

CAPITAL REGION CHAMBER

YOUR CHAMBER.
YOUR ADVOCATE

2017 Legislative Session Wrap-Up



News from the Capitol: Chamber Goes 3 for 3

A Message from Our CEO

The Chamber went into the 2017 Legislative Session with three top priorities: bringing ridesharing services, like Uber and Lyft to the Capital Region; ensuring increased state school funding for our urban districts; and implementing regulatory reforms that improve the state's current business climate. I am happy to report that your Chamber's advocacy team was successful on all three!

In June, Uber and Lyft started operating in the Capital Region thanks to legislation that the Chamber fought for and was ultimately included in the state budget. The city school districts of Albany, Schenectady and Troy received millions of dollars in increased state aid. And employers will save hundreds of millions of dollars annually due to Workers' Compensation reforms that we pushed for and were included in the final state budget.

All in all, the beginning of the session was far more productive than the end of the session. Although we fought for several bills that would improve the state's business climate, none were passed by both houses of the Legislature prior to the end of session. We will continue to fight for these bills next year and every year until they become law.

Thank you for your support and input, both of which are crucial to the success of our advocacy program. The Chamber's voice is strong because of you. To help advocate, or to discuss public policy issues, please contact Tom O'Connor, Director of Government Relations, at 518-431-1413 or via e-mail at toconnor@capitalregionchamber.com.

Sincerely,



Mark N. Eagan, CCE
Chief Executive Officer

ADVOCACY IMPACT



Chamber CEO Mark Eagan speaks at the Uber press conference to kick off the first day of ridesharing in the Capital Region.

The Capital Region Chamber is dedicated to promoting legislation, regulations and policies that support economic growth and job creation.

Here are the highlights from the 2017 State Legislative Session:

BUDGET:

The Good

Bringing **ridesharing** to the Capital Region was the Chamber's number one priority. The enacted budget authorizes Transportation Network Companies, such as Uber and Lyft, to operate across New York State.

Workers' Comp Reform was a top Chamber priority. These reforms will save employers hundreds of millions of dollars each year.

Specifically, the enacted budget includes the following reforms to the Workers' Compensation program:

- 130 week general rules on the periods of time it takes to reach maximum medical improvement for the purpose of being classified for permanent partial disability awards, and to provide a safety valve for injured workers who have not actually reached maximum medical improvement within 130 weeks;
- Removes the requirement that injured workers remain attached to the workforce after being classified with a permanent disability;
- Expands the safety net threshold from above 80 percent to above 75 percent, to allow the most seriously injured workers to petition to continue receiving benefits after the permanent partial disability caps have expired;
- Moves the responsibility for annual safety net reporting from the Department of Labor to the Workers Compensation Board;
- Provides for a statutory mechanism to require release and implementation of updated impairment guidelines reflective in advances in modern medicine;
- Provides for a comprehensive prescription drug formulary;
- Authorizes the Workers Compensation Board to implement administrative efficiencies related to billing and periodic reporting;
- Authorizes the Workers' Compensation Board to execute assumption of liability policies for the special disability fund and the reopened cases fund;
- Extends the New York Compensation Insurance Rating Board (NYCIRB) for ten years and requires the public actuary to issue a report regarding the savings associated with the reforms herein, on an annual basis for the next ten years;

- Requires that a study of independent medical examinations be conducted by the Workers Compensation Board and that a report be submitted to the Legislature and the Governor;
- Prohibits the Board from disallowing certain claims by police or firefighters that are related to job stress;
- Provides for a reduction in the maximum fund balance from ten to five percent, that can be retained by the Board from the administrative assessment levied pursuant to subdivision three of section 151 of the workers' compensation law and creates a fiduciary fund to transfer such excess fund balance into for the purpose of rate stabilization.

Equitable state school funding has been a top priority of the Chamber. Specifically, we have been fighting for increased funding for the city school districts of Albany, Schenectady and Troy. The enacted budget increases education aid by \$1.1 billion, including a \$700 million increase in Foundation Aid, bringing the new education aid total to \$25.8 billion or an increase of 4.4 percent. Regarding the three urban school districts, the enacted budget includes:

- A \$6.4 million Foundation Aid increase for Albany City School District;
- A \$7.5 million Foundation Aid increase for Schenectady City School District;
- A \$1.7 million Foundation Aid increase for Troy City School District.

