



2023 Policy Statements

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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 Georgia Chamber of Commerce 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 Georgia Chamber of Commerce 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. Moreover, the Chamber **supports** the independence of Georgia’s State Board of Workers’ Compensation as it provides fair and prudent leadership, balancing the needs and concerns of all stakeholders. 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 Chamber **supports** adoption of policies that eliminate duplicative work and streamline procedures that will provide long-term efficiencies and budgetary predictability.

Business Climate and Quality of Life -- 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 brand and 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.

Furthermore, economic development depends on vibrant, thriving communities to ensure that growth and prosperity continue. Crime and community violence inhibit community growth, lessen upward mobility, and perpetuate generational poverty. Additionally, crime creates unsafe conditions for residents and small business owners alike. The Georgia Chamber **supports** legislation and policies that increase public safety across the state to continue to make Georgia a great place to do business.

Civic Engagement: The Georgia Chamber **supports** legislation and policies that make it easier to vote, harder to commit fraud, and instill faith and confidence in secure, accessible, and fair elections for Georgia voters. Furthermore, the Chamber **supports** expanding access to the ballot box while ensuring Georgia remains a secure state in which to cast a ballot.

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. As a result, 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 duplicative 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;
- 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; and
- expanding access for Georgia companies so their products can 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 and will limit the ability of companies to maintain operations, let alone increase them. Also, the lack of skilled workers will result in the off shoring of businesses. Legal immigration is an integral part of growing the state's economy and driving innovation.

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;
- 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;
- Efforts to grow skilled legal immigrant talent in the state through increased access to higher education in our technical colleges and universities and;
- Efforts to decrease regulatory barriers that prevent foreign- born individuals from utilizing their existing skillsets and engaging in the workforce.

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.

Digital Assets --The financial services industry is heavily regulated, and the adoption of any new laws or regulations governing digital assets should be designed to fit within the established regulatory framework. The Georgia Chamber **supports** public policies for digital assets that complement, and not conflict with, existing laws and regulations as well as private sector rules and practices.

Alternative Work Options -- The Georgia Chamber of Commerce **supports** telework options to sustain the health, well-being, and productivity of employees, especially as the number of technological platforms available are increasing. Flexible arrangements between employers and employees benefit Georgia businesses through improved employee quality of life and balance of personal-professional commitments, 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.

Portable Benefits – As more Georgians pursue non-traditional work opportunities in our increasingly fast-paced and flexible economy, the options for benefits should also be expanded. Companies are looking for new ways to invest in workers that meet the needs of today’s economy. The Georgia Chamber **supports** portable benefit opportunities for non-traditional and gig economy workers to bolster the entrepreneurial, innovative, and mobile workforce of today and in the future.

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;
- policies that promote increased private investments in technological infrastructures;
- development of new transportation infrastructure needed to move goods; and

- the organizing of regional and local efforts and critical shared resources.

Private Financing of Infrastructure

The Georgia Chamber of Commerce **supports** efforts to identify and remove legal or regulatory impediments to the growth of public-private partnerships in the timely procurement, design, construction, improvement, renovation, expansion, equipping, maintenance, operation, implementation, installation, and financing of public infrastructure and government facilities within the state that serve a public need and purpose.

Infrastructure Resilience and Pre-Disaster Mitigation Planning

Building resilience into infrastructure means increasing the capacity of these systems to absorb shocks, continue to function when they are disrupted and facilitating rapid post-event recovery to full capacity. The Chamber **supports** a voluntary focus on pre-disaster mitigation, preparation and resilience planning and investment.

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-conscious solutions. The Georgia Chamber of Commerce **supports** the 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 of Commerce **opposes** proposals to narrow the exemptions from overtime pay. This includes any proposals that would increase the 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 – Unemployment benefits assist Georgians as they experience job loss and seek new employment opportunities. Cognizant of fiscal limitations, the Georgia Chamber

opposes any additional extension of state unemployment benefits if they are funded by taxes on employers. 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.

Economic crises may require increased unemployment benefits to support essential economic activity. However, taxes on businesses stifle economic growth and ultimately impose an undue burden in opposition to stated objectives in challenging economic circumstances. Any temporary expansion of UI should not be funded by taxes on business.

