



GEORGIA CHAMBER
CENTER FOR COMPETITIVENESS

2019 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 of Commerce and the Chamber’s Center for Competitiveness. The Chamber represents the unified voice of the Georgia business community and is an advocacy arm for businesses in the development and promotion of good public policy to ensure a future of economic growth for Georgia businesses, workers and families.

While the Chamber holds fast to fundamental tenets like opposition to burdensome government mandates, protection of private property rights and promotion of a tax system that enhances Georgia’s economic competitiveness, the Center’s board-level policy committees provide a forum for identifying key challenges facing business in Georgia and developing policy solutions in an effort to encourage business growth and job creation. Through Center-led research and formal committee meetings and discussions, the policy committees continue to refine public policy positions on major issues including health care, education, taxation, water, energy, innovation and civil justice reform. Those positions are reflected in this document.

2019 will be the twelfth year of operation for the Chamber’s policy committees and marks the sixth 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 Climate

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.

Furthermore, the Chamber **supports** flexibility for employers to pay employees wages through both traditional and modern methods of payment including check, direct deposit, pay cards, or other new technologies. This flexibility allows employers to meet the diverse needs of their employees and provides for innovation with a diverse set of business models.

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 regulation, 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.

Discrimination -- The Georgia Chamber of Commerce **opposes** legislation or policies 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 preservation, establishment, and practice of discriminatory policies or culture will jeopardize the state's ability to grow its economy and negatively impact Georgia's reputation as a leader for global commerce.

The Georgia Chamber of Commerce opposes discrimination in any form. Decisions to remove historical monuments or symbols, should be legal matters for the appropriate government authorities responsible for the locations where they sit. The Georgia Chamber of Commerce **supports** a balanced and fair representation of the state's past. Narratives, monuments, and symbols should be inclusive and reflect Georgia's diverse cultures, citizens, and communities.

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, though regulatory restriction can prevent such advantages. 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 Georgia Chamber **opposes policies that negatively impact businesses and consumers.**

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 rulemaking 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.
- expanding access for Georgia companies so their product is able to be sold globally

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. The Georgia Chamber **supports** efforts that promote all military bases and Georgia as a pro-military state including investments in

infrastructure and talent as well as policies that benefit military families-should another Base Realignment & Closure Commission (BRACC) convene.

Money Transmission – The Georgia Chamber **supports** a reasonable regulatory system for electronic money transmission.

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, transportation challenges, employee quality of life, and environmental issues. These arrangements often benefit Georgia businesses through increased employee productivity and motivation, improved employee quality of life, 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, training and re-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.

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.

The Chamber also **supports** payment of sales tax through existing channels and infrastructure. The Chamber opposes accelerated sales tax proposals which increase costs for small businesses and government without providing additional revenue to the state.

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 --

The Chamber recognizes the role of dynamic capital and **-supports** policies that encourage the availability of capital to fund new business growth or expansion and promote a healthy capital sector.

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. Similarly, the Chamber **supports** uniformity, streamlining, and simplification of state licensing requirements for the non-bank financial services industry. Licensing should not be an impediment to the growth and development of innovative financial products and services.

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 imminent, a thorough, efficient process that works well for governments, taxpayers, borrowers and lenders is key to restoring the health of our real estate

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 and programs, proposed legislation, rules and regulations.

Energy Policy -- 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 promotes a reliable, diversified energy supply at the least possible cost increase to rate payers in Georgia.

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 market-based 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 has captured 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
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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.

Telemedicine— Our state is expansive and Georgians across the state need better access to physicians and specialists. Additionally, there is an increased demand for care as Georgians age and an expected shortfall in healthcare workers. The Georgia Chamber **supports** voluntary investments and incentives to spur investments in telemedicine, financial incentives to health care providers that are consistent with technology advancements, and the infrastructure to expand access to necessary healthcare services and create a more effective healthcare delivery system.

Rural Healthcare – Quality and ability to access healthcare services should not be determined by zip code. Rural communities across Georgia have seen hospital closures and experienced limited options for care, often requiring them to drive lengthy distances. The Georgia Chamber **supports** efforts to:

- increase physician and healthcare professional recruitment and retention in rural areas
- develop a public-private task force to recommend prevention and wellness policies and strategies to lower cost and improve outcomes
- develop new healthcare models for access to care for communities that demographically cannot continue to support a traditional hospital
- address mental and behavioral health gaps in rural communities
- utilize innovative tools and new technologies to create an efficient care delivery system

Graduate Medical Education and Healthcare Workforce– Georgia is expected to experience a healthcare professional shortage in the coming years. More talent is needed in the state. The Georgia Chamber **supports** increasing investments for graduate medical education to ensure the state has physicians in the state, especially for those students who have completed their undergraduate and graduate academic careers in Georgia. At the federal level, the Chamber also **supports** reliable funding from Medicare for direct graduate medical education.

The Chamber also **supports** increased investments for other degree and certificate programs within the University System of Georgia and the Technical College System of Georgia that fill the numerous careers and occupations in the healthcare industry.

