Representing Southeastern Virginia
The Hampton Roads Chamber works as an impactful advocate, inspiring ignitor, powerful economic partner and regional collaborator. Our members’ business needs are our primary focus, and we will strive to meet those needs through our advocacy efforts.

During the 2021 legislative session, the Hampton Roads Chamber's efforts at the state level will reflect the following core values: recovery from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, strengthening and diversifying our regional economy; enhancing our state’s “business-friendly” climate; reducing over-regulation and taxation of business; re-shaping education & workforce development; improving healthcare access and managing healthcare costs; investing in transportation infrastructure, energy and technology; and supporting initiatives that protect and grow Virginia-based military and federal assets.

The Hampton Roads Chamber’s legislative agenda is produced by members of the Legislative Affairs Committee and business stakeholders, and is approved by the Chamber’s Board of Directors. This document outlines our positions on critical issues affecting the business community.

We recognize the importance of providing a positive business climate and how it affects our future. With a flourishing, business-friendly environment, more jobs will be created, putting more Virginians to work, improving our communities, and finally making Virginia a premier destination to do business. Strengthening the state’s ability to create, attract, retain, and grow jobs for decades to come, is the Chamber’s highest priority!

We look forward to working with our stakeholders, the General Assembly, and the Northam Administration to help bring prosperity to the region and the Commonwealth.

Sincerely,

Bryan K. Stephens
President & CEO
Bryan K. Stephens has extensive leadership and business experience. Prior to assuming his current position, he served as President and CEO of Kalmar in San Antonio, Texas; a $250M/ year manufacturer of material handling equipment, after serving a distinguished 28-year career in the U.S Army, retiring as a Colonel. In the Army, he served in a variety of progressive operational leadership and command positions. His last assignments include Infantry Brigade Commander and Division Chief of Staff, 10th Mountain Division (LI) Fort Drum, NY and Chief of Operations and Chief of Staff, Joint Warfighting Center, USJFCOM in Suffolk, VA. His military qualifications include, among others, Ranger, Airborne, Pathfinder, Air Assault, and Joint Staff Officer.

Since taking the helm of the Hampton Roads Chamber, Mr. Stephens has led the Chamber to a U.S. Chamber of Commerce “5 Star Accreditation”, an achievement only obtained by the top 1 percent of the over 7,200 Chambers in the Nation. In 2016 he was awarded the Chamber Executive of the Year for the Commonwealth of Virginia by the Virginia Association of Chamber of Commerce Executives and in 2017 and 2018 he was #15 on Inside Business’s Top 25 Most Powerful People in Hampton Roads. In 2019 and 2020, Mr. Stephens was recognized on the Inside Businesses Top 25 list while also being on the Virginia 500 Power list for economic development.
Stephen R. Romine became Chairman of the Hampton Roads Chamber Regional Board of Directors in December of 2020. Romine is a business partner with the mid-Atlantic regional law firm, Williams Mullen, resident in the Virginia Beach office. Mr. Romine’s practice is concentrated on business and commercial real estate with a focus on land use, zoning and permitting. He has extensive experience representing clients in the energy, commercial real estate and telecommunications industries as well as national retailers and institutional investors.

During his forty-years of private practice, he has held numerous legal and industry leadership positions including being a charter member and president of the Hampton Roads Association for Commercial Real Estate, and a fellow in the American College of Real Estate Lawyers. Romine has served on the Board of Regents of the American College of Mortgage Attorneys, is a member of the governing Council of the American Bar Association, Real Property Trust and Estate Law Section, Chair of the Virginia State Bar, Real Property Section, and Secretary of the YMCA of South Hampton Roads.

Romine has served on the Hampton Roads Chamber regional board for more than ten years holding various positions including Virginia Beach Division Chair, Vice Chair for Leadership, Treasurer, and General Counsel.
Before joining the Chamber, Reynolds worked as a legislative aide to Senator Steve Newman, President Pro Tempore, of the 23rd district. She started as an intern in his office and was offered the job shortly after. From this role, she brings experience in her ability to navigate the political and policy-driven development process within the General Assembly. Through her work with the senator, Reynolds was well versed on pressing issues involving education, health, transportation, commerce & labor, general laws, and budget related topics. She graduated from Liberty University in 2018 with a degree in Public Health: Pre-Clinical where she was a member and officer of the Eta Sigma Gamma and Alpha Lambda Delta Honors Societies.

