



# 2021 PUBLIC POLICY AGENDA

# ABOUT THE CHAMBER

The Greater Akron Chamber (GAC) exists to drive economic growth and prosperity for Greater Akron (Medina, Portage and Summit Counties) and represents over 1,600 members, who employ over 117,000 people with \$2.3 billion in total payroll and \$66.2 billion in total revenue. We proactively support the success of the business community by strategically utilizing the collective impact of members through:

## CONNECTING

members to key information on relevant political activities and engagement opportunities

## CONVENING

stakeholders on pressing issues and engaging them in dialog to develop solutions

## ADVOCATING

for our collectively established priorities in Columbus and Washington, D.C.

The GAC's ability to effectively advocate on these issues is largely due to ongoing support and input from its Government Affairs Committee. This group meets on a regular basis and is comprised of leaders from within business, nonprofit, higher education and community-based organizations. This committee is, at its core, a tool that enables the GAC to understand members' perspectives on relevant issues and collaboratively explore solutions. Doing this work is critical to the GAC's ability to effectively advocate on our members' behalf and provides us with a platform to collectively engage elected officials.

Currently, our Government Affairs Committee has over thirty-five dedicated members who actively participate in these efforts. Under the leadership of Co-Chairs Nick Gattozzi, Executive Director of Government and Community Relations, Kent State University and Elizabeth Bartz, President & CEO, State & Federal Communications, we have increased the frequency of our proactive activities and are determined to continue building momentum.

The issues outlined within this agenda are intentionally designed to align regional priorities with state and federal activities. This ensures our members are enabled to engage in policy discussions on relevant issues in a timely manner.

If you are interested in joining the GAC's Government Affairs Committee, please visit our website for more information at [www.greaterakronchamber.org](http://www.greaterakronchamber.org) or contact John Rizzo at [jrizzo@greaterakronchamber.org](mailto:jrizzo@greaterakronchamber.org).



# 2021 POLICY PRIORITIES

The GAC's policy priorities represent key legislative items that are most relevant to ongoing activities and critical to our region's economic growth and success.

## COVID-19 RELIEF & PANDEMIC RESPONSE

Continuing our role in regional pandemic response efforts, we will continue proactively advocating to the state and federal government for expanded aid for small businesses, local governments and members of our communities that need it most.

- **Economic Support**– Continue advocating for new and continued funding of key programs and lines of support that provide small businesses with direct financial relief in response to the impacts of the pandemic.
- **Liability Protections** – In respect to the prolonged nature of the COVID-19 pandemic, ensure that liability protections remain available to small businesses following the expiration of existing protections in September 2021.
- **Local Government Funding** – The GAC remains a strong advocate for (1) increased funding for local governments to ensure that regional pandemic response efforts are well funded and (2) greater flexibility in spending those funds so that local leaders can maximize the overall efficacy and impact of their spending.

## OPPORTUNITY & INCLUSION

The GAC will drive initiatives that create/expand economic opportunity for all Ohioans and level the playing field for traditionally disenfranchised populations.

- **MBE/WBE Support** – Advocate for legislation that creates/expands policies that increase business opportunities for minority business enterprises and women-owned business enterprises.
- **LGBTQ Protections** – Support legislative efforts that create employment protections for all Ohioans, regardless of gender, gender identity or sexual orientation.

## HIGHER EDUCATION

The GAC will advocate for our region's higher education institutions to receive adequate funding so they may continue providing strong educational foundations and skill development in alignment with the region's economic development priorities and workforce needs.

- **Ohio College Opportunity Grant (OCOG)** – Maintain funding and increase accessibility to OCOG to ensure students in need of financial assistance can receive a quality education.
- **State Share of Instruction (SSI)** – As a primary funder of higher education, we support an increase to ensure that education remains affordable and accessible.
- **Integrate Research** – Convert the research capabilities of our region's higher education institutions into commercial and talent attraction opportunities.

## ECONOMIC & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

The GAC will actively advocate for the utilization, creation and preservation of policies and regulations that are vital in supporting job creation and retention, capital investment and improving Ohio's business climate.