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 and 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.

Access to 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 access to capital for GA companies.

Cybersecurity – Companies depend on predictability in their business models. The Georgia Chamber **supports** efforts to streamline state policies to ensure Georgia companies have predictability and are globally competitive. As it relates to data breach notification requirements, the Chamber **supports** uniformity among state requirements. Almost every state has its own data breach law, which can leave consumers with inconsistent protection and companies in the difficult position of dealing with conflicting requirements. The Chamber also **supports** policies that expand liability protections to companies adhering to reasonable, responsible standards for protecting consumer data and foster a strong environment for emerging tech start-ups and financial services companies.

Technological Developments in Infrastructure – The development of new technologies positively impacts industries and consumers by increasing the quality of life in communities across Georgia and increasing access to national and global markets. The Georgia Chamber **supports** state efforts to streamline the deployment of all technology allowing our state to address emerging challenges.

Creating a Culture of Innovation – Advancements in technology occur through a process of learning, adapting, and building new models. This process requires access to capital and resources as well as a diverse and highly skilled workforce. The Chamber **supports** efforts to create a policy environment that promotes innovation and removes barriers for start-ups and entrepreneurs. The Chamber also **supports** higher education initiatives that support science, technology and related degree programs and K-12 curriculum that teaches Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Math to prepare for jobs of the future.

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 noneconomic 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.

Talent and Leadership

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 remain 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.

K-12 Education—While there have been significant improvements in Georgia's K-12 system—the Georgia Chamber recognizes the need to produce the skilled workforce for tomorrow by successfully educating our 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 maintaining 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 hard to staff communities, 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;
 - support efforts to ensure all public and private-sector school choice incentives include strong accountability of taxpayer dollars
- 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.

Building a Workforce Pipeline-- 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 "Dual Enrollment," 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;
- efforts to update industry credentials with current curriculum to ensure students are being prepared for current and future workforce needs; 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;
- efforts to improve the adult literacy rate creating a more adaptable workforce whose skills can evolve with changes in industries; 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

Early Learning and Childcare – Effectively educating our students early in their academic careers is critical in preparing them for success throughout K-12 and into post-secondary education. The Georgia Chamber ***supports:***

- investments in the Georgia Pre-K program and related programs that expand access to quality preschool programs for Georgia families.

Furthermore, a strong workforce depends on access to childcare in order for employees to contribute fully and effectively while children are in a safe environment that encourages them to learn. The Chamber ***supports***:

- expanding access to quality rated childcare that is affordable for Georgia families, opening a segment of the labor force that is eager to work.

Developing Leadership – Identifying and encouraging talented individuals to pursue leadership positions and lead effectively is critical to further economic prosperity throughout Georgia. The Georgia Chamber ***supports***:

- integrating curriculum that develops leadership skills across educational institutions from our youngest citizens in K-12 to our students in higher education. Leadership in our schools is of utmost importance not only to prepare a generation of innovators and critical thinkers for tomorrow’s workforce, but to stabilize economically vulnerable communities today.
- public-private partnerships to equip current school and district leaders with the skills needed to cast and communicate an ambitious vision for student achievement and well-being; galvanize community support around the vision; lead healthy school cultures; and use disciplined improvement processes to produce excellent outcomes for all students.
- investments in developing capacity in community, state, and elected leaders to purport strong governance and enhance their ability to create and sustain thriving communities across Georgia. Additionally, companies are adapting to meet new social and political expectations as the state’s business landscape changes. In order for Georgia to maintain its business-friendly reputation, rising business leaders must know how to effectively and authentically represent their company in external environments.
 - efforts to develop individuals into leaders who can confidently interact and build relationships with external organizations, industry and civic leaders and elected officials.

Transportation

By 2030, Georgia will see an increase of 1.5 million cars on the road, a 60% annual increase in cargo traffic through our ports, and over 130,000 additional flights in and out of Hartsfield Jackson Atlanta International Airport each year. To increase economic growth and opportunity, Georgia must continue its strong momentum on multi – modal transportation infrastructure investment while maintaining the state’s commitment to environmental awareness and safety.

Transportation Funding Act 2015- GTA and the Georgia Chamber **oppose** any attempt to reduce the benefits of the Transportation Funding Act of 2015.

Strategic State Investments- GTA and the Georgia Chamber **support** continued strategic investment of state funding into Georgia’s transportation network which will result in economic growth and greater quality of life.

Increased Public Funding- GTA and the Georgia Chamber **support** all efforts to increase public funding for transportation at the federal, state, and local level, particularly federal funding solvency and local solutions like transportation SPLOSTs.

Freight- GTA and the Georgia Chamber **support** efforts to expand Georgia’s capacity to transport freight through Georgia as well as to end-market users in the State.

Public Transportation Systems- GTA and the Georgia Chamber **support** strategic efforts to continue to develop Georgia’s network of public transportation systems.

Innovations in Technology in Transportation- GTA and the Georgia Chamber **support** initiatives around innovations in technology in transportation that contribute to the state’s competitiveness and economic growth.