



GREATER SIOUX FALLS CHAMBER OF COMMERCE 2024 LEGISLATIVE PLATFORM

In order to develop its legislative platform, the Greater Sioux Falls Chamber of Commerce (Chamber), through its Issues Management Council, conducts research, hears presentations and surveys its members about issues affecting business. These efforts, combined with actively following and monitoring legislative activity, guide our efforts toward developing the legislative platform. The Issues Management Council makes platform recommendations to the Board of Directors, which is the Chamber's final policy decision-making body.

BUSINESS CLIMATE & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The Chamber believes our economy is best served by allowing free and open competition in the marketplace in an environment that encourages business development and expansion. Laws that preclude or give an advantage to one business structure or arrangement over another ultimately lessen competition and reduce our area's attractiveness as a business location. Appropriate rules and regulations may be required for a viable free market, but government intrusion should not inhibit or restrict business unnecessarily.

The Chamber supports economic development with local, regional, and state programs including, but not limited to, the Revolving Economic Development and Initiative (REDI) Fund, the Future Fund, the Building South Dakota Fund, and Tax Increment Financing. The Chamber supports workforce-focused programs, addressing infrastructure and revolving fund loans, workforce, education housing, childcare, and grants to offset certain taxes for qualifying projects. We will continue to monitor the use and impact of these programs and we will closely analyze any legislation that impacts these programs and other economic development efforts in our state.

TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE

The Chamber recognizes that a safe, efficient, and responsive infrastructure is critical to economic development and commerce in greater Sioux Falls and throughout South Dakota. The Chamber supports the continued evaluation of our roads, bridge systems, air, rail, water, sewer, telecommunications, energy, public transit and public facilities on an ongoing basis. Current funding, including local flexibilities, should be carefully reviewed before new funding is considered.

WORKFORCE HOUSING

The Chamber supports expanding workforce housing and support services for workforce development, retention and recruitment that is accessible for low and moderate-income individuals. The Chamber promotes innovative solutions that would make workforce housing more accessible. The Chamber continues to support the Housing Infrastructure Fund that is administered by the South Dakota Housing Authority.

THE STATE BUDGET

The Chamber supports a balanced budget even if it means making difficult decisions. Balancing the budget can be done in many ways and the Chamber supports creative solutions to addressing this issue. We continue to see no need for an income tax or major tax increases.

EDUCATION

The future of greater Sioux Falls and South Dakota depends on educating our residents and developing our workforce to remain competitive on a regional, national, and international scale. It is vital to foster an educational system that works in tandem with the business community and government to address and support quality education and workforce development initiatives. Quality education is essential for the business community to attract new employers and employees and to educate a growingly diverse workforce.

To support our state's residents and to meet our workforce development needs, the Chamber supports the appropriate allocation of public monies to ensure funds for an equitable, effective, and efficient system of early childhood learning, K-12 education, and our post-secondary education systems.

Early Childhood Learning: The Chamber encourages and supports efforts to provide quality and affordable early childhood education for all children in South Dakota, including Pre-Kindergarten. We support identifying strategies at the state, local, and federal levels to fund and implement these programs. The Chamber also supports increasing the efficiency and availability of early childhood learning programs, including public and private partnerships.

K-12: The Chamber supports a quality and fully funded public education system. Fair compensation and benefits for our educators is also critical to retaining and attracting quality workforce in our public education system. We recognize some districts that are sparsely populated may require additional resources per student to ensure quality education. However, districts that choose to remain small, and may require additional financial subsidies in those instances, should be critically reviewed. We encourage the use of technology-based instruction to enhance access to master teachers and course topics that are not available in our smaller districts. We also discourage school districts from recruiting students with various incentives. The Chamber encourages increases in efficiency and innovation to continue to reflect the changing demographics of our K-12 students.

Post-Secondary Education: The Chamber recognizes that educated, well-trained, and skilled workers are critical to growing our workforce. We believe that supporting our post-secondary education systems, which includes the Regental and Technical Education systems, is imperative to continuing to educate our residents and supply our workforce needs. To retain our students, the Chamber encourages the expansion of scholarship funding, as well as, the use of recruitment and retention tools. This includes, but is not limited to, the needs-based Freedom Scholarship, Build Dakota Scholarship and South Dakota Opportunity Scholarship. We support adequate funding for our post-secondary education systems, and encourage continued consideration of funding options to address tuition cost and new student opportunities. Further, we encourage public and business input into our post-secondary education systems to better align its programs with the needs of residents and the business community.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

The Chamber is concerned about the current lack of resources available to our local governments to address behavioral and mental health, criminal justice costs, and infrastructure needs. We believe that collaborative partnerships and improved funding will benefit our local communities.

