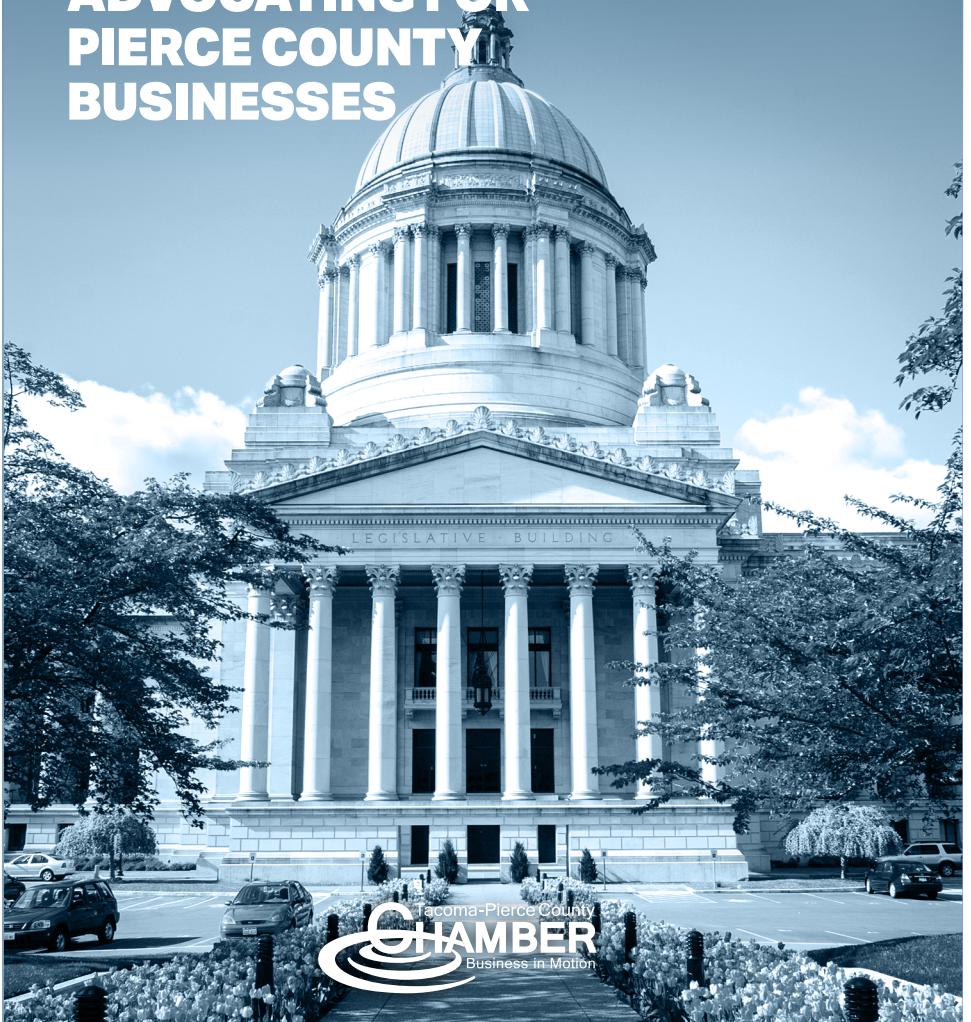


TACOMA-PIERCE COUNTY CHAMBER

2024 LEGISLATIVE AGENDA

ADVOCATING FOR
PIERCE COUNTY
BUSINESSES



Tacoma-Pierce County
CHAMBER
Business in Motion

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TACOMA-PIERCE COUNTY CHAMBER

Our Vision is Making the South Sound the Most Equitable, Inclusive, and Thriving Place to do Business in Washington State.

2024 LEGISLATIVE GOAL

Improve the business climate, grow businesses, and create private sector jobs in the South Sound

TACOMA-PIERCE COUNTY CHAMBER TOP LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

- **Protect** the Puget Sound Gateway, Connecting Washington, and Move Ahead Washington transportation packages to help meet our transportation and economic development needs
- **Support** legislation focused on growing our manufacturing sector through workforce development and business growth
- **Support** policies that encourage innovation, entrepreneurship and foster a thriving business environment
- **Support** regulatory and tax code updates to encourage housing construction of all types
- **Improve** public safety for our community's business and their and employees

THE CHAMBER'S GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR THE LEGISLATURE

Pierce County employers continue to feel the lingering effects of COVID-19, workforce shortages, inflation, and supply chain delays. The Legislature should strive for the creation and retention of private sector jobs by adopting a sustainable budget that implements spending controls and reforms that provide long-term financial stability. At the same time the Legislature should focus on adopting legislation that will streamline regulatory policies/rules, promote job growth, enhance the business climate, and close our education and workforce gaps.

