



2023

LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES — & AGENDA

KALISPELLCHAMBER.COM



MESSAGE FROM OUR LEADERSHIP



Lorraine Clarno,
President/CEO
Kalispell Chamber of Commerce



Erica Wirtala,
Government Affairs Chair
NW Montana Association of Realtors



The Kalispell Chamber of Commerce focuses on developing and enhancing the economic vitality of the Flathead Valley. We are a non-partisan member-driven organization, representing 700+ small businesses, large employers, and nonprofits operating in the Flathead County area and 20,000+ employees. Serving as the voice of business is central to our mission, via our role as an advocate and a trusted source of information for the business community. We seek to build a business-friendly Flathead County and City of Kalispell that allows businesses to fully compete for customers and market share based on the goods and services they provide. The Kalispell Chamber's legislative strategy is to support policy proposals that fit our mission and oppose measures that detract from our goals. The Executive Committee, Board of Directors, and Government Affairs Committee uses these broad criteria when determining positions on policy issues. We strive to ensure elected officials, government staff, and other community leaders are aware of the concerns of the business community.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES:

ECONOMIC GROWTH: Promote policies that enable businesses of all sizes to thrive and grow.

INCLUSIVITY: Engage and listen to business stakeholders on policies that impact how employers operate.

COLLABORATION: Collaboratively develop policies with a willingness to consider alternative paths and compromise agreements.

FISCAL RESPONSIBILITY: Prioritize state and federal spending based on outcomes and results to create a balanced and stable budget.

COMMUNITY: As a business organization we recognize our important role in growing and supporting a healthy and vibrant community.

We are proud to present the first Legislative Agenda for the Kalispell Chamber of Commerce. While we have been engaged and active in policy formation and worked closely with our elected officials, this Agenda will allow us to be proactive in connecting our legislators to our immediate and top priorities to help guide them in their decision making.

We, the business community, are the foundation of a vibrant economy from which a high quality of life is derived. If business is strong, our community will be strong.

Sincerely,

Lorraine Clarno & Erica Wirtala



TAXATION

We believe in efficient and cost-conscious limited government.

- Support increasing the business equipment tax exemption from \$300k to \$1million.
- Support long-term tax reform which may include income tax and property tax relief.
- Support the statewide tourism industry by opposing attempts to redirect or redistribute the Lodging Facility Use Tax which supports communities, tourism jobs, historical preservation and parks.



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

We believe Government should establish policies that provide incentives to foster a competitive business environment to increase growth and development opportunities. Fostering the growth of family-wage jobs is vital.

- We support the expansion of the Montana Trades Education Credit for employers to send their employees to learn a trade.
- We support Tax Increment Financing as a tool for local community development.
- We oppose land use preemption legislation that takes local decision making from counties and cities to develop long-term housing solutions for their areas and inhibits innovative & individualized community growth management plans.
- We support legislation that enables robust and healthy agriculture and forest production in Montana.
- We support liquor license reform that addresses the shortfall of licenses in tourism communities which are extremely limited during heightened visitation months and support extended hours of service for craft brewers.



WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

We believe everyone in Montana should have the right skills to fill the jobs of today and have the ability and opportunity to adapt for the jobs of tomorrow. The demographic shift to a significant aging population and an increasing demand for skilled workforce across industry sectors requires a concerted community approach to workforce development efforts.

- We support state funding for programs that help increase workplace readiness, adult education, and workforce certification programs.
- We support incentives for employers to invest in trades education and training for employees.



HOUSING



Montana is experiencing a housing shortage that is severely limiting business growth, attraction and employee recruitment to the Flathead. We support the Governor's Housing Task Force recommendations to

- Create an infrastructure fund for grants that will make developing and building housing more attainable/affordable.
- Amending state law to streamline local permitting processes with DEQ to enable more efficient and innovative housing solutions to get to market more expediently.
- Prioritizing investment in sewer/water infrastructure, expanding investment in workforce development, and encouraging great public-private investment collaborations.

CHILD CARE

The Flathead Valley has identified the lack of affordable, quality, and accessible child care as a major impediment to growing business and employment. We support the Governor's continued examination Red Tape Relief efforts designed to eliminate unnecessary barriers to licensure and employment for child care providers.

- Adding a new care category "Out of School Time" licensed providers (Boys & Girls Club, YMCA etc.) that offer care hours for children 6 and up to be eligible for federal funds.
- Provide for innovative pilot projects to test new approaches to child care delivery.
- Provide flexibility to indoor and outdoor program shared spaces.
- Building requirement examination to allow for increased capacity in different types of residential settings.
- Ensuring safety is paramount. We support streamlining background check requirements, improving regulations around transportation safety and core sleep safety standards.



EDUCATION

Montana is ranked 50th in the nation for teacher pay. If we want to attract, retain, and grow innovative, family-wage businesses we must address school funding for the K-12 system and Flathead Valley Community College. Retaining and attracting top talent and fully-funded educational systems are paramount for future success.

- We support the continuation of kindergarten funding for 4- and 5-year-old students as it has been proven to prepare students for success going forward in their educational path. The screening process results help to identify young children at the lower end of the developmental continuum of skills who need early intervention services.

HEALTHCARE

We believe that the United States has the most advanced healthcare in the world, in large part due to private sector led innovation and employer-sponsored healthcare coverage. Ensuring access to quality and affordable healthcare is critical for the health of Flathead County residents.



- We believe the best approach to ensuring our community is healthy and vibrant is to provide quality, affordable and accessible healthcare services from a wide range of providers. We need to continue to invest in existing infrastructure that will strengthen emergency response systems, the healthcare workforce, and fund the growing needs in behavioral and mental health, long-term care
- The approach should include strategies to reduce the rates of uninsured individuals; reduce excessive uncompensated care; provide greater investment in medical workforce development, particularly in behavioral and mental health; and support the deployment of wrap-around services to improve healthcare outcomes from birth to the end of life.

