JOIN THE MOST POWERFUL VOICE OF LOCAL BUSINESS
2014 GENERAL ASSEMBLY OUTCOMES

The Hampton Roads Chamber of Commerce, in partnership with the Greater Williamsburg Chamber & Tourism Alliance, promotes pro-business policies in local and state government, advocating for a variety of business-related issues on behalf of nearly 2,600 businesses representing more than 300,000 working men and women in Hampton Roads.

The Chamber is your advocate in local and state government and works closely with elected officials to create economic prosperity and enhance the quality of life. Gain access to decision makers and get involved in business issues that impact your business community.

TRANSPORTATION

HB2 provides for the development of a prioritization process for projects funded by the Commonwealth Transportation Board. State and Regional transportation taxes will be collected from Hampton Roads businesses generating hundreds of millions of new dollars to be invested in our transportation infrastructure.

Impact on business: Now decisions will be based upon measurable and transparent factors or tangible metrics such as congestion relief ranking, economic development analysis, safety mitigation, etc. by the Commonwealth Transportation Board.

Chambers’ position: The Chamber supported HB2 because in the past, decisions on which road or transit project were sometimes based upon politics.

HB1253 creates the Hampton Roads Transportation Accountability Commission to manage regional transportation planning in the greater Hampton Roads region. The Commission will be delegated authority to issue bonds and manage regional transportation taxes.

Impact on business: For the first time in the Commonwealth’s history, Hampton Roads’ elected and appointed leaders now control the process of selecting which road projects to approve to strategically map out our future.

Chambers’ position: The Chamber supported HB1253 because we have worked diligently towards the successful passage of the historic comprehensive long-term transportation package and to insure that the region properly manages and allocates the approximate $175-200 million in new dedicated gas and sales tax revenues annually.

PORT OF VIRGINIA

HB873 changes Virginia’s ports-related tax credits by increasing the annual amount of international trade facility tax credits that may be issued from $250,000 - $1.25 million.

Impact on business: The Port of Virginia is an important driver of our region’s economy. The bill reduces from 10% to 5% the minimum annual increase in cargo transported through a maritime port that is a condition of trade facility, port volume increases, and barge and rail usage tax credits.

Chambers’ position: The Chamber supported HB873 to increase the Port’s competitiveness in the global marketplace.

ETHICS

HB1211 created the state and local Government Conflict of Interest Act and General Assembly Conflicts of Interest Act. The bill prohibits tangible gifts with a value of $250 or more to certain officers and employees of state and local governments.

Impact on business: Local and state government have a tremendous impact on the business environment in Hampton Roads.

Chambers’ position: The Chamber supported this legislation to insure elected officials and private parties understand the critical ethical standards for conducting business in the Commonwealth.

TOURISM

All proposed bills that would eliminate the current post-Labor Day opening requirement were defeated during the 2014 session.

Impact on business: The economic impact of the Commonwealth’s hospitality industry is approximately $340 million annually.

Impact on business: The Chamber opposed the bills because a uniform start for schools prior to Labor Day would have a projected negative economic impact on the Commonwealth’s hospitality industry.

Chambers’ position: The Chamber opposed the bills because a uniform start for schools prior to Labor Day would have a projected negative economic impact on the Commonwealth’s hospitality industry.

MINIMUM WAGE

All proposed bills that would increase the minimum wage in Virginia were defeated in the 2014 session of the General Assembly.

Impact on business: Employers that are required by a particular state to pay a higher minimum wage are at a distinct disadvantage in the contracting arena.

Chambers’ position: The Chamber supports a federally mandated minimum wage bill that supports a market system that is fair to all private sector participants.
**EMPLOYMENT LAW**

**HB93** would have prohibited employers from inquiring whether the prospective employee has ever been arrested, charged with, or convicted of any crime.

**Impact on business:** Companies would not have the right to know an individual’s background relative to the criminal justice system.

**Chambers’ position:** Opposed

**HB33** would have allowed paid “safe days” if the employee or a family member is a victim of domestic violence, sexual assault, or stalking.

**Impact on business:** HB33 would have been a burden to private sector employers required to provide “safe days” if the employee or a family member is a victim of domestic violence, sexual assault or stalking.

