



2021 ADVOCACY AGENDA FOR RECOVERY & EQUITY

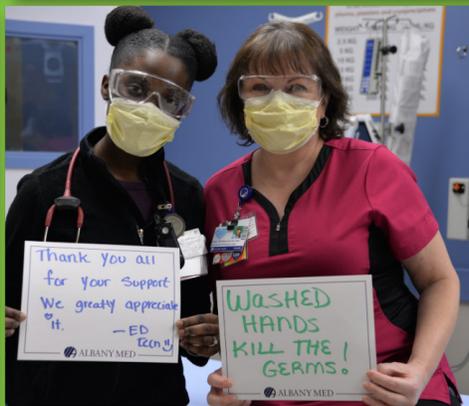
We faced multiple crises in 2020 - a global pandemic, an economic recession, and unrest over racial equity and justice.

The Capital Region Chamber has and will advance ideas, policies, and opportunities to help make our region more competitive, lead to job creation, and allow for prosperity for all.

Our advocacy, at all levels of government, will focus on driving recovery and equity to best position all citizens, businesses, and our region to recover and ultimately thrive post-pandemic.

These are truly challenging times; however, we'll face them together, provide clarity and a rational voice, as we seek to unite our decision makers under the common goal of overcoming these challenges. Our Chamber's mission is "to be a unifying force for change to provide greater influence and opportunities for our members and our Capital Region communities." Never has our mission been more relevant, nor more clear.

We will face these challenges united with one voice, with one mission for one region.



RECOVERY

COVID-19 has impacted our lives and livelihoods in ways both readily apparent and yet to be seen. From stay-at-home orders, to remote learning, to wearing masks and social distancing, almost every facet of our economy and daily lives have been touched by this virus. While federal stimulus has helped many, the stability of many for-profit and non-profit businesses, and local governments remain in peril.

The Capital Region Chamber will be a strong advocate for financial and mandate relief. Recovery will require New York State and local governments to be responsible stewards of finances and reduce regulatory and tax burdens.

Lawmakers must enact public policy and programs that will accelerate economic recovery. They must avoid attempts to impose statewide policies that may work in the Downstate area but may have a negative impact on Upstate. They must also avoid raising revenue through ever increasing taxes and fees and spending well beyond what is fiscally prudent. Government leaders must adopt policies that will grow our economy and create jobs to stimulate a swift recovery.

We will advocate for federal COVID-19 related financial assistance;

In order to help sustain small businesses which have been particularly hard hit during the pandemic, we will advocate for a permanent and broad personal income tax reduction for small businesses;

We will advocate for increasing state and local procurement from small businesses;
We will advocate for creating jobs by investing in Upstate's aging roads and bridges, and ensuring Upstate/Downstate regional parity to address critical infrastructure needs;

In order to reduce the cost of construction and infrastructure projects in Upstate, we will advocate for a 5-year moratorium on the Scaffold Law. This would save taxpayers \$785 million annually;

The pandemic has reinforced the important role childcare plays in creating a stable economy. Parents cannot return to work without access to safe, affordable childcare. We will advocate for policies and increased funding to expand access to high-quality, affordable early childhood education and early childcare programs;

We will advocate for workforce and training programs to assist workers that have been displaced by the pandemic in developing new skills to return to the labor force;

In order to protect businesses from unwarranted lawsuits related to the pandemic, the federal and state governments must provide liability relief to businesses that make good-faith efforts to follow applicable public health guidelines;

Community based non-profit organizations play a significant role in providing much needed resources to our region during the pandemic and are essential to our region's economic recovery. Their finances have been severely strained. We will advocate for regulatory reforms that reduce the unfunded mandates on non-profit organizations;

Our region's hotels, restaurants and visitor attractions continue to operate at extremely low capacity as a result of the pandemic. We will advocate for policies and financial relief that assist the restaurant, tourism and hospitality sectors recover from the aftermath of the pandemic;

Our performing arts venues have been in large part closed during the pandemic. We will advocate for funding that sustain them now to best position them for reopening;

The severe reduction in commerce has dramatically reduced the sales tax revenue collected by local governments. We support the federal and state governments providing appropriate financial assistance to municipal governments;

The pandemic has made it abundantly clear that health care is vitally important. We support affordable access to health insurance and a robust healthcare system without imposing new mandates and/or taxes on businesses or individuals.

EQUITY

Unrest exposed the great inequity that still exists in our society. It's apparent how far we still have to go to ensure that every person can fully realize opportunity and justice.

