



2023 Legislative Agenda Priorities for the Discover Kalispell Chamber of Commerce

- ***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.
- ***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)
- **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 encourage 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, improve 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 in both the K-12 system and for our Flathead Valley Community College. 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 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 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 and quality medical services.
 - 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.

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