



ORANGE COUNTY  
BUSINESS COUNCIL



# 2025 STATE POLICY GUIDE

# ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

## ISSUE

Orange County is an economic engine for Southern California and the state. As a global competitor, we are 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 increased fiscal challenges.

## STRATEGIES

- Oppose and reform regulatory policies that intentionally or unintentionally inhibit economic opportunities and job growth in California, such as building moratoriums.
- Support policies that encourage private investment and public-private partnerships in Orange County.
- Support new businesses and business expansion by protecting and advocating for 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 relationships with foreign countries and business organizations whose top industries are exploring expansion and/or relocation to Southern California.
- Continued funding of the California Jobs First Initiative (formerly "CERF") to follow through on regional commitments for equitable and sustainable economic development.

# WORKFORCE

## ISSUE

Orange County is a leader in educational attainment and college eligibility, but there is a pressing need to re-skill or up-skill

thousands of workers to provide the right talent which employers need in a fiercely competitive market. A skilled workforce also garners higher wages which further supports our economy.

## 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.
- 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.
- Review and update curriculum standards to determine if they are still relevant in order for a student to be effective in a 21st century economy.

# ENERGY

## ISSUE

California's economy and overall quality of life is dependent on a reliable, stable, diverse and competitively priced energy supply.

Further, progress toward 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.
- Support a modern and reliable grid to safely harness the full potential of all carbon-free resources, while facilitating more affordable customer choices.
- Support regulatory reform, including siting and permit streamlining, to accelerate grid infrastructure deployment.
- 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.
- Support augmented firefighting resources, including dedicated state funding for the Quick Reaction Force (QRF) aerial firefighting fleet.

# 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

- Oppose the imposition of burdensome workers' compensation, unreasonable minimum wage policies and other mandates that unfairly target specific sectors or business sizes.
- 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.

# PUBLIC SAFETY & RETAIL CRIME

## ISSUE

Ensuring public safety and reducing retail crime are critical to maintaining a thriving business environment in Orange County. Retail crime, including theft and organized crime, significantly impacts local businesses by increasing costs, reducing

profitability, and discouraging investments. With the recent passage of Proposition 36, prioritizing legislation that enhances retail security and deters crime is essential for preserving Orange County's economic vitality and quality of life.

## STRATEGIES

- Support legislation that increases penalties for organized retail theft and provides additional resources for law enforcement to address retail crime.
- Support programs and funding to support public-private partnerships aimed at crime prevention, such as technology-driven crime deterrents and community policing initiatives.
- Oppose unfunded mandates that place the financial burden of crime prevention solely on businesses without government support.

# TELECOMMUNICATIONS

## ISSUE

Closing the “digital divide” remains a top priority. Virtual participation in work, education, and

healthcare brings many benefits, but 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 by efforts to establish government-controlled or subsidized providers, rate regulations, or technology standards/minimums.

## 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.

# TRANSPORTATION

## ISSUE

Despite continued state investments and strong local management of public funding, transportation challenges persist in 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 hinder a local agency’s ability to deliver transportation programs and projects.
- Preserve FY 2024-25 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.
- Support solutions to mitigate increased costs and challenges related to implementing zero-emission mandates.
- 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.

# ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI) & CYBERSECURITY

## ISSUE

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has the potential to transform industries, increase productivity, and spur economic growth in Orange County. Leveraging AI technologies responsibly can help the business

community innovate and stay competitive in a global market. However, thoughtful policies are needed to ensure ethical AI development while avoiding overregulation that stifles innovation.

Protecting against massive and sustained cyberattacks that pose a threat to U.S. economic competitiveness and critical infrastructure resources is also key to businesses success. Technological developments in interconnectivity promise great innovation opportunities, but also increased and novel cybersecurity risks that must be sufficiently addressed.

## STRATEGIES

- Support Initiatives to promote the research, development, and deployment of AI technologies across industries, creating new business opportunities and enhancing productivity.
- Support policies that establish clear and consistent standards for ethical AI development, including data privacy and transparency.
- Advocate for public-private partnerships that foster innovation in AI and workforce development programs to prepare employees for AI-driven industries, while also developing frameworks for improving critical infrastructure cybersecurity.
- Support a voluntary approach to cybersecurity practices in the private sector, as opposed to a system of legally mandated practices.

# HOUSING

## ISSUE

Excessive regulation, permitting redundancies, and legal delays continue to slow home construction, keeping housing supply far

below demand and pricing out much of our local workforce. Meanwhile, the recent wildfires in Los Angeles will place unprecedented strain on housing resources—from lumber and construction materials to labor and permitting capacity—further complicating the ability to build homes efficiently in Orange County. To retain and attract a talented workforce, Orange County must accelerate housing production to increase supply in all levels of housing. Without action, the limitations on supply will constrain economic growth.

## STRATEGIES

- Modernize the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) to expedite and improve the environmental review process, reduce delays and the cost of development.
- Advocate for a regional application to the governor's executive actions to temporarily lift CEQA and Coastal Commission requirements for new construction. 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 do business in California.

# WATER

## ISSUE

A reliable water supply is fundamental 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 disasters 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. 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.

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 2025-2026 OCBC Legislative Action Guide.

## CONNECT WITH US

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