The enacted budget re-establishes a privately controlled board of directors for NYRA. This was a priority of the Chamber. The new board will consist of 17 members: the CEO; eight executive committee members; and two individuals each appointed by the Governor, the Senate and the Assembly. Breeders and horsemen each will have a member.

The Chamber has been a strong advocate for increased investment in our region's transportation, water and sewer infrastructure. The enacted budget includes a \$2.5 billion investment in the Clean Water Infrastructure Act and \$29 billion in transportation infrastructure. Without proper investment in our infrastructure, our competitiveness and potential for economic growth is hindered.

The enacted budget includes a \$15 million investment for the construction of a new passenger rail station in Schenectady. This is vital for the areas continued resurgence and crucial to the transportation needs of the region.

The Bad

- The Chamber did not support the inclusion of **Municipal Consolidation/Shared Services**. Instead, the Chamber has advocated for a better approach that would reduce the cost of local government and provide property tax relief to our businesses and residents alike. Namely, the Chamber has urged



Tom O'Connor, Chamber Director of Government Relations, joins Senators Amedore, Marchione and others to call for the passage of Workers' Comp Reform legislation

the state to: 1) stop implementing unfunded mandates on local governments; 2) provide local governments with meaningful relief from existing mandates; and 3) provide local governments with appropriate levels of state aid.

- The enacted budget included the **Excelsior Scholarship Program** which provides tuition-free college for families making up to \$125,000. The Chamber did not support this free college tuition at SUNY/CUNY. The Chamber is disappointed that this proposal did not provide students attending private colleges and universities with a similar program. This is unfortunate as the Capital Region is well served by the many fine private institutions that have a long history of educating our region's students regardless of their economic status. Additionally, if the state wants to ensure that students, regardless of their socio-economic status, receive a quality education, the Chamber believes that the state would be better served by focusing its attention on equitable K-12 school funding. Free tuition is meaningless to many students in our underfunded urban school districts with high poverty rates. Due in large part to inequitable state funding, too many of these students do not receive an education that would allow them to be college- and career-ready.

Support the Capital Region Business PAC

The Capital Region Business Political Action Committee (PAC), of the Capital Region Chamber, enables the business community to participate in the political process to promote a favorable business climate and quality life in the Capital Region and New York.

The Chamber has a focused legislative agenda and is at the Capitol representing your interests to make the Capital Region and New York State more competitive to retain and create jobs. The PAC provides dedicated resources to better position the organization to have a greater impact on legislative matters. The PAC does not endorse candidates; contributions are distributed on a nonpartisan basis and for advocacy on issues of importance to the region.

To contribute, contact Tom O'Connor, Director of Government Relations, at 518.431.1413 or email him at toconnor@capitalregionchamber.com. For more information on the PAC, visit www.capitalregionchamber.com/political-action-committee-pac/.



Capital Region Chamber

LEGISLATION

Business Climate Reform

In response to the several business-unfriendly mandates included in last year's enacted budget, the Chamber pushed for the adoption of policies that would improve New York's business climate. Our recommendations included small business tax relief, workers' compensation reform and Scaffold Law Reform. Although some workers' comp reform was included, the enacted budget failed to provide other provisions to improve the state's business climate. Scaffold Law Reform, small business tax relief, and other regulatory relief were not addressed. The Chamber continued its advocacy efforts on these issues during the remainder of the 2017 Legislative Session. However, the Legislature failed to enact any of these provisions prior to the end of session. The Chamber will not give up its efforts to promote policies that improve the business climate of the Capital Region.

Health Care Quality & Cost Containment Commission

In 2007 New York State became the 27th state to implement a broader scope of review criteria for health insurance mandates, legislatively imposed requirements that dictate certain types of coverage and treatments or how health insurance companies will provide care for a specific group of people. The Legislature created the Health Care Quality and Cost Containment Commission and charged it with answering fundamental questions related to efficacy and cost. Unfortunately, this commission was never seated and citing this fact, Governor Cuomo vetoed its funding in this year's budget. Health insurance mandates place an undue burden on our members, and yet the Legislature introduces close to 100 health insurance mandate proposals every session. The business community needs this commission now more than ever. That is why the Chamber supported legislation that would re-establish this commission, including a strict timeframe for legislative appointments. Although this legislation was not enacted this year, we will continue to fight for its adoption next session.