Reynolds is a native of Chesapeake where she has been involved in her community and established lasting relationships with local, state, and federal members. She says she feels as though she prepped her whole life for a position such as this. “The Chamber takes pride in the advocacy it provides for businesses throughout the 757 region. I plan to continue that legacy to ensure policies drive a thriving environment for regional business prosperity.”

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The Hampton Roads Chamber works on behalf of more than 400,000 members of Virginia’s workforce. The following outlines areas for the Chamber’s 2021 state policy priorities:

- Business climate
- Economic development
- Education and workforce development
- Energy and natural resources
- Fiscal stability
- Healthcare
- Military and Veterans affairs
- Technology innovation
- Tourism and business travel
- Transportation
Protect Virginia’s Right to Work laws for private and public employees to guarantee that no person can be compelled, as a condition of employment, to join or not to join, nor to pay dues to a labor union, and assures that no person or organization may use intimidation, use of force, threat of use of force, reprisal or threat of reprisal, or interrupt the work of any employee.

Support public policy that strengthens Virginia’s competitive standing in the national and global economy.

Maintain protections to ensure all employers meet their legal and ethical obligations to their employees and the government, but allow free market conditions to determine important labor issues such as compensation, benefits and other conditions of employment.

Protect the Dillon Rule to ensure local governments may only act in those areas authorized by the General Assembly, protecting businesses from a patchwork of inconsistent policies and regulations from one jurisdiction to another.

Support policies that encourage business investment and capital formation and remove barriers to access capital for businesses.

Expand programs that support the unique needs of small businesses.

Support legal reforms that will prevent excessive litigation, halt runaway liability risk, reduce the statutory cap on punitive damages and promote greater fairness and efficiency in the civil justice system.

Reduce overreaching regulatory burdens for businesses.

Ensure Virginia’s unemployment compensation policy is fair, equitable and adequate to provide financial assistance to employees who become unemployed through no fault of their own, but with protections to ensure the cost of the system is sustainable for employers.

Protect the workers’ compensation system from changes that would increase costs and regulatory burdens on businesses or otherwise undermine the system’s existing sound principles and purpose.
Support regional economic development initiatives that enhance and diversify the economy in Hampton Roads and across Virginia.

Continue investment in GO Virginia to promote regional and public-private collaboration to support economic development goals.

Increase investment in local, regional and state economic development marketing and lead generation initiatives.

Increase investment in local, regional and state economic development programs that help to attract businesses to Virginia and support growth for existing Virginia businesses, including the Virginia Jobs Investment Program (VJIP), the business-ready sites program and VEDP’s Talent Accelerator program.

Expand and increase capacity in Virginia’s international trade programs.

Support continued investment in the Port of Virginia.
Reform and invest in Virginia’s early childhood education system to ensure it is high quality, affordable and accessible to all Virginia children, including public-private partnerships for early learning that ensure quality care for at-risk students in communities around the state. Strengthen Virginia’s K-12 system, including:

- Providing students with skills, training and knowledge to become productive lifelong members of the workforce.
- Promoting instruction with a focus on critical thinking, creativity, communications, collaboration, citizenship skills and problem-solving.
- Providing robust career exploration and work-based learning opportunities.
- Investment in programs and tools to encourage and improve interactive virtual learning opportunities.

Support career and technical training designed to prepare students for careers in high-demand fields, including STEM-H (science, technology, engineering, mathematics, and health care).

Strengthen the linkage between the classroom and the workplace at all levels with the collaboration of both the public and private sectors.

Support expansion of high quality, affordable industry certification and credential programs that are aligned with Virginia’s current and future workforce needs.

Invest in initiatives to attract and retain quality teachers, including removing unnecessary obstacles to entering the teaching profession, better preparing teachers for the challenges of today’s classrooms, providing teachers the tools and support they need to succeed, and investment in teacher compensation.

Ensure assessments provide accountability for schools, educators and students.

Maintain quality and affordability for Virginia’s colleges and universities, with a strong focus on employability for graduates, competency-based instruction and programs that strategically align with workforce needs.

Support consistent, quality-focused, streamlined dual enrollment programs that encourage collaboration between Virginia’s colleges and universities, community colleges and high schools.
Promotion of offshore wind energy development in Hampton Roads, including efforts to attract supply chain businesses to support OSW projects and training for the workforce needed to sustain the offshore wind industry.