- **Tax Credits and Incentives** – Support legislative efforts that sustain and create tax credits which help secure funding for economic development projects and expands the ability of/encourages employers to hire workers who traditionally have barriers to employment.
- **FY22-FY23 State Budgets** – Actively engage lawmakers in support of key tax policies, program funding and local infrastructure support that satisfy our region's broader economic development goals.
- **Business Income Deduction** – Advocate for the maintenance of pro-business tax policies, such as the BID, to maintain jobs and avoid raising taxes on small- and middle-market businesses.
- **Broadband Expansion** – With access to broadband becoming a critical factor in everything from healthcare to workforce to broader economic development efforts, we will support policies and legislation that empower the telecommunications and cable industries to extend service to unserved and underserved areas. To address adoption challenges, we will engage our membership to identify opportunities to better understand and address other factors that can be significant barriers to closing the digital divide.
- **IRB Modernization** – Advocate for long-needed regulatory improvements to industrial revenue bonds that would help manufacturing companies access more flexible/less expensive capital and enhance the industry's overall capacity to grow.
- **SSBCI Reauthorization** – Advocate for the reauthorization of the State Small Business Credit Initiative and other sources of federal funding that support state and/or local programs whose purpose is to better connect small, minority-owned and early-stage companies with capital.
- **New Market Tax Credits (NMTC)** – In light of this program's proven success as an economic development tool in attracting private capital into low-income communities, the GAC will advocate for this program to be made permanent.

## **HEALTHCARE**

The GAC will advocate for policies and initiatives that allow healthcare systems to operate in cost-effective and innovative ways and support efforts that strengthen their ability, as the region's largest employers, to attract and retain new employees and upskill and retrain incumbent workers.

- **Increased Access to Health Care** – Support policies and legislation that expands access to medical specialists, extends physicians' ability to treat patients and increases the utilization of new technologies in healthcare.

## **WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT**

To help continue developing the region's talent pipeline, the GAC will work closely with key stakeholders to address regional workforce needs by identifying, connecting and creating opportunities that effectively, efficiently and cohesively bring together students, skills training and in-demand jobs.

- **Experiential Learning Opportunities** – Drive initiatives and advocacy efforts that facilitate internships, externships, apprenticeships, co-ops, job shadows and other forms of experiential learning opportunities to bridge the gap between small- and mid-market employers and an evolving student and mid-skill workforce.
- **Mid-Tech Skill Development** – Support efforts that advance the mid-tech skills of incumbent workers and those in disadvantaged populations and enables them to adapt to evolving workforce trends and in-demand jobs.
- **Workforce Re-entry** – Support policies and initiatives that provide a route of re-entry into the workforce for those affected by addiction, incarceration or trauma.
- **Immigration Reform** – Advocate for an increase in the number of and access to H-1B visas and other policies, regulations and reforms that improves our region's ability to attract and retain diverse and highly skilled talent.

## **TRANSPORTATION**

In recognizing the funding challenges Ohio's transportation infrastructure faces and the importance of transit to metropolitan economies, we will advocate for policies and related funding opportunities that enable the continued maintenance and development of Ohio's transportation infrastructure and the reliability and affordability of urban travel.

- **Akron-Canton Airport** – Support advocacy efforts and initiatives that promote new economic activities and attract additional commercial airline and cargo services to CAK, positioning it for long-term economic growth and economic vitality.
- **Regional Transit Authority** – Advocate for dedicated funding and sustainable resources to support the effective and affordable transport of displaced workers in urban communities to Job Hubs.

# PUBLIC POLICY AGENDA

The GAC drives growth and prosperity for Greater Akron through advocating for policies that support the success of its business community.



# INVEST IN HUMAN CAPITAL

## EDUCATION CONNECTIVITY

- Advocate for policies and funding that support and strengthen the cradle to career continuum which helps ensure students are prepared, succeed academically, earn a post-secondary degree or accreditation or acquire the skills they need to enter a career.
- Continue to support the APS College and Career Academies that prepare students for 21st-Century careers by linking subjects to industry themes with a strong focus on experiential learning opportunities.
- Continue to support regional STEM platform schools that serve as the model program for the development and sharing of 21st Century skills.
- Create mutually beneficial partnerships through actively working with partners to realize our region's higher education institutions' capacity to be an asset for economic development purposes.
- Advocate for standards that provide a rigorous curriculum that ensures students become college and career ready.
- Encourage communities, schools and governments to work together to fund public education for the economic success of the region.
- Advocate for policies and funding that support educational programs which align mid-tech skills training and in-demand jobs.