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. The organization recognizes that businesses are the key to jobs, economic development, and an improved quality of life for all Georgians. The organization also recognizes 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 Georgia Chamber of Commerce **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 to Georgia.

The Georgia Chamber **supports** tax policies that support Georgia businesses which are exploring and implementing Alternative Work Options, as described above.

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;

- encourage economic growth, entrepreneurship, and prosperity; and
- provide equal tax treatment of both brick and mortar and online retailers.

The Georgia Chamber of Commerce **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 sufficient revenue to the state.

The Chamber also **supports** tax policies to allow businesses flexibility as to choice-of-entity.

The Georgia Chamber **opposes** changes to tax policy that:

- makes any tax policy impose new or increase tax liabilities retroactively, as such changes should be prospective only;
- enables state or local taxing agencies or third parties contracting with state or local taxing agencies to be compensated on a contingent fee basis; and
- expands the applicability of the False Claim Act to include any state or local taxes, as tax agencies should be the sole administer of state and local tax laws.

Tax Compliance -- The Georgia Chamber of Commerce recognizes that a distinctive 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 of Commerce **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 not to create undue burdens that discourage lending to creditworthy individuals and businesses. Similarly, the Georgia Chamber of Commerce **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 **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 and efficient process that works well for governments, taxpayers, borrowers, and lenders is key to restoring the health of our real estate.

Energy and 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, our citizens and communities of all energy, natural resources and sustainability policies and programs, proposed legislation, rules and regulations.

Energy Policy -- The Chamber 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 **supports** and 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;
- the development of a clean energy ecosystem that promotes growth of and investment in market-based business development and associated employment growth;
- policies that foster and encourage the state's economic development efforts to attract electric and alternative fuel mobility;
- 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;

- policies that reduce dependency on fuels sourced outside of North America to maintaining a more balanced and competitively priced energy portfolio of fuels available in Georgia and the United States, including responsible use of nuclear energy, natural gas, coal, solar, biomass, renewable natural gas, hydrogen, propane, hydro, wind, geothermal, 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 best cost 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 Chamber **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 Chamber **supports** implementation of statewide and regional water planning initiatives that:

- rely on sound science on water quality, surface and groundwater availability, 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.

Climate Change, Sustainability and Environment, Social, Governance (ESG)

Our climate is changing. This creates environmental, social, technological, and economic challenges and opportunities to ensure the future viability of Georgia’s natural resource base, its economy and the welfare of its businesses, communities and residents.

The Chamber will lead Georgia’s business community’s engagement of climate change and seek to identify competitive advantages for the Georgia economy, as policies, technical solutions and management options are identified, implemented, monitored and reviewed.

The Chamber’s climate change policies will:

- be informed by the best science and observations available;
- be informed by realistic projections of future greenhouse gas emissions;
- prioritize the utilization of market-based mechanisms;
- be technology and solutions neutral;
- recognize prior commitments and achievements;
- be undertaken in a manner that is equitable, practical and affordable for both businesses and consumers and supports continued community and social development;
- continue to promote investment in aligned research and development programs;
- support business investment and employment growth initiatives; and
- protect the competitiveness of energy-intensive trade-exposed industries.

The Chamber’s climate change policy goals include supporting and promoting:

i. 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 established element of business competitiveness, now being reflected across internal management strategies and wider supply-chain and industry relationships.

Public policy initiatives that seek to sustainably manage natural resources, must ensure equitable access to all publicly available resources for all users, including recreational and commercial interests, without infringing on private property rights.

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 Chamber **supports** 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;
- are encouraged by market-driven and incentive-based implementation;
- stimulates technological and process innovation in areas such as:
 - reducing landfill dependency, promoting comprehensive recycling and beneficial reuse;
 - promoting productive land use and soil protection;
 - clean air initiatives; and
 - activities to increase water conservation and water-use efficiency.
- demonstrates business stewardship of resource management;
- protects small and medium enterprises from overly-burdensome and cost-prohibitive requirements or reporting;
- delivers measurable Triple Bottom Line outcomes; and
- promotes community development.

ii. Environment, Social, Governance (ESG) Practices:

Addressing today's most pressing environment and social challenges provides an opportunity for Chamber members to showcase their commitment to and leadership on these issues.

ESG initiatives provide an opportunity for Chamber members to voluntarily tell their resource stewardship and business operations story. The Chamber **opposes** mandatory ESG compliance and reporting.