Credit Privacy in Employment Act

Legislation was introduced in both houses of the State Legislature that would prohibit employers from using consumer credit reports in hiring and employment decisions. The Chamber opposed this bill. Employers have an obligation to their businesses, as well as to consumers, to ensure that their employment decisions are based on thorough background checks, including the use of consumer credit reports. Conducting thorough and proper employment screening can help mitigate risk and allow employers to make better hiring decisions. Thanks to the Chamber's opposition, this legislation did not gain legislative approval.

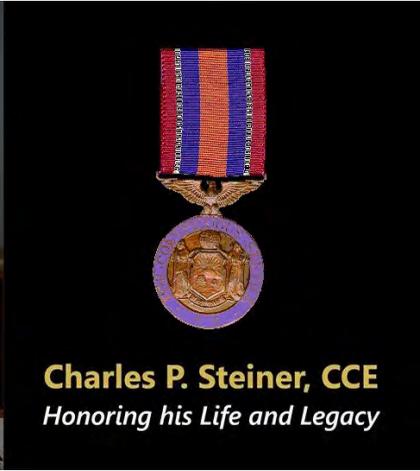
State Sponsored Retirement Mandate

The Chamber opposed legislation that would create an automatic payroll deduction savings retirement plan and would establish a state board to administer the financials of the program. This is yet another mandate from Albany that would increase the administrative and regulatory burdens on our employers. The Chamber firmly believes that business owners, and not the state, are best suited to determine the terms and conditions of employment based on the financial and competitive position of their business. Thanks to the Chamber's strong opposition, this bill did not become law. If New York State is ever going to become open for business, instead of pushing more mandates on businesses, the Governor and the Legislature should be laser focused on providing businesses with mandate relief.

E-Bikes

The Chamber supported a bill that would legalize the use of electric assisted bicycle (e-bikes). From a tourism and recreation standpoint, legalizing the use of e-bikes would have a positive impact on New York's fast growing bike tourism industry, particularly upstate, and inject significant additional funding into local economies. E-bike adoption would also bring increased business to local bicycle shops and bicycle and accessory manufacturers from bike riders. E-Bikes also benefit the environment and from a transportation standpoint, e-bikes provide freedom of transportation and mobility. Although the bill was not approved this year, the Chamber will continue to advocate for its passage.

HONORING CHUCK



Charles P. Steiner, CCE
Honoring his Life and Legacy

Governor Andrew Cuomo and Major General Anthony German awarded Charles P. Steiner the New York State Conspicuous Service Medal prior to his passing. This is the second highest military award, after the Medal of Valor, the state can bestow. The Conspicuous Service Medal may be awarded to any individual who shall have distinguished themselves by exceptionally meritorious service in a capacity of great responsibility.

Part of the accompanying citation reads as follows: Mr. Charles P. Steiner's devotion and unwavering dedication to support the military forces of the state of New York reflects great credit upon himself and the Unified Military Affairs Council.

In addition to this award, the 109th Airlift Wing is dedicating the Wing's conference room at Stratton Air National Guard Base in honor of Chuck.

While we greatly miss Chuck, we are also very proud of how impactful Chuck was to our community, particularly our military and military families.

Chamber CEO Mark Eagan joins Assemblymember Angelo Santabarbara and members of the Capital Region's military for Military Day

MILITARY DAY AT THE STATE CAPITOL

For the first time in its history, members of the Chamber's Unified Military Affairs Council (UMAC) joined members of the Capital Region's military as they were honored by the state Senate and Assembly at the Capitol.

The Capital Region is the proud home to several military installations and units. Our military installations and service members are vitally important to national security and they have a tremendous impact on our region's economy, communities and quality of life. UMAC is grateful for the continuing support of our Capital Region Legislative Delegation for our region's military. UMAC is already planning for next year's Military Day at the Capitol!





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