MENTAL & BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

Montana's mental and behavioral health system is broken and contributing greatly to increasing costs associated with mental illness, drug addiction, and homelessness in the Flathead. It is imperative that the State hospital in Warm Springs be fully funded, staffed and operational and that the two shuttered facilities in the Flathead (operated by Western Behavioral Health) be reopened and professionally staffed as soon as possible. Homelessness is detrimental to a thriving and safe business environment and places undue burdens on our law enforcement and public safety providers in our community. To that end we support utilizing a percentage of the surplus to address these issues and increase investment in the HEART Fund.



BALLOT MEASURE REFORM



*Ballot Measure Reform – Strengthens transparency and reporting requirements for ballot measures, making them similar to candidate requirements. Clarifies that legislative interim committees review constitutional initiatives the same as statutory initiatives. Sets a \$3,000 fee for filing ballot measures. Streamlines timelines for agency reviews. Prohibits electronic signatures. (Cuffe)

TORT REFORM

*Reducing the volume and associated costs of civil litigation in the judicial system.

- Public Nuisance Law – opioids, climate change, environmental and plastic clean ups, e-cigarettes/vape products
- Product Liability Reform – Allows comparative fault defense. Expands product misuse defense. Creates 10-year statute of repose. Creates innocent-seller defense from sellers that sold the product unchanged from the manufacturer. (Fitzpatrick)
- Third-Party Bad Faith Reform – Creates a duty for an insured or third-party claimant to cooperate with insurer investigating/adjusting a claim. Creates affirmative defense when claimant or insured breaches duty to cooperate. (Usher)
- Time-Limited Demand Reforms – Requires that time-limited settlement demand letters reasonably describe the claim, include relevant records and allow for 60 day acceptance. (Hertz)
- Third-Party Litigation Financing Reform – Requires third party litigation financiers to register with Banking Division Limits. Limits TPLF interest rates. Limits recovery to no more than 40%. Requires annual reporting.



*Montana Chamber of Commerce tort reform and ballot measure bills in process.

ENGAGE...PARTICIPATE...BE INFORMED

The Kalispell Chamber has your back. You are busy running your business so we do the work for you. We'd love you to join us in advocating for strong, responsible public policy that ensures a thriving business climate and community for Kalispell & the Flathead Valley.

Government Affairs Committee

Generally meets the 1st Monday of each month from 12:00pm - 1:00pm at the Chamber. We can also provide you with you a Zoom link. Members are welcome to weigh in and help shape our guidelines, agendas, and priorities.

Stay Current

Read your weekly eNews emails that come out the beginning of each week. Watch the Leadership Message Video. Visit kalispellchamber.com for announcements and current information.

Connect with your Legislative Officials

They truly do want to hear from you. Make your voice and opinion heard. Let them know when they've done well and if you'd like to see something different. We will occasionally send out Action Alerts urging you to reach on out specific bills and issues. Use your voice. Together we can be at the table and not on the menu.

To find your legislators, visit <https://leg.mt.gov/legislator-information/>



LEGISLATIVE PROCESS

1. Bill is introduced in House or Senate - 1st Reading
2. Bill is assigned to a committee
3. Bill is heard in a committee and 1. passes with or without amendments 2. fails by vote, or 3. is denied a hearing
4. Bill returns to the floor for potential amendments & engrossments (2nd reading)
5. Bill passes out of chamber of origin (3rd reading)
6. Bill repeats in the second chamber
7. All steps must occur, or the bill dies
8. If bill moves forward without an amendment in the second chamber, bill goes to the Governor
9. If bill is amended in the second chamber, and is approved by the author and majority of the chamber of origin approve changes, bill goes to the governor
10. If the bill's author doesn't agree with the amendments, a conference committee is appointed
11. Conferees from both chambers negotiate changes to the bill. If unanimous agreement on a conference report, the report passes to the House and Senate Rules Committees, and if it receives a majority vote in both chambers, the bill goes to the Governor. If all steps are not successful, the bill dies.

There have been 4,333 pre-introduced Bill drafts as of December 29, 2022



LEGISLATIVE CALENDAR

Monday, **January 2** - Session opens
Tuesday, **January 17** - Last day to request General Bills & Resolutions
Tuesday, **January 24** - Last day to request Revenue Bills
Monday, **February 20** - Last day for Committee to request General Bills & Resolutions
Friday, **February 24** - Last day to introduce General Bills
Friday, **March 3** - Transmittal of General Bills to the other chamber, last day to request Appropriation Bills
Thursday, **March 23** - Last day for committees to request Revenue Bills, Bills for reference, or to implement HB 2
Wednesday, **March 29** - Last day to request Study Resolutions, transmittal of Revenue estimating Joint Resolutions
Friday, **March 31** - Last day to introduce Appropriations Bills, Revenue Bills, & Bills proposing Referenda
Friday - **April 7** - Transmittal of Appropriation Bills, Revenue Bills, & Bills proposing Referenda
Monday, **April 17** - Transmittal of amendments to General Bills
Tuesday, **April 25** - Last day to introduce Study Resolutions
Wednesday, **April 26** - Transmittal of amendments to Appropriations & Revenue Bills, Revenue estimating resolutions, & Bills proposing Referenda
Friday, **April 28** - Transmittal of amendments to Revenue Estimating Joint Resolution
Wednesday, **May 3** - Transmittal of Interim Study Resolutions
Wednesday, **May 10** - Legislature adjourns

2023 90-day session!

For more information or
questions on
Government Affairs contact
Lorraine Clarno,
l.clarno@kalispellchamber.com
406.758.2804