We have a responsibility as a business community to do more. Everyone in the Capital Region has the right to quality education, to earning a living with equal access, and share in our regional economic prosperity. Change is possible and we are capable, but it is going to take intentional, actionable strides by all of us.

The Capital Region Chamber will champion policies and programs that address disparities to improve economic inclusion.

We will advocate for workforce development initiatives that build diverse talent that is inclusive of people that have been traditionally disenfranchised;

We will advocate for improvements to the Minority and Women-Owned Business Enterprise (MWBE) certification and recertification process;

We will advocate for policies that improve access to capital for minority-owned businesses;

We will advocate for policies that remove key barriers to securing gainful employment for those who have been convicted of low-level, nonviolent felony offenses and who want to be productive and contributing citizens;

We will advocate for school funding that is fair and equitable to all school districts and produces relief to taxpayers. Today, some school districts receive more than 100% of what the State aid formula suggests, while other districts receive far less. This inequitable distribution of school aid most often negatively impacts urban school districts;

We will advocate for education policies that eliminate the gaps in access to advance courses and opportunity that hold too many students back from a bright future and from the state achieving its economic potential. We specifically support and are committed to these five principles and the steps that must be taken to fulfill each:

- ▶ All students, families, and educators will have accurate and timely information, support, and help to access a rich and robust course experience in their school. How: Leverage the state's new accountability system to enhance transparency and implement school improvement strategies that support equitable access to rigorous courses;

- ▶ All students and families will have the information and support to pursue rigorous college and career-prep pathways. How: Require that families receive better information and expand access to school counselors and other resources;
- ▶ Every student will receive rich and rigorous instruction that prepares them for success after high school graduation. How: Establish a default college- and career-prep course sequence that all students are automatically enrolled in, backed by high expectations and support for educators and students;
- ▶ Every student will be able to earn college credit and/or participate in work-based learning opportunities before they graduate from high school. How: Expand access to AP, 1B, dual enrollment courses, proven programs like
- ▶ P-TECH, and employer-based internships and other connections to colleges and employers;
- ▶ High school graduation requirements will match modern-day expectations for college, career, and civic readiness. How: Update course requirements for high school graduation, including by adding a fourth year of math;

COVID-19 has made clear the necessity and inequalities of broadband access. We will advocate for Congress to develop a national broadband strategy and work in coordination with states and local governments to address funding and permitting. These efforts must be in coordination and partnership with the private sector. Policy makers must stop looking at broadband as a means to an end, namely, to generate revenues, rather than as an end in itself. Siting policies to build broadband infrastructure must be reformed to minimize delays, requirements, and fees.



While recovery and equity are the core focus during 2021 legislative session, your Chamber will continue to advocate on other issues. Please click [Where We Stand](#) for a complete list of public policy positions.

The Capital Region Chamber is non-partisan and issue focused. This agenda provides a framework for the Chamber's advocacy work and can be added to during the year as needed.

In a time of so much uncertainty, let there be no question where the Capital Region Chamber stands: We stand as a champion for the free enterprise system, the most effective and proven way to create widespread opportunity.

To help us advocate or to discuss any issue, large or small at local, state or federal level, please contact Tom O'Connor, Vice President Government Relations, at 518.431.1413 or toconnor@capitalregionchamber.com.

**UNITED TO DRIVE ECONOMIC PROSPERITY WITH
ONE VOICE, ONE MISSION, ONE REGION**



WHERE WE STAND

TAXES/ GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS/ REGULATIONS

Make the Capital Region and New York State more competitive through mandate relief, responsible stewardship of local finances, and reducing significant state and local regulatory and tax burdens.

The Chamber supports policies that improve the state's business climate.

Support broad-based tax reform:

- ▶ Support efforts by the state to provide municipal governments with meaningful mandate relief. It is an absolute necessity to provide municipal governments with appropriate state aid and mandate relief;
- ▶ Support the reduction of burdensome, outdated and complex business taxes;

Support reforms that will make New York State cost structure more competitive with other states to assist employers in attracting and retaining talent.;

Support policies that foster the viability and sustainability of family-owned farms;

Support legislation that will provide Rivers Casino & Resort with a tax reduction to bring it in line with other casinos licensed by the state and to allow the casino to better market itself;

Support legislation that would require that any new state-mandated programs imposed on municipalities and school districts be fully funded by the state;

Support legislation that provides that an employer's unemployment experience rating account will not be charged for a temporary employee whose employment ends as the result of the return of an employee after family leave;

Support policies that encourage the sharing economy and gig economy and ensure New York State's competitiveness in this innovative marketplace;

Support amendments to the "Housing Stability and Tenant Protection act of 2019" (Universal Rent Control) that reduces and eliminates burdens on responsible landlords;

Support legislation that provides the Office of the State Comptroller with the authority to audit all state-funded economic development initiatives.