We ask legislators to focus on policy approaches that will:

- 1) reduce crime and improve public safety systems while keeping victims' rights and proper offender accountability and consequences in mind;
- 2) decrease homelessness;
- 3) improve the behavioral health recovery system; and
- 4) place an emphasis on creating an attainable housing supply of all types.

The Chamber will support legislation that:

- Positively impacts Pierce County's economy, enhances the business climate and creates equitable and inclusive economic development
- Promotes private sector job growth and investment
- Provides enhanced funding for education and workforce development
- Builds attainable housing of all types & infrastructure
- Decreases the regulatory burden on businesses
- Improves public safety in our communities
- Supports the legislative priorities of the Chamber's partner entities

BACKGROUND

Every year, the Tacoma-Pierce County Chamber evaluates its legislative priorities and asks the members for feedback on the most important issues facing them. While often times passing legislation is a multi-year effort that involves building broad consensus around these significant issues. While an unscientific survey, it gives us a strong picture of what our members are facing in their businesses day-to-day. This year, our members raised the following top issues:

- 1) Improve Public Safety and Employee Safety
- 2) Address Homelessness and the Housing Shortage
- 3) Support Transportation Investments
- 4) Expanding the Qualified Workforce
- 5) Strengthen Economic Development & Investment

This feedback is then combined with conversations with a variety of stakeholders and experts, our organizational priorities, and considerations on how to have a significant impact in our community. The policy areas that follow are addressed in our work at all levels of government. With these issues rising to the top of our member's list we wanted to call them out more directly.

EDUCATION & WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Employers are choosing where to locate in part due to the availability of a skilled workforce and the quality of life. This starts with high quality education from pre-K to 12th grade. The Chamber furthermore recognizes the need to support the early learning and childcare industry who provide critical services to Pierce County families. We must continue to invest in additional workforce training and educational opportunities. Schools and other training opportunities continue must provide high quality education through innovation and sufficient resources.

The Chamber supports policies and investments that address talent shortages in key industry sectors while supporting local flexibility in implementing workforce development and job training programs. This can best be done locally through Pierce County based entities including the workforce development council, school districts, community-based organizations, community and technical colleges, universities, and local apprenticeship programs.

To achieve this, the Chamber will:

- Support the state constitutional requirement for provision of basic education for all children so that an appropriate allocation of resources corresponds to expectations of such funding – such as local control by the principal, performance reviews, higher pay for positions of higher demand, and the like.
- Ask that the Legislature properly prioritize career and technical education within the K-12 curriculum.
- Prioritize capital and operational funding in programs that have demonstrated an ability to enhance student learning that are coupled with clear expectations of outcomes and performance measures.
- Support programs that foster alignment of education curriculum, including career and technical educational opportunities, with industry needs and increase funding to skilled trades and vocational certifications – especially in the health care, building and construction trades, maritime and manufacturing, and behavioral health areas.
- Support expansion of University of Washington Tacoma to better serve residents in the South Sound, including their operating and capital budget funding requests.
- Encourage investments and adoption of policies like tax credits and incentives rather than taxes on businesses that foster growth and entrepreneurship in the childcare industry through public-private partnerships that show value in their investments.

EMPLOYMENT LAW

Washington employers, including those in Pierce County, are subject to more employment regulations than almost any other state and has one of the most expensive workers' compensation and unemployment insurance systems in the country. The cost to comply with an ever-restrictive regulatory system creates fewer and fewer opportunities, especially for small businesses trying to navigate through it. The Chamber wants to ensure a regulatory environment that allows for the success of both employers and employees.

To achieve this, the Chamber will:

- Support previously adopted legislative changes and oppose increasing unemployment insurance rates, especially those COVID-19 related rate adjustments.
- Encourage the adoption of cost controls within the unemployment insurance system.
- Oppose benefit enhancements and eligibility standards.
- Support the maintaining of reasonable reserves.
- Advocate for dedicated funds like the workers' compensation, and paid family and medical leave to be spent only on programs and purposes that support all the businesses who contribute to those funds.

ENVIRONMENT & ENERGY

Our natural environment is a major driver of our local economy from timber to tourism to our drinking water. Policy makers must continue to encourage innovation and sustainability instead of creating more regulatory burdens. State policy makers should not adopt climate change-related policies that will adversely impact the construction industry, our utilities, and our transportation infrastructure but rather should let bills already adopted to lower carbon be implemented so that their impacts can be properly assessed. Enactment of additional policies to directly or indirectly regulate GHG emissions threatens investments, especially capital investments, in Washington's economy. It is imperative that GHG reduction strategies complement existing policies, do not impose inefficient costs on Washington businesses or residents, and are not duplicative or layered upon regulations at the federal, state or local levels.