## TALENT ATTRACTION AND RETENTION

- Drive efforts to build and maintain a diverse and skilled regional workforce through experiential learning opportunities and skills training programs.
- Support programs, initiatives and advocacy efforts that work towards enhancing downtown vitality through the attraction and retention of talent and young professionals.

## CLOSING THE SKILLS GAP

- Support public-private partnerships that provide programmatic support and targeted training opportunities designed to align employee skills with the needs of in-demand jobs and help employers bridge employment disparities.
- Support the alignment of federal, state and local policy and funding to assist mid-skill workers and those in disadvantaged populations to succeed in an ever-evolving job market.



**Grace Walkulchik**

Chair, Greater Akron Chamber Board of Directors  
President & CEO, Akron Children's Hospital

"A top concern of Greater Akron's business community is to engage students early on to explore career pathways and build viable skill sets, as well as to promote the continual growth and development of our existing workforce. We are fortunate to have educational institutions and talent intermediaries who identify employer needs and collaborate to fill workforce gaps. As a community, we need policies that support equitable and inclusive educational opportunities across the talent ecosystem to ensure the thriving future we envision for our area's families and businesses."

# SUPPORT THE FOUNDATIONS OF GROWTH

## ENTREPRENEURSHIP

- Create opportunities and enhance support networks for emerging businesses and entrepreneurs to thrive and attain self-sufficiency.
- Pursue policy and funding opportunities in collaboration with regional partners to support entrepreneurial investment and innovation.
- Work with local and regional partners to support technology transfer and product development ecosystems.
- Facilitate and support programs and initiatives that mentor, support, attract and retain entrepreneurs of all backgrounds striving to do business in the Greater Akron region.

## INNOVATION CENTERS

- Promote policies and funding that enhance the retention and expansion of local industry clusters such as Advanced Materials (metal, plastics/polymers, biomaterials and liquid crystals); Advanced Manufacturing; Healthcare (biomedical); Oil, Gas and Water; Instruments, Controls and Electronics; Logistics and Distribution; Defense; and Service (Finance/Insurance/ Real Estate/Housing) as an integral part of our economic growth strategy.
- Build upon the existing momentum of regional assets such as the Bounce Innovation Hub, Akron Biomedical Corridor, NEOMED/REDI Zone, and other innovation centers focused on biotech, life sciences and healthcare industries.
- Continue to strengthen public-private partnerships to enable creative collaboration and sustainable investment opportunities.
- Work with regional partners to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of economic development efforts and research partnerships within Northeast Ohio.

## TAXATION

- Advocate for pro-growth tax policies that preserve global competitiveness and create a tax climate which strengthens the regional business community's ability to invest in new products, equipment and employees.
- Support the continuance, creation and utilization of tax credits as economic development tools for the Greater Akron region.
- Advocate for policies and legislation that stands to benefit small- and mid-size businesses to support retention and expansion efforts at the local level.



# STRENGTHEN REGIONAL BUSINESS

## HEALTHCARE

- Continue to support market-driven solutions to control growth in health care costs and foster competition in the private health insurance market.
- Support efforts to maintain adequate, predictable and sustainable payment for health care services provided through the Medicaid program.
- Support sustainable public-private solutions to increase citizen access to health insurance coverage and decrease the number of uninsured.
- Support initiatives that enable healthcare institutions to be fiscally sustainable and provide quality health care.
- Continue participating in efforts to gather and provide data from businesses in an effort to have the most up-to-date information on health trends within the Greater Akron region.
- Advocate for a competent worker's compensation system that works for both state-funded and self-insured employers and proficiently balances providing proper medical treatment for injured employees and cost for employers.

