

# OSHKOSH CHAMBER

## PLAN FOR PROSPERITY

### 2025 - 26 Legislative Agenda

The Oshkosh Chamber is the leading voice and advocate for business in the Oshkosh region. It supports a wide variety of initiatives that build a strong local and regional economy and serves as the guardian for the business community. A strong economy provides the tax base necessary to support education and local services, along with building a sustaining community infrastructure. Consequently, we support a public policy agenda fostering business growth, creates jobs and investment, and keeps Wisconsin competitive.

We advocate for policies strengthening talent and business attraction and retention to protect and grow family-supporting jobs. For Oshkosh and Northeast Wisconsin to be successful, policies must be in place which allows local and regional companies to compete on a global level.

As an organization, the Oshkosh Chamber leads the engagement of its membership in public policy initiatives supporting business.

- *We support* a tax system incentivizing business growth and workforce investment.
- *We support* efforts to streamline and reduce regulation impacting the cost of doing business.
- *We support* empowering local government to use economic development tools to grow their employment and tax base.
- *We support* honesty in taxation ensuring revenues collected are expended for the reason stated.
- *We support* initiatives ensuring workers have the skills to compete in a global economy.

#### **Economic Development:**

The Oshkosh Chamber of Commerce supports economic development incentive programs and policies driving private investment and serving as a catalyst for economic activity in the community.

- Support comprehensive TIF modernization legislation enhancing TIF flexibility for communities to encourage the development of new workforce housing, funding infrastructure improvements to cultivate additional business development, and ensuring Wisconsin and local communities remain competitive.
- Create a state-funded Deal Closing Fund supporting economic development by providing financing and incentives to businesses considering investments in Wisconsin. The purpose of the Fund is to help close deals or attract new businesses to Wisconsin making significant capital investments in the state, creating jobs, or igniting growth in key industries. The Deal Closing Fund is not intended as the primary source of capital for projects, but rather to provide critical financial incentives – through grants, low-to-no interest loans, and other funding tools – to make key projects viable and move them across the finish line.

- Support a streamlined approval process for energy infrastructure investment needed to power high-demand energy projects located in development-ready sites certified by the state, ensuring prospective businesses can access their energy needs quickly.
- Protect and defend Wisconsin's Manufacturing and Agriculture Tax Credit.
- Prioritize alternative goals for state economic development programs, such as attracting and retaining businesses, encouraging capital investment, or fostering innovation, rather than focusing primarily on job creation requirements

### **Workforce Development/Education**

The Oshkosh Chamber recognizes all efforts to strengthen and diversify our local and regional economy must include a commitment to education and training, ensuring citizens, businesses and other organizations benefit from new knowledge, research, workforce talent, entrepreneurship and innovation. A strong K-12 and post-secondary education system is critical to grow our workforce. Workforce development is the number one issue facing Oshkosh area employers and our state and the Oshkosh Chamber is committed to supporting workforce and education policies strengthening our talent pipeline.

- Support equitable funding for K-12 public education so all public school districts can afford equipment and personnel to provide skills/certifications for high school aged students in collaboration with their area technical college or university.
- Support the expansion of the State's school choice/voucher program and charter school options. Wisconsin should expand school choice opportunities by reducing barriers to entry including removing enrollment caps, income limits and grade entry points.
- Build Wisconsin's talent pipeline through the support of the state's apprenticeship programs to accelerate the placement of skilled employees in the workforce.
- Support the adequate funding of a comprehensive, state level talent attraction program.
- Support programs, policies, and tax incentives to strengthen the early childcare workforce and increase access to affordable childcare for Wisconsin working families.
- Support transferable credits among higher education systems.
- Support the provision of additional state investment in UW Oshkosh and Universities of Wisconsin priorities ensuring educational quality, increasing affordability, preserving accessibility, developing talent, and investing in innovation.
  - Support Universities of Wisconsin's specific budget initiatives including:
  - Support energized and innovative enrollment strategies to meet the needs of the state and the knowledge economy. Among them are increased investments in dual enrollment (UWO's Cooperative Academic Partnership Program delivering college credits in high schools is the largest in the state); expanding recruitment and outreach through Direct Admit Wisconsin, Welcome Back Wisconsin and Transfer Pathways programs.

- Support for student success initiatives, from mental health and wellbeing to continued concentration on career readiness, civil dialogue training, undergraduate research and internships, and reskilling and upskilling opportunities for local employees.
  - Support the establishment of an Artificial Intelligence hub to prepare universities to serve as partners with Wisconsin industries and workforce in the growth of AI capacity.
  - Support advancement of the existing Freshwater Collaborative of Wisconsin, of which UWO is a contributing member.
- Support initiatives to grow the State's skilled workforce, including incumbent and transitional worker training, recruitment and retention incentives for in-demand professions and technical education programs.
  - Support programs to provide the State's incarcerated population access to skills training and work experience opportunities like apprenticeship programs as a means to move this population into meaningful employment upon release from the State's correctional system.
  - Support incentives such as tax relief and tax credits to encourage recent graduates to stay in Wisconsin and to move here from other states.
  - Support tax incentives for new residents relocating to Wisconsin to work.
  - Support policies encouraging the development of workforce housing in communities across Wisconsin, including tax credits, TIF incentives and new financing tools, and zoning and land use reforms.

### **Taxation:**

Burdensome taxes – whether on individuals or businesses – make Wisconsin less competitive. Our high-quality services must be funded adequately, but continued progress must be made to eliminate excessive tax burdens on state residents.