Oppose state legislation that would institute net neutrality. This is a federal issue and Congress should pass legislation that provides commonly agreed upon net neutrality protections;

Oppose government mandates that require electric vehicle charging stations in private parking lots.



WHERE WE STAND

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

The public has a right to be served by a government that is accountable, responsive and transparent. Process matters. All too often, significant policy decisions are made by a select few, behind closed doors during budget negotiations. This allows for very little public review and input. Policy issues should be submitted as stand-alone bills, debated and subject to public hearings and public comment. The Chamber will advocate for a process that provides opportunities for our voice and the public to be heard.

Oppose the inclusion of substantive policy issues in the Budget. Policy issues should be submitted as stand-alone bills, debated and subject to public hearings and public comment;

Budgetary matters that have a substantial effect on taxpayers should be published at least 10 days in advance of any vote so that the taxpayers and legislators will have ample time to review its impact on the taxpayers. All legislators must have the opportunity to read the proposed budget to their satisfaction before being required to vote either in favor or against it;

Oppose the use of Messages of Necessity for Budget Bills. A Message of Necessity allows the Governor, Senate and Assembly to bypass the three-day waiting period between when a bill is introduced and when it can be put to a vote. Its function is to address a situation that requires immediate attention. Far too often, these messages are used to avoid proper debate, public review and comment. These messages should only be used for their intended purpose: situations that require immediate action;

Funding for non-profits should continue even if the budget is not passed by April 1. Any budgetary changes would be adjusted from moneys already paid to those non-profits if they were to continue with funding post April 1st, otherwise moneys would need to be repaid if they were not supported in the then-passed new budget;

Executive Orders should be limited in nature and should not be used to bypass policy issues that should more appropriately be addressed by the legislature.



WHERE WE STAND

Economic Development is essential for a prosperous Capital Region. The Chamber supports policies and funding that advance the region's economic development priorities.

Support policies that strengthen the Capital Region's ties to the advanced materials, bio/life sciences, clean-tech/energy, homeland security/defense, information technology and nanotechnology/semiconductor industries;

Support policies that foster the creative economy; Advocate for a digital gaming media production tax credit;

Support feasible, locally-identified and locally-focused projects;

Advocate for a broad-based approach to economic and community development projects, and environmentally responsible measures, as well as a balance between commercial and recreational uses;

Support integrated policies that support urban redevelopment, including transit and mobility options that include bike and pedestrian enhancements;

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Support efforts to improve the availability of capital from both conventional and unconventional sources to attract investment for housing, retail, business expansion, mixed-use and other economic development projects;

Support enhanced historic rehabilitation tax credits; Support continued investment and innovation in our region's downtowns;

Support an asbestos remediation tax credit to promote the redevelopment and reuse of existing underutilized properties;

Support meaningful efforts to repurpose the former Central Warehouse Cold Storage Building;

Support reforms to the brownfield program to include certain superfund and RCRA sites, and to expedite review and approval of remediation projects.



WHERE WE STAND

EDUCATION/ TALENT DEVELOPMENT

Employers rely on a qualified and diverse workforce to successfully operate. A skilled and inclusive workforce is therefore critical to regional job growth and prosperity. The Chamber supports early childhood development programs, education policies, school funding, and talent development initiatives that are available to all students and workers at all levels so that they are ready to enter and re-enter the job market.

Support full funding of the On-the-Job Training Grants Program which provides financial assistance to local businesses to address employee training needs;

Support funding for the University at Albany's renovation of the Schuyler Building to become the home of UAlbany's new engineering college;

Support increased funding for community colleges toward customized industry training and equipment. Community colleges play a vital role in our region's economic development;

Support K-12 education models that better prepare students for entry into career and/or college:

- ▶ Support efforts to improve science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) education;
- ▶ Support efforts to better prepare students for careers in healthcare and long-term care;
- ▶ Support expanded access to innovative education models and multiple pathways to graduation;

Continued support for Capital Region P-TECH is essential;

Support higher standards for education and assessments;

Support teacher quality and retention initiatives; Support evaluating the publicly funded employment and training system to better align resources for employers and job seekers. This must include a standardized system of assessment and accountability;

Support increase in Tuition Assistance Program funding.