The Chamber supports the ability to permit local governments to impose a sales tax for community enhancement project purposes, provided there is an affirmative vote of the communities residents and the tax is tied to specific projects for a set period of time. We believe this type of local control proposal is the best way for a community to determine the need for such a tax, and measure the willingness of local voters to impose a tax in their community.

HEALTH CARE AND WELLNESS

The Chamber recognizes the role the non-profit healthcare community plays in providing essential services to our most vulnerable residents and supports appropriate funding for them. We strongly encourage the state's reimbursement rates to align with providers' true costs associated with those essential services.

The Chamber acknowledges the important contributions its medical institutions provide to our community and will give additional weight to their recommendations for public health and wellness policies. Community acknowledgment and commitment to wellness is an attribute of successful communities and can enhance the desirability for people and businesses to come here and stay here to work, live, and play.

DIVERSITY AND INCLUSIVITY

The Chamber recognizes the growing diversity of our state's population and we embrace the opportunities that this diversity provides for a culturally and talent-rich community. We will work with residents, our partners, community and state agencies and elected officials to develop efforts to engage and include all individuals in our state who seek to work side-by-side with us to grow our economy. This includes providing information and services that are more easily consumed by English Second Language residents in acknowledgment of our community's demographic changes so all residents can participate in our workforce and our community. As we work to meet the workforce expectations evident today and predicted well into the future, legal immigration and refugee resettlement are proven and important strategies. We will also resist initiatives that inappropriately sanction or discriminate against individuals or groups.

BUSINESS OWNER RIGHTS

The Chamber opposes unnecessary intrusions into employer and employee relationships. This includes opposing policies that prevent a business from exercising their own financial interests or internal policies. We support voluntary agreements between management and the workforce establishing compensation, benefits, hours, and working conditions.

The Chamber also supports the employer's ability to ensure a safe environment for employees and patrons. While the Chamber supports the right to gun ownership, we have also maintained that property and business owners have the right to restrict fire-arm possession on their property if they so choose, and will continue to support this position.

TOURISM/VISITOR INDUSTRY

The Chamber supports funding mechanisms for the visitor and tourism industry as it continues to be a vital part of the greater Sioux Falls and South Dakota economy. Funding mechanisms to support these efforts include, but are not limited to, the Business Improvement District (BID) tax and the tourism tax.

INITIATIVE AND REFERENDUM

The Chamber believes that South Dakota's longstanding tradition of allowing direct citizen access to the ballot through the initiative and referendum processes should remain. We encourage an ongoing review of the rules and requirements surrounding constitutional and statutory ballot measures.

AGRIBUSINESS INDUSTRY

Agriculture has been the primary economic driver in our state since 1889. The Chamber supports legislation that enhances agribusiness in South Dakota, including the expansion of agricultural products, services, and technologies.

SPORTS WAGERING

The Chamber supports efforts by the legislature to permit sports gaming to occur within physical establishments located throughout the state. We support the concept that these establishments should be licensed to perform such activities.

RECREATIONAL CANNABIS

While the Chamber opposes the legalization of cannabis for recreational use, should expansion occur, we encourage our elected officials to work prudently to implement the enacting law. Employer liability is a chief concern as there is no legal standard for determining when an employee is under the influence and when the employee is cognitively impaired. Additional employer concerns include workplace and patron safety, employer business insurance loss of coverage, and that cannabis remains an illegal substance at the federal level.

ENVIRONMENT

The Greater Sioux Falls Chamber of Commerce places a high priority on safeguarding and conserving both the quality and quantity of our area's natural amenities. Government, in partnership with businesses and residents, should share responsibility for conserving, enhancing and protecting our natural resources. Given the substantial public and private investments to develop the river greenway, and the potential to develop a first-class amenity in our community, strategies seeking to improve the water quality in the Big Sioux and its tributaries should continue to be identified and implemented.