

## *Where Does Your Chamber Stand on the Issues?*

### 2021 Policy Positions

*Mid-Maine Chamber of Commerce is dedicated and committed to promoting, educating and advocating for business prosperity and regional economic improvement. Our mission involves advocating for public policy that will assist our region to prosper and grow. The Public Policy Committee has developed and implemented these policy positions for the Mid-Maine Chamber of Commerce with the endorsement of the Chamber's Board of Directors.*

*While we firmly believe in the effectiveness of these policies, we also acknowledge that reasonable people can disagree about policies and politics. We maintain that vigorous, but respectful, debate on political issues is a vital input to democratic government and civil society more generally. We do not support ad hominem attacks and the incivility that has crept into political discourse. Especially in the months following an*

## **Education & Workforce Development**

Educational opportunity and achievement are essential to the region's economic health and quality of life. Without an educated workforce and diligent efforts to develop the pipeline of workers that businesses need to compete globally, our competitiveness for quality workers will diminish. Our region struggles to replace the high rate of retiring workers with a qualified workforce needed, as our college students are leaving the State for higher-paying jobs. To that end, the Chamber supports:

- Developing a comprehensive strategy to attract and retain workforce.
- Aligning education opportunities with private, public and non-profit workforce needs to attract skilled workers to mid-Maine.
- Promoting and expanding of quality early childhood through twelfth grade curriculum and programs (including public, private and charter schools).
- Encouraging schools to share and combine resources so that more opportunities are offered to students in a safe and healthy environment.
- Promoting mid-Maine as a higher education hub.
- Increasing high school and higher education going/attendance and completion rates through financial aid awareness, expanding transfer agreements, dual and concurrent enrollment classes and Career and Technical Education.
- Encouraging math and writing taught throughout high school.
- Promoting development of a regional, long-term education strategy that sets timelines and outcomes including specific training of pandemic procedures/protocols tailored per profession.
- Encouraging CareerCenters, Local Workforce Investment Boards and educational institutions to work hand-in-hand in a coordinated manner.
- Supporting policies that encourage and increase in-migration of workforce including attracting more people to become year-round residents.
- Establishing clearer pathways to citizenship.
- Recognizing that our workforce is aging and that in order for our businesses to survive and/or thrive, transitioning workforce must replace our retiring workers.
- Advance broadband capacity to support telehealth and other health care technology based services.

## Health Care

The cost of health care remains at the top of the list of concerns to members of the Mid-Maine Chamber of Commerce. Our Chamber supports efforts that:

- Continue to advance the quality of care and improve the health of Maine's population to reduce the overall cost of health care including prescription drugs, to advance the goal of reducing the cost of health insurance for employers and employees.
- Advance broadband capacity to support telehealth and other health care technology-based services.
- Address the critical demand for education and training of the health care workforce to meet current and future needs.
- Effectively implement comprehensive solutions to address the opiate crisis.
- Address the critical demand for comprehensive elder care services that workers and their families rely upon to support older adults.

## Transportation

Transportation is a key component of economic growth, and as such the Chamber supports making investments in our transportation infrastructure a priority. To that end, the Chamber supports:

- Better maintained roads and bridges (upgraded infrastructure) working with DOT, municipalities, etc. particularly on communication to share with membership.
- Public transportation, such as KVCAP's bus system, that serves the needs of the region's population of all ages, enabling them to live, work and have access to our downtowns and centers of commerce.
- Advocacy towards fully linking the KVCAP bus system, i.e. Waterville, Skowhegan & Augusta transit.
- Development of a regional airport; support of passenger and freight railroad systems from Portland to Bangor via the Lewiston line.
- Policies that encourage public and private infrastructure investments in transportation and logistic systems that support economic growth, including the Federal U.S. Foreign Trade Zone Program.

## Telecommunications

Broadband capacity is now a critical component to economic development, stability and growth within the region. This technology holds the promise of eliminating geography as a concern with respect to our economic growth. Further, the industry mix here – research labs, factories, libraries, educational institutions and biomedical firms – is such that strong broadband connections are a necessity for the mid-Maine region to be successful. To that end, the Chamber supports:

- Public policies that will allow for greater penetration of high-speed broadband in our market, especially ultra-high speed connections used by technology companies whereas all of our students and telemedicine have to have increased access/better broadband.
- Economic development strategies that target companies with a high demand for bandwidth and to better attract technology firms to our region.
- Policies that encourage public and private infrastructure investments in telecommunications that support economic growth focusing on unserved areas.
- Preservation and enhancement of incentives for continued private broadband investment and investment in important broadband adoption initiatives.

## Energy

Mid-Maine Chamber endorses an energy policy that realizes the goals of lowering the price of electricity, lowering the cost of energy and reducing greenhouse gas emissions in a way that results in cost effective and sustainable solutions.

Specifically, the Chamber supports:

- Regulatory reforms that lower electric transmission and delivery costs for business as well as promotion of local distributed generation such as community solar and industrial co-generation.
- Research and development of cost-effective sustainable alternative energy sources including, but not limited to, domestic solar.
- Continued implementation of cost-effective energy conservation and efficiency policies, including those techniques and strategies supported by the EfficiencyMaine Trust.
- Increased utilization of renewable energy sources such as hydropower greater than 100 megawatts that will achieve Northeast Goals of increased utilization of non-fossil energy sources.
- Reducing the price of electricity by increasing natural gas pipeline capacity into New England by 1-2 billion cubic feet per day as natural gas can be a useful bridge fuel to renewables.
- Increased capacity for natural gas infrastructure systems to deliver low-cost, domestic natural gas supplies to consumers including large-scale energy users, households and alternative utilization.

## Taxes

The tax burden on Maine businesses is too high and the structure here discourages growth. Mid-Maine Chamber supports:

- Taking no action that would increase property taxes.
- The State of Maine's tax laws conforming with Federal tax laws.
- A tax code that is easy for businesses to understand and comply with.
- Continued scrutiny of government spending and looking for ways for the government to be more efficient.
- Opposition to local option sales tax initiatives.
- Reducing tax rates at every level of government in order to promote more retained earnings for workers and a better environment for businesses and employers of every size to grow.

## Regulatory Reform & Policy

Mid-Maine Chamber supports State and Local policies designed to expand opportunities and prosperity for our region. Our Chamber supports:

- Regulations written in terms that businesses can easily understand, and regulators can consistently interpret and implement.
- Regulatory reforms that remove barriers to job growth and retention without compromising public health, environmental and consumer protection.
- Any changes in regulations to be carefully reviewed to see what increased costs they may place on businesses versus the benefits the regulation provides.
- Government policies that permit individual incomes to grow faster than the rate of government spending.
- Policy-regulation-capacity that minimizes the obligation of Maine taxpayers with the issuance of government debt.
- Policy-regulation-capacity that creates a positive investment climate.
- The U.S. reevaluating its free trade agreements to insure that they are benefiting the Maine people.
- The re-evaluation of the referendum process in Maine and not use ex post-facto.
- Promoting and increasing public access to outdoor recreational opportunities including lakes, rivers, trails, parks, etc.
- Preserving the constitutionally-protected right to freedom of association to advance their common interests. Caution and due care should be used before changing election laws.

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Mid-Maine Chamber of Commerce

\*denotes member of Executive Committee

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