**Chambers’ position:** The Chamber opposed the bill to save private sector employers from the significant cost of providing this new employee benefit.

**LEGAL**

**HB375** and **SB150** prohibit any person from making a bad faith assertion of patent infringement. Authorizes the Attorney General to issue civil investigative demands and accept assurances of voluntary compliance and seek injunctive relief.

**Impact on business:** Patent infringement is a significant legal issue for small business. A bad faith assertion of patent infringement could cost a business tens of thousands of dollars in lost business and legal fees.

**Chambers’ position:** The Chamber supported HB375 and SB150 to strengthen the Commonwealth’s laws in the patent infringement area.

**UNEMPLOYMENT COMPENSATION**

**SB18** provides that good cause for leaving employment exists if an employee voluntarily leaves a job to accompany the employee’s spouse, who is on active duty in the military of the United States.

**Impact on business:** Hampton Roads is home to approximately 83,000 active duty military personnel with 45% of our local economy linked to the Department of Defense. Our region and the Commonwealth of Virginia have a goal to be the most military friendly community in the United States.

**Chambers’ position:** The Chamber supported SB18 that provides unemployment compensation for trailing military spouses to further our regional support of the military.

**WORKERS’ COMPENSATION**

**HB1083** establishes prompt payment for clean claims and processes for the carrier of employer to notify the provider why a claim is denied. Limits what assistants at surgery can charge.

**Impact on business:** Applies consistent rules for billing of multiple surgical procedures. The Commonwealth of Virginia has some of the best workers’ comp rates in the United States.

**Chambers’ position:** The Chamber supported HB1083 to continue to improve the efficiency of workers’ compensation in the Commonwealth and keep the rates very low for businesses.

**TAXATION**

**HB497** – Business Professional and Occupational License (BPOL) Tax Appeal Process permits a taxpayer to request a written ruling with regard to the classification of a business for tax purposes.

**Impact on business:** BPOL continues to be a significant burden to the business community in Hampton Roads. The ability to appeal the classification provides regulatory relief in instances when a misclassification has occurred.

**Chambers’ position:** Supported

**HB617** authorizes a locality to establish lower personal property tax rates on the tangible property of business that locate for the first time in a locality.

**Impact on Business:** Tangible property taxes are a significant portion of a first time or newly located business’s costs. Allows localities to establish lower fees for this category of business in order to promote the establishment or the expansion of start-up businesses.

**Chambers’ position:** Supported

**RETAIL**

**HB117** would have imposed a .05 cent tax on disposable paper and disposable plastic bags.

**Impact on business:** Taxing paper or plastic bags used by area retailers would place an unfair burden on the business community and add to the costs of goods in our market.

**Chambers’ position:** The Chamber opposed HB117 to protect our retail establishments from additional regulation and cost. The Chamber supports voluntary programs and educational efforts to urge consumers to use personal bags or recycled bags for shopping.
MEDICAID

The Hampton Roads Chamber recognizes that health insurance access and affordability continues to be an issue for businesses throughout the state, particularly small businesses. The Hampton Roads Chamber of Commerce supports reasonable market-based efforts to make health care more affordable and manageable.

Businesses in Virginia outlined 11 free-market based reform principles for the General Assembly. These include total privatization of Virginia Medicaid expansion, saving state funds to offset private option contributions, employment requirements for enrollees, and a new market-based/financial incentive approach to help control the use of health care. Virginian businesses have additionally included principles to ensure the security and integrity of the program. Such principles are as follows: an audit requirement for the Medicaid program and the renewal of the private option plan every four years, termination language in the private option plan in case the federal government fails to meet their financial obligations, the support of wellness and preventative services, annual performance reviews and the expansion of fraud and abuse prevention.

Improved health care is vital to the citizens of Virginia, as well as the business community that currently provides health insurance for employees. To maintain a healthy and productive workforce and to preserve the quality of life in the Commonwealth, it is imperative to address human service needs throughout the region.

The above positions regarding Marketplace Virginia and Medicaid expansion were not adopted by the Greater Williamsburg Chamber & Tourism Alliance.