhancing the state's travel brand.

**Uniform School Calendar** -- Uniform school schedules across the state's public K–12 school systems would allow Georgia families to maximize their opportunity to travel within Georgia without facing conflicting school schedules among their children. Additionally, employers in the hospitality and tourism sector will achieve a more stable workforce as many offer employment opportunities to high school students. GATA **supports** efforts to research the feasibility of aligning statewide school calendars.

## Transportation

*\*The Georgia Transportation Alliance serves as the official Transportation Policy Committee of the Georgia Chamber Center for Competitiveness.*

**Georgia Transportation Alliance Mission** -- To increase growth and minimize unemployment Georgia must continue its strong leadership on multi – modal transportation infrastructure investment. All transportation development must allow Georgia to continue enjoying the benefits of increasing economic opportunity while maintaining the state’s commitment to environmental awareness and safety.

According to the Georgia Chamber of Commerce, by 2030, Georgia expects to see an increase of 1.5 million cars on the road, a 60% annual increase in cargo traffic through the Georgia Ports Authority, and over 130,000 additional flights in and out of Hartsfield Jackson Atlanta International Airport each year.

**Goals** -- GTA supports continued strategic investment in Georgia’s infrastructure network to:

1. Raise transportation investment per capita to above the national average.
2. Remove metro Atlanta from the nation’s top 10 most congested urban areas.
3. Elevate the Port of Savannah to the number one container port on the east coast.
4. Elevate Hartsfield-Jackson to a Top 5 air cargo hub in the United States while maintaining the airport’s ranking as the number 1 passenger service hub in the United States.
5. Attain a Top 5 listing in all national rankings of transportation logistics factors related to economic development through roads, bridges, transit, transit oriented development, freight rail, general aviation and cargo airports.

**The Georgia Transportation Alliance places priority on policies in six primary buckets:**

**Protecting State Investment** -- Strategic investment of state funding into Georgia’s transportation network will result in economic growth and greater quality of life. GTA **supports**:

- Opposition to any attempt to roll back, reduce, or otherwise alter the use of funds created and established by the Transportation Funding Act of 2015.
- Encouraging continued wise fiscal management through best practices like asset management and the integration of technology in infrastructure.
- Continuing the state’s general treasury commitment to transportation through including road, bridge, freight rail, and transit projects in the state’s annual bond package.
- Exempting expenditures for publicly funded transportation infrastructure projects from sales and use taxation.
- Exempting capital infrastructure expenditures at all commercial and/or cargo service airports from sales and use taxation.
- Reforming the current system of sales and use taxes on railroad diesel fuel used in locomotives.

- Collaborating with Georgia’s universities and high tech industries to encourage and create more initiatives around technology in transportation, especially in areas such as detailed predictive models, tolling, managed lanes, and autonomous vehicles.
- Reversing Georgia’s rapidly increasing rate of highway fatalities through policies that encourage metric-driven evaluation of safety programs to ensure they are operating at maximum effectiveness, commitment to performance standards in any new initiative or system, and increased cooperation among all related safety agencies in Georgia through breaking down silos and joint planning initiatives.
- Encouraging the use of state transportation dollars to include and support Georgia based business and service providers.

**Promoting Federal Investment** -- GTA supports a long-term funding system that allows Georgia to balance state and local funding mechanisms with those which are obligations of the federal government. **GTA supports:**

- Encouraging Georgia’s Congressional delegation to support Congressional action to adequately fund a robust federal highway program by addressing long term structural deficiencies in the Federal Highway Trust Fund and funding mechanism.
- Eliminating red tape and costly regulations, particularly burdensome Environmental regulations, that lessen the impact of already limited federal funding.

**Assisting Local Investment** -- GTA supports the methods of local governments to adequately fund transportation and infrastructure projects that will result in prosperous communities. **GTA supports:**

- Further enhancing and improving Georgia’s transportation SPLOST mechanisms to encourage local investment in high value capital projects of regional significance.
- Providing a mechanism for CIDs to receive formulaic funding.

**Expanding Cargo, Freight & Logistics Capabilities** -- GTA supports efforts to expand Georgia’s capacity to transport freight through Georgia as well as to end-market users in the state. **GTA supports:**

- Building upon Georgia’s commitment to multi-modal development by providing the Georgia Department of Transportation with the funding needed to transition Georgia’s Freight Rail Plan into a Freight Rail Program.
- Completing the Savannah Harbor Expansion Project, and working with the Georgia Ports Authority to plan and fund an adequate system of inland ports. GTA will oppose any effort to limit or otherwise reduce the impact of our inland port system.
- Encouraging Georgia’s focus on logistics development, congestion relief, and employment sustainability through continued delivery of high value projects like the I-285 / GA – 400 interchange, I-75 / I-16 interchange, and the Georgia Xpress Lanes projects on I-75 and I – 85.
- Continuing Georgia’s commitment to identification and development of freight corridors and support facilities such as truck only lanes and ramps and signal technology.

- Modernizing and streamlining Georgia’s system of levying and collecting taxes on jet fuel into conformity with best practices from other states, protecting Hartsfield Jackson International Airport’s competitive position in the global economy as the busiest airport in the world.
- Continuing support for equipment and facility infrastructure programs such as Commercial Truck Driving, Diesel Equipment Technology, Logistics and Supply Chain Management, and others, in support of the Governor’s High Demand Career Initiative Report on the Logistics & Transportation Sector, as well as the HOPE Strategic Industry Workforce Development Grant.

**Growing Transit** -- GTA supports strategic efforts to continue to develop Georgia’s network of public transportation and transit systems statewide. GTA ***supports***:

- Allowing local governments to make strategic investments in their transit systems through both short and long term funding options that provide flexibility and support the greatest leverage of bonds and matching funds.
- Providing state investment in local transit systems to increase mobility, reduce congestion, and promote economic development.

**Developing Technology in Transportation** – GTA supports state efforts to better plan and prepare for the deployment of rapidly expanding technological advances in transportation.