- Oppose regulations and policies negatively impacting Wisconsin's business climate. Oppose rules and policies which create uncertainty and are unnecessarily costly, complex and burdensome requirements on the regulated community.
- Support policies incentivizing investment and creating an attractive business climate in Wisconsin so that our state continues to prosper.
- Oppose legislation shifting or increasing property taxes on business taxpayers (dark store). Local governments have asked the Legislature to prohibit the use of physically comparable vacant properties as comparable sales to occupied properties for property tax assessment purposes. The result of this policy would allow tax collectors to more subjectively assess property value, and taxes, and make it harder for businesses to challenge their tax bill.
- Oppose modification to property tax assessment not meeting the uniformity clause of the State's constitution and disproportionately shifting the property tax burden onto commercial and industrial property owners.

- Continue meaningful limits on school and local government property taxes, while allowing for reasonable increases from new development.
- Oppose the creation of new municipal fee(s) underwriting the cost of current municipal services without providing an equal, proportionate tax levy credit to the property taxpayer.
- Encourage Balanced Budgeting and Leverage the Private Sector - The size and scope of government should be limited to avoid unsustainable spending that often drives future tax increases. Our state budget should avoid raids on dedicated funds, maintain a healthy reserve and budget stabilization fund, and dedicate surplus revenues to tax relief for the taxpayers to whom it rightfully belongs. The state should outsource those functions which can be accomplished more cheaply and efficiently by the private sector, and eliminate instances where taxpayers subsidize competition against private sector businesses.
- The State of Wisconsin has a \$4.5 billion budget surplus resulting from greater than anticipated revenue collection. Revenue surplus belongs to the taxpayers of Wisconsin. Accordingly, the Oshkosh Chamber supports the return of this surplus to those creating the surplus – Wisconsin taxpayers.
- Oppose the establishment of any municipal fee-based utility not allowed in State Statutes or that violates the State's uniformity clause.
- Support changes to the City's Stormwater Utility ERU rate structure to align revenues to the actual annual operating cost of the Utility. Oppose the cost-shifting measure of moving staff cost (entire or partial) to the Utility currently supported by the City's tax levy.
- Support the elimination of the personal income tax. Repeal of the personal income tax will make Wisconsin's business climate instantly more competitive in the Midwest, help address worker shortages and unlock Wisconsin's economic potential. In the absence of eliminating the income tax, Wisconsin should reduce and flatten the rate to remain competitive with other Midwest states that have lowered rates and enacted other tax reforms.

### **Transportation & Infrastructure:**

A robust transportation infrastructure network is essential to economic growth. Ensuring adequate funding is available for scheduled road maintenance and road improvements will give Wisconsin manufacturers an advantage over their competition. The Oshkosh Chamber supports fiscally responsible public investment in Wisconsin's transportation system.

- Support the development of a fair and reliable transportation funding plan for Wisconsin. Oppose industry-specific tax/fee increases. Support an increase of transportation funding based on User Fee Approach that includes (exclusive and/or combination):
  - Gas Tax
  - Registration Fees
  - Use of sales tax of automotive sales and automotive-related parts
  - Creation of an interstate tolling system

- Support the planning and construction of critical local road projects such as a west side arterial from State Hwy. 21 to State Hwy. 44.
- Support robust investment in Wisconsin's highways, roads, rail, harbors, and other means of transportation.
- Ensure Wisconsin employers have access to affordable and reliable energy.

### **Regulatory Reforms:**

Unpredictable and overbearing government regulation are responsible for driving businesses to states with more predictable and flexible regulations. Wisconsin's regulatory environment must strike a balance between protection and the cost of implementation. The State needs to have a competitive business climate and should seek to eliminate and reduce state regulations impeding economic growth and job creation.

- Align Wisconsin employment and environmental regulations with corresponding federal requirements to eliminate the additional cost and complexity of complying with overlapping and "Wisconsin-only" regulations. Ensure newly promulgated rules are no more restrictive than federal requirements.
- Review and Repeal Obsolete Regulations - Improve our regulatory environment by reviewing existing administrative rules to repeal or reform obsolete, costly or cumbersome regulations.
- Support common-sense reforms to reduce regulatory and permitting burdens creating unnecessary costs for Wisconsin businesses, driving uncertainty, and inhibiting investment and growth.
- Support policies incentivizing investment and creating an attractive business climate in Wisconsin so our community and state can continue to prosper.

### **Human Resources and Employment Law:**

Support state-wide employment standards - The State, not local units of government, should be in charge of setting employment law standards. Lawmakers should pre-empt local governments from being able to set employment law standards that are different from state law in areas like wage and hourly, employment discrimination, sick leave, family leave, and other employment regulations that differ from state or federal regulations.

- Contain Workers Compensation Medical Costs with a Fee Schedule - Wisconsin's work comp medical costs are significantly higher than the national average, making our employers less competitive. We support curbing these costs, as 45 other states have already done, by implementing a fee schedule for workers compensation charges.
- Oppose Minimum Wage Increases - Raising the minimum wage will increase the cost of employing entry level workers, resulting in fewer job opportunities for workers entering the

workforce who need to build skills and experience for their career. Wages should be market-driven, not established by the government.

- Support policies that help contain the cost of health care.

**Government Efficiency & Accountability:**

To ensure adequate resources are available to meet our most critical public needs, the Oshkosh Chamber supports policies promoting and increasing government efficiencies and collaboration at all levels.

- Advance and support efforts to promote government efficiencies between various agencies at the state, county and municipal levels.
- Advocate to remove state and federal barriers preventing schools from being flexible and responsive in meeting the changing needs of area employers.
- Advocate for greater government transparency.
- Support the advancement of fee-for-service programs directly aligned with municipal services provided such as residential garbage and recycling services.
- Support Wisconsin Public Service Commission oversight, rate review and approval of municipal Stormwater Utility operations.