## BUSINESS REGULATIONS

- Advocate for the reduction or elimination of policies, rules and/or regulations that impose undue burden on businesses and/or harm productivity and profitability.
- Oppose policy that does not balance employer and employee interests.
- Support efforts that work to ensure government is creating and implementing policy that is responsive to both business and citizen needs.
- Monitor the local, state and national economy and partner with elected officials and governmental entities to address economic and business concerns.

## UNDER-SERVED ENTERPRISES

- Support the growth and sustainability of businesses owned by minorities, women, veterans and disabled persons, including supporting them in procurement initiatives.
- Drive policies and initiatives that provide employment opportunity and economic inclusion for all residents of the Greater Akron region.
- Advocate for funding and support for programs and initiatives that drive diversity and inclusion efforts and provide assistance to businesses owned by minorities, women, veterans and disabled persons.



# REVITALIZE AND MAINTAIN PHYSICAL ASSETS

## REGIONAL ASSETS AND OPPORTUNITIES

- Support efforts that promote community planning concepts which provide balance for citizens to live, work and play.
- Support projects that would preserve, expand and revitalize our urban core and adjoining neighborhoods which provide a variety of housing options for residents of all income levels and ethnic and racial backgrounds.
- Advocate for funding of sustainable development opportunities that enhance regional corridors and improve existing historical assets.

## COMMUNICATION

- Advocate for legislation that supports the telecommunications and cable industries, bringing increased broadband access and 5G technologies to the Greater Akron region and Ohio.
- Advocate for policies and initiatives that support investment from the telecommunications and cable industries to develop and implement new technologies that expand broadband access and position educators, businesses and healthcare systems to be more effective and efficient.

## TRANSPORTATION

- Air – Support Akron–Canton Airport’s (CAK) capital improvement plan and efforts that effectively utilize CAK as a vital regional asset.
- Surface and Multi-Modal Transportation – Advocate for transportation policies and related funding that improves the movement of goods and people in a way that enables economic growth.



**Steve Millard**

President & CEO, Greater Akron Chamber

“To elevate Greater Akron, we must create a business-friendly environment. This requires the Chamber to respond to business concerns in an effective manner and in ways that support the big picture. Key to the success of regional economic development activities is supporting a focus on shared prosperity that brings growth and success to companies of all types. Shared prosperity also means that companies with owners and leaders from every race and demographic are being included in our work – that focus on inclusion will position Greater Akron’s companies and the broader community to achieve new levels of economic vitality.”

## ENERGY

- Advocate for a regulatory structure that provides a fair balance between keeping prices reasonable, stable and affordable for customers, while ensuring utilities have the resources they need to make appropriate investments in service reliability, including the replacement of aging infrastructure.
- Advocate for the diverse supply of reliable and affordable energy, with a focus on maintaining in-state electric generation that supports sustainable jobs, a consistent tax base and economic development.
- Advocate for renewable and alternative energy resources where it does not distort competitive markets or increase the burden on taxpayers and ratepayers.
- Support the responsible development of the state's Utica and Marcellus Shale resources to provide lower energy costs for the region and expand economic development and employment opportunities within our region.
- Promote free market, cost-effective energy efficiency programs that can help our member companies make financially efficient decisions without increasing costs for any consumer.

## CULTURAL AND RECREATIONAL AMENITIES

- Promote projects that would support the arts, sports and other recreational activities that create or sustain economic impact or play a role in talent attraction and retention.

## INFRASTRUCTURE

- Support efforts to educate state leaders on the critical needs of Ohio's transportation infrastructure and advocate for legislation that addresses them.
- Advocate for dedicated funding that provides reasonable investments on a long-term basis in Ohio's transportation infrastructure and public transportation systems.

## PRISONS AND CORRECTIONS

- Continue supporting the utilization and expansion of successful, cost-saving, community corrections programs that help make communities safer, hold offenders accountable and provide opportunities for offenders to improve their lives.
- Support alternative sentencing for appropriate offenders, specifically for those who are better served by our region's Drug Courts, which will save the state hundreds of millions of dollars that could be better spent on education, rehabilitation, healthcare and workforce development.
- Advocate for policies that support workforce re-entry of those exiting our criminal justice systems, addiction services or traumatic situations.





# GAC

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