WHERE WE STAND

EMPLOYMENT

Growing private sector jobs is key to the Capital Region's economic future. The Chamber believes employers are best suited for determining the terms and conditions of employment based on their financial condition and competitive position. We must encourage state and federal governments to pursue pro-employment policies

Support programs that assist veterans and disabled veterans with business ownership and employment opportunities;

Support our military installations and their significance to the overall well-being of the Capital Region, all of which impact our global, national, state and regional security and economy;

Oppose efforts to prohibit employers from using consumer credit reports in hiring and employment decisions;

Oppose efforts to regulate or prohibit employers use of on-call scheduling of employees;

Support increasing the availability of temporary skilled-worker (H-1B) visas;

Support increasing the availability of permanent-resident visas (green cards) for STEM graduates and workers;

Support creating new-startup visas for immigrant entrepreneurs who launch businesses in the U.S. and meet certain employment and financing goals;

Support legislation authorizing non-CPAs to be minority owners of CPA firms.



**CAPITAL REGION
CHAMBER**

WHERE WE STAND

HEALTHCARE

As healthcare costs rise, many employers and working families continue to experience difficulties finding coverage. The Chamber supports policies that promote affordable access to health insurance and a robust healthcare system without imposing new mandates and taxes.

Oppose efforts to implement government run, single payer healthcare;

Support the reinstatement of the Health Care Quality and Cost Containment Commission. This commission would provide lawmakers with a cost and efficacy analysis prior to a vote on health insurance mandates;

Support reforming the medical tort system to make costs more affordable and predictable;

Oppose any additional health insurance tax to sustain New York State's Health Exchange;

Oppose efforts to mandate healthcare staffing.



WHERE WE STAND

Infrastructure is an important asset for all businesses and residents. Without the proper investment, our economic stability, potential for job growth and competitiveness are threatened. The Chamber supports continued investment in our transportation, water and sewer infrastructure.

Advocate for a stronger regional transportation system and upgraded infrastructure that will provide new and improved mobility options for the Capital Region. Those that live and work in the region should have access to an integrated mobility system. Such a system will result in smarter mobility options, will assist people to easily navigate our region and will reduce unnecessary traffic congestion;

- ▶ Support funding for highway and bridge improvements;
- ▶ Support funding for increased public transit services;
- ▶ Support funding for improved sidewalks and biking paths;
- ▶ Support efforts to integrate our public transit, taxi, ride-sharing, bike-sharing and other mobility services;

Support increased frequency and improved reliability of Amtrak rail service;

Support continued investment in our aging water and sewer infrastructure;

Support the redesign of I-787 in order to provide improved access to the Hudson River waterfront;

TRANSPORTATION/ INFRASTRUCTURE

Oppose efforts to shift the cost of MTA capital improvements onto utilities and their customers. MTA must take responsibility for these improvements and must ensure that costs are properly controlled; Advocate for increased flight service and competitive pricing to/from the Albany International Airport;

Support increased funding for continued improvements at the Port of Albany. As shippers look to increase their use of East Coast ports, it is critical that improvements be made at the port to further attract the shipping industry;

Support re-imagined uses for the New York State Canal System:

- ▶ Support traditional and modern commercial transportation options;
- ▶ Support enhanced recreational uses;
- ▶ Support environmentally-responsible industrial, commercial and recreational uses for the Canal's shores;
- ▶ Support the prudent use of state-owned land and assets along the Canal system to support the economically-challenged Canal communities;
- ▶ Support the lengthening of the Canal's navigation season and support maintaining the Canal's proper depth;

Support expansion of CDTA's Bus Plus (Bus Rapid Transit).



WHERE WE STAND

ENERGY

New York State consumers pay some of the highest energy prices in the nation. Physical limitations in bringing electricity to the Capital Region from power producers outside of our region are creating congestion that is driving up costs significantly. The Chamber supports policies that promote access to affordable and reliable energy.

Support upgrading the state's high-voltage electric transmission system in a manner consistent with competitive wholesale energy markets to make pricing more competitive in upstate communities;

Support policies that allow for the development of natural gas infrastructure and expand access to natural gas for consumers and businesses;

Support policies that allow for the development of renewable energy sources;

Support smart city and green initiatives in the Capital Region.