To achieve this, the Chamber will:

- Support efforts that expand upon Washington's current innovation, renewable energy and manufacturing sectors and the green economy.
- Encourage, incentivize, and support research and development for new and emerging technologies that reduce GHG and create jobs in Pierce County.
- Support policies that improve and incentivize the use of all alternative fuels and the infrastructure necessary to supply those fuels in Washington. State policy should not dictate single pathways to decarbonization. To meet statutory emissions reduction targets, policies should reflect a technology neutral approach.
- Support policies that create a predictable regulatory environment and encourage fully streamlining of land use and environmental review processes to eliminate unnecessary delay, duplication, and expense.
- Support policies that incentivize and further the safe, reliable, and efficient use of electricity and natural gas transmission in Washington State.
- Support policies that recognize hydropower as a carbon free, affordable, & reliable source of electricity, and encourage a streamlined regulatory environment to permit and site renewable energy generation and transmission facilities.
- Implementation of the Climate Commitment Act should include a mid-term review within the first compliance period to identify and correct any problematic issues to ensure market stability.

HEALTH CARE

Healthcare is not only a critical service; it is also a major sector of the Pierce County economy. With roughly 30,000 people in Pierce County working in this area, it is one of the major sources of wages for our region. As the methods of providing and paying for care change, we must be flexible enough to respond while not placing increased burdens on our employers and their employees. Policymakers should balance access with cost containment measures so that coverage remains affordable for both consumers and employers. For Pierce County specifically, the homelessness and behavioral health crisis and treatment system needs in our community have grown.

To accomplish this, the Chamber will:

- Oppose legislation that increases the cost of healthcare coverage borne by businesses and individuals.
- Support legislative efforts to encourage innovative, private sector approaches to cost containment, including health care cost transparency.
- Support policies that encourage, enhance, or expand medical and behavioral health services.
- Avoid adoption of policies that impose duplicative governing structures, mandates, and restrictions on the ability of providers and health care systems to care for their patients, regardless of their income status.
- Support legislative strategies for increasing workforce recruitment and retention of the full spectrum of health care and behavioral health professionals.

HOUSING & LAND USE

Housing, development, and construction are a critical part of Pierce County's economy and our quality of life. The quality of life associated with available housing and desirable places to live, work and play attracts talent and businesses. Housing is a cornerstone for building an equitable economic ecosystem and the lack of housing makes it harder to attract and retain talent. With Pierce County experiencing a housing crisis caused by construction not keeping pace with demand - an evaluation of the challenges created by a complex and burdensome land use regulatory system must be addressed. Policy changes that reduce barriers to development will help us move the needle forward faster to ensure we have the homes available for the workforce of today and tomorrow.

Today, the lack of industrial zoned land and housing affordability can oftentimes be associated with a long and uncertain permitting process. In addition, expanding the scope of state environmental reviews to include climate impacts has introduced excessive ambiguity and costs. By streamlining duplicative land use regulatory processes while protecting industrial land and creating more opportunities for residential development, predictability can be increased while costs can be contained.

To accomplish this, the Chamber will:

- Support legislation that would increase the housing supply of all types.
- Support reforms to add greater certainty, predictability, and efficiency to land use and environmental review processes.
- Oppose regulatory mandates that do not have adequate economic, health, or safety impact assessments.
- Oppose policies that contribute to increased housing development costs by artificially constraining supply, like rent control and exclusionary zoning.
- Support the continued expansion of the multi-family tax exemption program to encourage the development of more housing units quickly.
- Consider how Washington State can support fee waiver and permit streamlining programs to bring more attainable housing units of all types online quickly.
- Support the protection and preservation of essential public and private facilities that support Pierce County's trade-based economy.
- Support the preservation and expansion of industrial lands reserved for industrial uses.

PUBLIC SAFETY

Public safety and the perceptions of safety have risen to be one of the top issues facing our members, their employees, and residents. Policies must allow for more appropriate enforcement and regulation of drug sales and use, violence, and threats to personal safety while also connecting people to the help and services they need. Every opportunity should be taken to create consequences for and hold offenders accountable, provide the necessary treatment and rehabilitation for return to the community, and restore losses to victims.

