



ORANGE COUNTY
BUSINESS COUNCIL



2024 STATE POLICY GUIDE

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/tourism. Economic growth and job creation should be protected by implementing policies which support business as we address the current challenging fiscal landscape.

STRATEGIES

- 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).
- Support policies that encourage private investment and public-private partnerships in Orange County.
- Support new businesses and business expansion in Orange County by protecting 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.
- Continued funding of the California Jobs First Initiative (formerly "CERF") to follow through on regional commitments for equitable and sustainable economic development.

WORKFORCE

ISSUE

The 2024-25 state budget highlights a challenging fiscal landscape for California as the state faces a significant deficit. While Orange County is a leader in educational attainment and college eligibility, there is a pressing need to re-skill or up-skill thousands of workers whose wages make it a challenge to keep up with the cost of living, while employers can't find the right talent for higher paying jobs.

STRATEGIES

- Protect 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 equipped to fairly compensate faculty and staff.
- Ensure education institutions can provide relevant learning environments through academic facilities and infrastructure improvements.
- Advocate 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.
- Protect 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 profession schools.
- Support incentives for private companies to provide educational opportunities for employees.
- Protect affordable and accessible education and training methods to better enable low-skilled workers and programs that increase English language and computer proficiency.
- Increase pipeline of allied healthcare professionals to engage medium-high skilled workers to address workforce shortages and increase diversity.
- Update curriculum standards to determine if they are still relevant in order for a student to be effective in a 21st century economy.

HOUSING

ISSUE

Per the state's Regional Housing Needs Allocation (RHNA) plan, Orange County is required to plan for over 180,000 additional housing units to address existing and future housing needs. The housing shortage has priced out many in our county's workforce. Meanwhile, home builders face over-regulation, 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 is imperative for companies to retain and attract a talented workforce of the future, and reverse the county's current trend of residents aging-in-place.

STRATEGIES

- Modernize the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) to expedite and improve the environmental review process, reduce delays and the cost of development.
- Advance 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.
- Advocate for policies that incentivize insurance companies to remain and do business in California.

TRANSPORTATION

ISSUE

Despite continued state investments and strong local management of public funding, transportation challenges persist throughout Orange County. An integrated, multimodal transportation network of highways, transit, rail, and other infrastructure must be improved and maintained throughout Orange County with the support of continued state and federal investments.

STRATEGIES

- Secure Orange County's fair share of federal and state infrastructure funding.
- Oppose linking, re-prioritizing, or aligning local and state transportation funding with policies that could significantly hinder a local agency's ability to deliver transportation programs and projects.
- Preserve FY 2023-24 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.
- Seek to ensure Orange County infrastructure related to the 2028 Olympic and Paralympic Games in Los Angeles are eligible for funding incentives and project delivery tools.
- Maintain appropriate funding for operations that support infrastructure investments.

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. Preservation-wise, Orange County has invested billions in conservation over several decades; additional regulatory efforts to conserve water must account for these infrastructure investments, and the water resiliency investments Orange County continues to make.

STRATEGIES

- 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, including use and reliance on any emergency water supplies that have been developed.
- Continue investments that restore and rehabilitate existing water infrastructure, and expand development of water supplies and infrastructure needed to adapt to climate change.
- Secure Orange County's fair share of approved and proposed state water bond funding and other state and federal water infrastructure funding.
- Achieve the co-equal goals of restoring the Delta ecosystem and improved water supply reliability.

ENERGY

ISSUE

California needs reliable, stable, and competitively priced energy supplies for its businesses and consumers to work toward 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

- Create incentives to help businesses navigate California's clean energy transition without increasing or creating new fees or taxes.
- 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.
- Support reasonable 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.

TELECOMMUNICATIONS

ISSUE

Closing the “digital divide” across Orange County and Southern California remains a top priority. Virtual participation in work, education, and healthcare brings many benefits, but also exacerbates problems for those unable 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 prioritized.

STRATEGIES

- Oppose government-owned utilities offering communications services and instead encourage governments to partner with private broadband providers to support digital equity.
- Incentivize permit streamlining by local governments and other efforts to reduce and remove barriers for private sector investment in broadband.
- Protect support for digital literacy to bolster public support for all broadband solutions, with particular focus on adoption and unserved/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 non-profits, and businesses all work in partnership to enhance the region’s quality of life; however, challenging regulations targeting the healthcare and tourism sectors threaten improvements.

STRATEGIES

- Advocate for policies that keep our communities, businesses, and workforce safe as it pertains to retail theft and property theft.
- Oppose the imposition of burdensome workers’ compensation, unreasonable minimum wage policies and other unnecessary mandates that unfairly target specific sectors such as healthcare or hospitality.
- Protect access to healthcare while avoiding an onerous and expensive single payer overhaul.
- Address long-term pandemic impacts, including effects on mental health and workforce development.
- Collaborate with leaders in Orange County’s prominent industries 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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