The Chamber **supports** voluntary, measurable ESG initiatives, acknowledging that meaningful ESG performance is utilized as a tool for talent retention and acquisition, as well as stakeholder, community, and investor engagement. This supports increased competitiveness of Georgia businesses.

The further development of ESG practices for Georgia's businesses will be strengthened by Chamber leadership to help develop initiatives to articulate benefits, impacts and the role of ESG in business management and operations.

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 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.

Wildlife Management and Conservation

Georgia's statewide and offshore game and fish resources are a driver of economic activity and provide individual and family recreational opportunities and enjoyment. The State has an enviable record of proactively managing its wildlife resource base and protecting threaten and endangered species. These actions support a diverse range of hunting and fishing activities and stimulate valuable economic activity across the state.

The Chamber **supports** sound scientific management of the state's game and fish resources and the application of license fees from hunters and anglers to fund wildlife conservation and management programs.

The Chamber **supports** programs that preserve and promote access rights to public lands for all individuals, while protecting private property rights.

Health and 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, and dissuades employers from providing such a voluntary benefit, and hinders 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; and
- 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 BENEFIT 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 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 other creative mechanisms 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, additional incentives that do not negatively impact health providers when patients, with government sponsored insurance, are not compliant with their prescribed treatment plan;
- modernizing the medical tort system to restore the balance between the interests of the opposing parties, eliminate the incentives for the practice of unnecessary defensive medicine, pursue sustainable civil justice reforms that reduce the growth of medical liability awards and insurance costs, and correct the adverse direction of the courts from a business perspective;
- continuing the elimination of fraud and waste in existing government plans such as Medicare, Medicaid or PeachCare and enabling enrollees in those programs to enroll in private plans instead;
- 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;
- full tax deductibility of health plan premiums for individuals and small businesses
- utilizing association health plans to decrease costs and increase access for small businesses; and

- developing innovative approaches to improving access to quality care and lowering costs for patients across the healthcare continuum.

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 meet 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 that they foster Georgians' "right to know" without sacrificing consumer, employer, and provider privacy protections.

Telemedicine— 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 numbers of healthcare workers as patient preferences evolve. The Chamber **supports** appropriate reimbursement rates for telemedicine services to increase access to care for all patients. The Georgia Chamber also **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.

Research and Development Funding- The Georgia Chamber **supports** policies that increase research and development funding and promote investments to ensure Georgia is a life sciences research hub.

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;
- continue the development and expansion of the Rural Hospital Tax Credit program;
- address mental and behavioral health gaps in rural communities; and
- utilize innovative tools and new technologies to create an efficient care delivery system.

Graduate Medical Education and Healthcare Workforce– Georgia is experiencing a shortage of healthcare professionals and the shortage is projected to remain. Furthermore, great strain has been placed on the healthcare workforce by the COVID-19 pandemic. More talent is needed in the state. The Georgia Chamber **supports** increasing investments for graduate medical education to ensure the state has diverse and talented physicians, especially for those professionals 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, the Technical College System of Georgia, and Georgia's private colleges and universities that fill the numerous careers and occupations in the healthcare industry. Moreover, the Chamber **supports** appropriate licensure reform to grow Georgia's healthcare workforce.

Trauma Care Network -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.

Mental Health- Mental Health has become an increasing concern in communities across the nation. The disparities in access to mental health care have been highlighted, particularly in Georgia. Currently, Georgia ranks 48 out of all 50 states in access to mental health provisions

and resources. The lack of resources and access limits the productivity and overall wellness of Georgians as well as opportunities for long-term prosperity. Investing time and resources to improve access to mental health services for Georgians will lead to a healthier, more productive workforce, making Georgia an even better place in which to work, live, and do business.

To ensure that mental health provisions are expanded, the Georgia Chamber of Commerce **supports** policies that:

- seek to reduce barriers to mental health access,
- encourage the continued and growing usage of state funds for mental health services,
- lessen regulations on service provision; and
- create a robust network of mental health providers in our state.

Innovation and Technology

Entrepreneurship and Innovation --The Georgia Chamber of Commerce **supports** the development of policies that encourage and facilitate the growth of entrepreneurship and innovation within the life science and technology sectors. The Chamber **supports** policies that address commercialization, research activity, funding, and collaboration among the private and public sectors, including through public-private partnerships. 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 sources both inside and outside of Georgia. The Georgia Chamber of Commerce **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.