To accomplish this, the Chamber will:

- Support legislation that addresses the Blake decision using proper accountability and consequences to address sale and use of illegal drugs.
- Support strengthening law enforcement's ability to address criminal networks distributing fentanyl and other illegal drugs as part of efforts to combat rapidly rising drug overdose deaths.
- Support legislation to protect retailers by counteracting organized retail theft.
- Support the expansion of effective jail diversion programs, including Community Court, Therapeutic Drug Court, and Behavioral Health Court for people suffering from mental illness and substance use disorders. Maintain the accountability and consequences of people and programs if they are not properly utilized or shown by periodic performance reviews to be ineffective.

TAX & FISCAL POLICY

As taxes collected by the State go to fund services the State provides, they also reduce the amount of money that can be reinvested in research, innovation, benefits, and staff. Higher taxes not carefully considered can further discourage investment and growth. A set of simplified tax policies that targets specific growth sectors while reducing administrative burdens allows for a more acceptable tax code.

To accomplish this, the Chamber will:

- Support the creation of property tax exemption on the construction or expansion of manufacturing facilities to support the state's goal of doubling manufacturing jobs in 10 years.
- Support efforts to achieve a balanced and sustainable state budget while promoting economic development opportunities, job growth and strengthened competitiveness.
- Oppose fund transfers from dedicated funds and accounts to the general fund or unrelated programs and purposes. Support efforts that restore previous diversions of these funds.
- Support tax code simplification efforts that reduces administrative costs, that improve the predictability of the tax code and that reduce the tax burdens to Pierce County's businesses.
- Advocate for the retention, extension, and expansion of tax incentives that benefit the economy and support job growth in Pierce County.
- Support tax and regulatory policies that result in the increased movement of goods through the Puget Sound gateway.
- Advocate for profits rather than gross revenues to be taxed as a better representation of earnings through the business and occupation tax.
- Oppose efforts to reduce the existing funding formula for the state's association development organizations (ADOs).
- Support legislation that assists the Port of Tacoma and other manufacturing and industrial areas in their efforts to expand and preserve jobs and that streamlines the rules and regulations that affect their operations.

TRANSPORTATION & INFRASTRUCTURE

Transportation infrastructure is critical to our region's trade driven base. We know that the movement of people, goods, and services makes our region thrive. This is why four separate statewide transportation revenue packages have been adopted over the last 20 years, including most recently Move Ahead Washington in 2022 – all commitments of which must be protected. As we look forward, we must continue to protect these investments, show the community their value, and build out the economic opportunities they provide.

In addition to investing in physical infrastructure to ensure the effective and efficient ability to transport goods and services, we are aware of the need for digital and technological infrastructure investments as well. Digital infrastructure and digital equity investments are paramount to remain competitive as technological needs and services advance for business, workforce and education.

To accomplish this, the Chamber will:

- Protect the Puget Sound Gateway, Connecting Washington, and Move Ahead Washington transportation packages to help meet Pierce County's transportation and economic development needs
- Support the maintenance and preservation of the existing transportation system, including the maintenance of rights-of-way beyond just the travel lines.
- Support road repair and methods for reducing road congestion to enable easier access to businesses including enhanced bus and light rail.
- Reduce the patchwork regulatory systems that cause inefficient use of our transportation network by providing uniform state licensing of rideshare operations with common statewide standards.
- Support local transportation infrastructure policies and investments for Pierce County that improve freight mobility, provide congestion relief and system(s) reliability.
- Support legislation that encourages the use of multimodal commutes including the commute trip reduction [CTR] credit for businesses that provide benefits to their employees to ease traffic congestion and create increased road capacity.
- Support the priorities, funding, and implementation strategies from the WDOT SR 162 Study including completion of the design and construction work for the SR 410/SR162 interchange.

VETERANS & MILITARY AFFAIRS

Joint Base Lewis-McChord is a major economic driver for Pierce County as its single largest employer. Fortunately, Pierce County is also one of the preferred locations of transitioning service members. This gives us a great opportunity to show our support for federal investment and retain a high-quality workforce.

To accomplish this, the Chamber will:

- Ask the legislature to continue to support policy efforts for veterans and their family members' transition into the civilian workforce and higher education like granting college credits for previous military work, training or experience and streamlining the transfer of professional certificates and licensures of service members and their dependents from other states.
- Support funding for "clear zone" studies and purchases to reduce encroaching land uses located within the JBLM/McChord Field Clear Zone.
- Advocate for community compatible land use proposals to support the military mission of defense installations identified in the 2005 BRAC Report and the JBLM Joint Land Use Study (JLUS).

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UPCOMING CHAMBER ADVOCACY EVENTS

State Legislative Advocacy Day.....February 15, 2024

Washington to Washington DC Conference..... April 15-18, 2024

Public Officials Holiday Reception December, 2024

**Making the South Sound
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in Washington State**

Advocacy

Leadership

Relationships



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