

2023 STATE POLICY GUIDE



Orange County Business Council
Sacramento Advocacy Summit
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ORANGE COUNTY
BUSINESS COUNCIL

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

ISSUE

Orange County is an economic engine for Southern California and the state. As a global competitor, Orange County is home to some of the highest concentrated industry clusters in the country, including Medical Devices, Information Technology, and Hospitality and Tourism. Further economic growth and job creation should be created with the right policies, tools, and resources in place.

STRATEGIES

- Support new businesses and business expansion in Orange County through incentives and programs such as the permanent establishment of the California Competes Grant Program, Manufacturing/R&D/Biotech Sales and Use Tax Exemption, and the New Employment Credit.
- Strengthen economic relationships with foreign countries and business organizations whose top industries are compatible with California to attract further foreign investment into Orange County.
- Support policies that encourage private investment and public-private partnerships in Orange County.
- Oppose and reform regulatory policies that intentionally or unintentionally inhibit economic opportunities and job growth in California, such as building moratoriums or the Private Attorneys General Act (PAGA).
- Seek parity in emerging technologies in retail by establishing a standard definition of online marketplaces and opposing policies that discriminate against online marketplaces.

WORKFORCE

ISSUE

The 2023-24 state budget proposes maintaining record levels of investment in education. While Orange County is a leader in educational attainment and college eligibility, there is a pressing need to reskill or upskill thousands of workers that are disproportionately impacted by current economic conditions. Although the unemployment rate is rebounding, continued supply chain disruptions and a potential recession will likely slow employment growth.

STRATEGIES

- Focus public higher education funding for California Community Colleges, the California State University and the University of California to ensure Orange County institutions are receiving appropriate funding on a per student basis and fairly compensate faculty and staff.
- Ensure higher education institutions can provide safe and healthy learning environments through academic facilities and infrastructure improvements.
- Support for the development of a Regional Training Center that will connect the business and education communities to foster employee development and training for all parts of Orange County;
- Increase access to early childhood education and childcare for working families.
- Oppose and reform regulatory policies that intentionally or unintentionally inhibit student access to enrollment in high performing healthcare professions schools.
- Support incentives for private companies to provide education opportunities for employees.
- Expand affordable and accessible education and training methods to upskill low-skilled workers and programs that increase English language and computer proficiency.
- Increase pipeline of allied healthcare professionals to upskill medium-high skilled workers to address workforce shortages and increase diversity.
- Reassess curriculum standards to determine if they are still relevant for a student to be effective in a 21st century economy.

HOUSING

ISSUE

Orange County needs to build at least 58,000 additional units to house our current workforce, with the shortfall likely to reach 114,000 by 2045. This housing shortage has priced out many in the workforce. Additionally, home builders face overregulation, redundancies in the permitting and approval process, and unnecessary lawsuits and delays. As a result, higher building costs are passed down to the homebuyer or renter. Increasing supply, choices, and affordability of housing available to workers in job-rich areas of the state, such as Orange County, is imperative for companies to retain and attract a talented workforce of the future.

STRATEGIES

- Streamline the regulatory process to facilitate faster project approvals.
- Modernize the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) to expedite and improve the environmental review process, reduce delays and the cost of development.
- Pass legislation that reduces burdensome fees and removes other barriers discouraging developers from building.
- Support incentives for local governments to encourage overall increases to the housing supply, housing affordability, and choices of home types for a variety of families and workers;

TRANSPORTATION

ISSUE

Despite continued state investments, transportation challenges persist throughout Orange County. An integrated, multimodal transportation network of highways, transit, rail and other infrastructure must be improved and maintained, and the passage of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act presents an opportunity to deliver advancements. The ongoing supply chain crisis further illustrates the need to invest in goods movement.

STRATEGIES

- Secure Orange County's fair share of federal and state infrastructure funding.
- Protect the intent of SB 1 and advance the delivery of SB 1 projects expeditiously.
- Preserve FY 2022-23 Budget funding levels for transportation programs without diverting funds from future year or current year transportation accounts.
- Oppose efforts to limit transportation agencies' ability to plan for multimodal transportation solutions in their communities.
- Support local discretion in programming expenditures of transportation funds for regional priorities.
- Dedicate funding and streamline permitting to support efforts related to resilient infrastructure and climate adaptation measures, including along the critically important coastal rail corridor.
- Maintain local control for toll agencies in the operation and management of toll facilities, consistent with existing financing and governance structures.
- Expedite processes, provide regulatory flexibility and support long-term investments for ports, rail and associated transportation links to resolve supply chain bottlenecks and prevent Southern California's loss of competitive edge in goods movement.