Furthermore, the Chamber **supports** initiatives to increase access to capital for women-owned and minority-owned businesses. To achieve such goals, in the 2013 General Assembly, the structure for *Invest Georgia* was enacted to promote investment in Georgia start-ups. The Georgia Chamber of Commerce **supports** the appropriation of resources to continue providing funds, and increase funds for Invest Georgia, while exploring other initiatives to accelerate access to capital for Georgia companies.

Cybersecurity --The Georgia Chamber of Commerce **supports** efforts to streamline state policies to ensure Georgia companies have predictability and are globally competitive since companies depend on predictability in their business models. 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 and responsible standards for protecting consumer data and fostering a strong environment for emerging tech start-ups and financial services companies.

Privacy -The Chamber **supports** uniform national privacy standards enshrined in federal law. Laws governing data privacy should be consistent across state lines, and platforms, and strive to be compatible with international standards to avoid a patchwork of incompatible obligations and responsibilities. The Chamber **opposes** legislation that creates onerous, inconsistent regulatory burdens for business regarding the privacy of data.

Intellectual Property—The Georgia Chamber of Commerce **supports** state and federal protections of intellectual property rights to encourage vital business investment in future innovation.

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 of Commerce **supports** state efforts to streamline the deployment of all technology and supporting infrastructure allowing our state to address emerging challenges, remaining a leader in technology and innovation.

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 Georgia Chamber of Commerce **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.

The Georgia Chamber of Commerce **supports** efforts to diversify talent in STEM, which includes removing barriers that disproportionately impact people of color, women, and geography.

Law and Judiciary

Mission- The Law & Judiciary Committee actively monitors relevant decisions from state and federal courts in Georgia and provides Chamber members, its policy committees, and its affiliates with important legal analysis related to proposed legislation and regulations. The Law & Judiciary Committee’s commitment to see that laws and regulations are impartially

and prudently promulgated will ensure that the state maintains a competitive climate for business and creates economic opportunities for all Georgians.

The Georgia Chamber of Commerce holds 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, coherent, 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. The Chamber contends that the judiciary should take a common-sense approach to interpreting laws as they have been written, without eroding existing laws imposing new causes of action on Georgia businesses. One of the primary vehicles through which the Chamber actively advances this goal is through its *amicus curiae* program. A subcommittee of the Law & Judiciary Committee (the Amicus Subcommittee), in consultation with member firms, considers third party requests for the Chamber to file amicus briefs in cases pending before appellate courts in the state. The Amicus Subcommittee also monitors developing cases and may recommend that the Chamber file an amicus brief in a pending case should that be warranted even where a third-party request has not been made.

The Georgia Chamber of Commerce **supports** business courts and believes that they are best suited to resolve matters that primarily affect business issues. Furthermore, the Chamber **supports** efforts to ensure the successful development and utilization of the state's business court. The Georgia Chamber **supports** policy and legislation that would allow one party consent to utilize the state's business court.

Additionally, to maintain an efficient legal system, the Georgia Chamber of Commerce **supports** efforts to ensure courts are adequately staffed and funded, including competitive judicial pay. The Georgia Chamber further **supports** the enforcement of arbitration agreements, providing for the resolution of cases without judicial engagement.

Civil Justice System Improvements -- The Georgia Chamber of Commerce monitors pending legislation and cases, promotes business-friendly legislation, and offers amicus support to protect important business positions. The Chamber **supports** legislation that protects Georgia citizens, investors, and businesses from punitive judicial decisions that do not emanate from an actual harm or loss.

Additionally, the Chamber **supports** efforts to educate juries on the importance of appropriately apportioning fault and damages based on actual contribution to the harm alleged rather than available financial resources. The civil law system should not punish lawful commerce nor indulge costly and frivolous lawsuits. In 2005 the Georgia Chamber supported the state legislature in abolishing joint and several liability and implementing fault and damages apportionment in civil cases. The Georgia Chamber continues to support any legislation that clarifies and strengthens Georgia's apportionment statute.

