



# Maryland Chamber of Commerce 2008 Business Agenda

---

## Mission

---

The mission of the Maryland Chamber of Commerce is to maximize opportunities for its members and their employees to grow and prosper. By working with the Administration and the General Assembly, the State Chamber seeks to make Maryland an even better place to live, work and do business.

The Maryland Chamber's priorities for the 2008 Session are to:

- Achieve fiscal responsibility;
- Promote affordable health insurance;
- Improve the State's transportation system;
- Limit business regulation;
- Defend civil liability laws;
- Balance environmental law and regulation; and
- Support education funding.

---

## Achieve Fiscal Responsibility

---

Maryland State government must practice responsible fiscal stewardship. Although the State's most recent \$1.7 billion structural budget deficit was addressed by a combination of budget reductions, slots authorization and taxes, our elected officials must show greater budgetary restraint for the State to live within its means if we are to avoid creating the next structural deficit. The Maryland Chamber recommends:

- That the Governor slow the growth of the fiscal year 2009 state budget, consistent with the provisions of House Bill 1 of the 2007 special session;
- Approval by Maryland's voters of the constitutional amendment to authorize carefully regulated slot machines in limited locations to fund education;
- Repeal of the hastily adopted sales tax on computer services, balanced by additional state budget restraint;
- Reconsideration and revision of the unprecedented new corporate reporting requirements, so that necessary information is collected but overly burdensome requirements are removed;
- Keeping State taxes competitive with other jurisdictions, and enacting sound tax policy that improves Maryland's business climate and attracts and retains jobs; and,
- Resisting unfunded spending mandates.

---

## Promote Affordable Health Insurance

---

Access to affordable health insurance in a competitive marketplace is necessary to promote public health. Individuals, businesses, and State government each have a role to play if we are to reduce the number of uninsured in Maryland.

As with other types of insurance, the purchase of health insurance is ultimately an individual's responsibility. Individuals who can afford to purchase health insurance should be encouraged to do so. Employers should assist employees in obtaining health insurance on a pre-tax basis, but the mix of salary and benefits must remain an employer's choice. The role of state government should be to:

- Help individuals who truly cannot afford to purchase health insurance;
- Promote a competitive, affordable health insurance environment where health insurance plan design is driven by the marketplace; and
- Respect federal ERISA law, which allows employers to design, and decide their level of participation in, health benefit plans.

Most small employers cannot afford to offer health insurance. This serious and growing problem is made worse by existing State laws that fail to provide proper incentives for users of health services to become better consumers, limit plan design flexibility for small employers, and require among the highest number of mandated health benefits in the country. The Maryland General Assembly must grant relief to small employers by reforming the small group health insurance program.

---

## Improve the State's Transportation System

---

Maryland's transportation network is the lifeblood of our economy. Every day, Marylanders use the State's transportation network to get to and from work. The business community relies on an effective, efficient, and reliable transportation network. But, the congestion on Maryland's roads and highways and the aging transportation infrastructure demand action today.

To protect this investment and to catch up on the \$40 billion backlog of transportation projects, Maryland needs to annually invest a minimum of \$600 million in additional revenue. New transportation revenues, resulting from the 2007 special session of the General Assembly, will achieve approximately 70% of that goal. Businesses and

the citizens of Maryland need a diverse transportation system that keeps the State competitive while supporting economic growth, reliable mobility, and maintaining and preserving our quality of life. The Maryland Chamber supports and encourages State government to:

- Provide new funds for road, highway, transit, port, airport, and rail projects to meet the needs of this vital transportation network;
- Maintain the integrity and financial health of the Transportation Trust Fund in light of under funded project needs;
- Support Congressional efforts to secure new federal funding for transportation modes that would benefit the State; and
- Operate the Maryland Department of Transportation in the most cost-effective manner possible, while also maximizing operating efficiencies.

Appropriate improvements to this system will enhance this region's competitiveness and viability for supporting jobs.

---

### **Limit Business Regulation**

---

The free market is the most efficient and cost-effective system for delivering goods and services needed by Maryland residents. Therefore, the General Assembly should avoid overregulation that substitutes the mandate of government for the free choice of individuals in the marketplace. Examples of potentially damaging legislation include:

- Efforts to impose artificial wage and benefit levels;
- Legislation to mandate terms of employment such as paid time off, "show-up" pay and meal breaks;
- Protectionist measures to restrict competitive bidding for state procurement; and
- Bills to enact price controls on goods and services.

The Maryland Chamber anticipates continued discussion about the form of regulation concerning the electric industry. The State Chamber will aggressively advocate for a stable, predictable regulatory environment for public service companies and their customers, as well as for other regulated businesses, in order to promote access to services that are essential to Maryland's economy.

---

### **Defend Civil Liability Laws**

---

The ability of a company to receive fair treatment from a state's legal system influences business decisions regarding job creation and business location. Efforts to liberalize the civil liability system, create new causes of action to sue businesses or increase business liability costs will drive jobs out of the State, and must be resisted. The Maryland Chamber:

- Opposes legislation that would provide for tort liability based on comparative fault, market share liability, or weaken the standards for the award of punitive damages;

- Opposes legislation that would liberalize existing provisions of the civil liability system such as filing deadlines, statutes of limitations or awarding of attorney's fees;
- Supports meaningful reforms to civil liability law that will help reduce defensive medicine and moderate medical liability insurance rates; and
- Supports jury service reforms that will promote more representative juries.

---

### **Balance Environmental Law and Regulation**

---

Maryland Chamber members and their employees live and work in their communities and care about the natural environment. They approach environmental citizenship with the same discipline, strategy, and accountability that drives their businesses to produce benefits that extend beyond their bottom lines.

As such, the Maryland Chamber will:

- Continue to address the needs of an increasingly complex legal and regulatory environment;
- Take a leading role in educating the Maryland General Assembly and regulators on the benefits businesses provide when a balanced legal and regulatory environment is maintained – invigorating economic growth and job opportunities for Marylanders; and
- Continue stakeholder dialogue and further engage the expertise of our members as a knowledgeable resource to successfully drive efficient and effective environmental policy.

---

### **Support Education Funding**

---

The availability of a well-educated workforce is an essential component of Maryland's economy. The quality of, and access to, high quality primary, secondary, adult and higher education is a vital concern for Maryland's business community due to its impact on job retention and creation. Meaningful levels of adult education funding are important to meet unmet demands for job retraining. Recent levels of State support for higher education have contributed to significant tuition increases, made higher education less affordable and threatened the quality of higher education in Maryland. The Administration and General Assembly should provide predictable and sustainable funding for adult and higher education in Maryland and ensure accountability for the goals set by the State.

---

### **Additional Areas of Concern**

---

In addition, the Maryland Chamber will:

- Continue to offer its leadership and expertise in workers' compensation and helping to ensure the fiscal soundness, benefit integrity, and administration effectiveness of Maryland's Unemployment Insurance program.
- Support coordination of State and local investments to meet the infrastructure required by the Base Realignment and Closure process.