WATER

ISSUE

A reliable water supply is integral to the state's economic health. Business, therefore, supports activities leading to a cost-effective, fair, timely, comprehensive, and long-term solution to California's water challenges. The state's aging water delivery system is vulnerable to natural disaster and climate change. More than 27 million Californians, including the Orange County business community, depend on the successful implementation of the Delta Conveyance Project to modernize this system. Conservation-wise, Orange County has invested billions in conservation over several decades; additional regulatory efforts to conserve water must account for these infrastructure investments.

STRATEGIES

- Secure Orange County's fair share of approved and proposed state water bond funding and other state and federal water infrastructure funding.
- Continued investments that restore and rehabilitate existing water infrastructure, and expand development of water supplies and infrastructure needed to adapt to climate change.
- Achieve the co-equal goals of restoring the Delta ecosystem and improved water supply reliability.
- Support the ongoing development of the Delta Conveyance Project.
- Ensure areas that have heavily invested in drought resilience are able to rely on their planning and supplies as an appropriate drought response, as opposed to mandated water reductions.

ENERGY

ISSUE

California needs reliable, stable, and competitively priced energy supplies for its businesses and consumers as we work towards addressing the broader issue of climate change. Progress towards California's 2030 and 2045 climate change mandates must be conducted with a plan in place to address cost and infrastructure challenges associated with achieving them.

STRATEGIES

- Support decarbonization policies that promote diverse zero and near-zero emission energy sources, infrastructure, and uses, including electrification, hydrogen, carbon capture and sequestration, and renewable natural gas.
- Develop a more modern and intelligent grid that can manage and integrate increasing sources of carbon free energy, while facilitating more customer choice.
- Support modernizing the grid to harness the full potential of all clean energy sources while providing reliable energy at all times.
- Create incentives to help businesses navigate California's clean energy transition without increasing or creating new fees or taxes.

TELECOMMUNICATIONS

ISSUE

The challenge of closing the “digital divide” across Orange County and Southern California persists after the pandemic. Shifts to tele-work, tele-education, and tele-health bring many benefits, but also exacerbate problems for those without access or the inability to adopt broadband technologies due to affordability, lack of devices, or other barriers. Telecommunications providers are equipped to bridge this divide in partnership with governments and stakeholders, but would be limited if efforts to establish government-controlled or subsidized providers are successful.

STRATEGIES

- Oppose government-owned utilities offering communications services and instead encourage governments to partner with private broadband providers to support broadband access and adoption.
- Facilitate permit streamlining by local governments and other efforts to reduce and remove barriers for private sector investment in broadband deployment.
- Increase support for digital literacy and other community education efforts to bolster public support for all broadband solutions, with particular focus on unserved and underserved communities.
- Fair and equitable state regulations ensuring equal treatment for all communications providers, including the preservation of cable providers’ authority under the California Digital Infrastructure and Video Competition Act (DIVCA).
- Strategically direct state budget dollars to areas with the highest need and fund “last mile” projects.

QUALITY OF LIFE

ISSUE

Orange County’s premier healthcare providers, world-renowned tourism destinations, diverse nonprofits and businesses all work in partnership to enhance the region’s quality of life; however, onerous regulations targeting the healthcare and tourism sectors threaten improvements.

STRATEGIES

- Address long-term pandemic impacts, including effects on mental health and workforce development.
- Oppose the imposition of onerous workers’ compensation, unreasonable minimum wage policies and other unnecessary mandates that unfairly target specific sectors such as healthcare or hospitality.
- Expand access to healthcare while avoiding an onerous and expensive single payer overhaul.
- Collaborate with leaders in Orange County’s prominent industries, including tourism and hospitality, transportation, construction, retail and restaurants, to identify ways to support them and retain as many businesses and jobs as possible during economic downturns.

Orange County Business Council's (OCBC) Policy Guide highlights key issues facing businesses and features solution-oriented actions to support a growing economy in Orange County. Detailed positions and specific priorities are further discussed in the 2023-2024 OCBC Legislative Action Guide approved by OCBC's Board of Directors.

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