The Georgia Chamber of Commerce **supports** reasonable caps on noneconomic damages, the strengthening of premises liability protections for business owners, the safeguarding of consistent and competitive business insurance rates in Georgia, and the modernization of the Georgia Civil Procedure Act. Enacting legislation and policy that provides liability protection to private landowners and lessees when crimes are committed by third parties on their property is invaluable, to support community development, job growth, and upward mobility. This is especially true in disadvantaged communities where crime has discouraged investment due to unsafe conditions, increased business costs, and the threat of increased liability.

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

- enforcing contracts according to their terms to ensure certainty and predictability for businesses who have expended extensive resources during the negotiation process;
- commercial laws that promote clarity of agreements between parties, and the adoption of uniform commercial laws that further intra- and interstate commerce, as well as inbound and outbound foreign investment;
- regulations that fairly balance the state's needs with the interests of business and the rights of Georgia's citizens to pursue individual enterprise;
- rules and regulations that are based in rational public policy and science;
- the continued funding and continued development of a successful statewide Georgia business court;
- legislation that would overhaul and modernize the Civil Practice Act to be consistent with best practices;
- equitable cost sharing for discovery of electronically-stored information; and
- 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

Policy Purpose -- To enhance the lives of all Georgians from cradle to career through advocacy in early learning and childcare, K-12 education and building a workforce pipeline in partnership with Georgia businesses for growing our current and future economy and developing leadership within our State.

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 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, which opens a segment of the labor force that is eager to work.

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 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, and other indicators of long-term student wellbeing and life success 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 those in high-demand subject areas and hard to staff communities;
- attract, train, and retain 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 college, life, and work in our ever-evolving economy through early introduction of critical workforce competencies such as leadership, collaboration, data fluency, critical thinking and strategic problem-solving;
- support efforts that decrease barriers to applying and enrolling in higher education, including offering college enrollment exams during the school day and providing strategic college and career counseling;
- assist at-risk and under-served students in their pursuit of academic success and social well-being;
- prepare students for postsecondary education, degree completion, 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;
- assist parents and communities in understanding how their child’s schooling may differ from their own schooling to successfully prepare them for college and career; and
- ensure K-12 teachers and leaders receive training and resources regarding current employment opportunities and projections of growing occupations and industries so students are prepared to participate fully in our future economy.

Building a Workforce Pipeline-- The Georgia Chamber of Commerce **supports** efforts to improve workforce readiness 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 high demand 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 closer working relationships among these institutions to achieve a more seamless transition from high school to post-secondary institutions, and the workplace;
- efforts to get more complete information into the hands of students, parents, and educators so students can make smarter decisions about the most appropriate post-secondary path;
- 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 students to earn post-secondary credit prior to graduation;
- efforts to further develop secondary career and technical education programs and certifications, and to create career academies, developing educational opportunities that focus on needed workforce competencies;

- initiatives that provide greater counseling to post-secondary students as they progress to support increased degree completion and awareness of employment options post-graduation;
- efforts to implement work readiness assessment programs throughout the state to enhance workforce competencies and provide the ability to clearly demonstrate those competencies to potential 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 better prepared for current and future workforce needs; and
- efforts to protect and expand post-secondary access and degree completion through Georgia’s merit-based and needs-based student financial aid programs as well as increased FAFSA completion, last-mile funding grants, and access to in-state tuition for DACA recipients that graduate from a Georgia high school.

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 employability, 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 create and scale new degree programs that are nimble and responsive to the needs of industry and future employees;
- initiatives that up-skill current workers to improve their long-term adaptability as new technologies emerge and automation is utilized more widely across industries;
- efforts to improve the adult literacy rate, creating a workforce that is better prepared for lifelong learning where their knowledge bases, skills, and abilities can evolve with changes in our economy;
- 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; and
- initiatives to increase housing stock across our state to accommodate our growing workforce and booming economic growth.

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 students 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 which 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. For Georgia to maintain its business-friendly reputation, rising business leaders must know how to represent their company effectively and authentically 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;
- efforts to develop cross-sector leadership networks, that convene leaders in education, civic society, and the business community to further economic opportunity and increased prosperity; and
- Programs designed to reach across K-12, higher education, civic and government, and the business/economic development sectors and grow leaders together rather than in siloes by sector. This practice would help build in habits of communication, coordination, systems thinking, and cross-sector collaboration needed to realize a future-ready and prosperous Georgia.