Support a holistic environmental strategy that is balanced, flexible, respects private property rights and business opportunity, and reflects the region’s diverse urban, suburban and rural assets.

Promote local, state, and federal environmental initiatives that rely on market-based incentives and voluntary compliance.

Support market-based efforts to encourage resilient landscapes and shorelines, protect wetlands, native plant and animal species, enhance and restore open space and promote innovative land-use models.

Maintain policies that promote healthy rivers, clean streams and effective solutions to reduce pollution in the Chesapeake Bay.

Support access to reliable, efficient and affordable energy, which are essential to a growing economy and high quality of life.

Support development of a diverse mix of options to support the region’s increasing energy needs, including increased conservation and energy efficiency, new sources of conventional and renewable energy, and new transmission and distribution infrastructure.

Support a comprehensive approach energy policy that promotes stable rates, incentives and proven market-based methodologies, thoughtful consideration of short- and long-term economic impacts and the critical importance of protecting our environment.

Elevate recurrent flooding as a regional and statewide issue.

Expand and enact programs that will encourage businesses to invest in energy efficiency and renewable energy projects, including the C-PACE (Commercial Property Assessed Clean Energy) program.
Protect Virginia’s AAA bond rating.

Comprehensively evaluate and modernize Virginia’s tax structure to better align revenue with core government responsibilities and more appropriately reflect today’s economy with a focus on promoting economic growth and success.

Actively engage the business community as any new fiscal policies that impact the business climate are considered to enable the benefit of a business-like approach to any policy changes and protect against consequences that could negatively impact Virginia’s economy.
Support a comprehensive approach to healthcare policy that reduces costs, increases quality and expands access to quality healthcare for all Virginians.

Support policies to reduce prescription drug prices, the most significant contributor to increasing healthcare costs.

Expand the use of telehealth and other healthcare delivery technologies that will improve access and reduce costs.

Adopt policies that create social and physical environments that promote good health for all, in an effort to eliminate health disparities and inequity.

Support strategies that address the social determinants of health that negatively impact quality of life, health outcomes and life expectancy.

Eliminate the stigma related to mental illness and support access to behavioral services by effectively addressing public health, including mental health and opioid and substance abuse.

Preserve the Certificate of Need Program to protect hospitals’ ability to provide medical services to all, promote quality care, and provide a full range of essential health services.

Support policies that strengthen and promote healthcare readiness and response to continue to combat COVID-19 and its impact on our community.
Encourage strategic initiatives that preserve and grow military and federal assets throughout the region and Virginia.

Invest and expand Veteran job transition and training programs focused on reducing the skills gaps and addressing the workforce needs of the region.

Support increased educational and workforce opportunities targeted to veterans and their families.

Continue to grow the Virginia Values Veterans (V3) program to encourage and recognize businesses that make it a priority to hire Veterans.

Adopt policies that promote innovation and job creation in the technology sector.

Encourage private investment to enable universal access to broadband through the use of all available technologies, including wireless, fiber optics and cable.

Expansion of business opportunities in conjunction with the completion of the Trans-Atlantic Data Cables landing in Virginia Beach.

Business-friendly legislation and tax incentives that stimulate innovative business concepts, foster competition, reduce barriers to entry and provide retention and growth for high-tech entrepreneurs and technology businesses.

Leverage available assets for regional connectivity, educational and economic opportunities, Smart Region Capabilities and workforce development.
Support and encourage efforts to promote tourism and business travel to Hampton Roads, including increased and targeted investment in destination marketing and international marketing for tourism business relocation and expansion.

Increase promotion of the region to business travelers, conferences and conventions.

Expand and promote the region’s many assets, including opportunities to enjoy the performing arts, museums, cultural and historic attractions, and indoor and outdoor sporting events and recreation.

Protect, grow and diversify travel to Hampton Roads by expanding the region’s attractions, hotels, restaurants and other vacation experiences that attract visitors.

Increase state funding to the Virginia Tourism Corporation.

Supports the establishment of liability protections for hospitality and tourism-related businesses that shield these employers from frivolous lawsuits related to COVID-19 so long as they comply with health and safety guidelines or do not engage in grossly negligent behavior.

Support the continued viability of the H2-B and J1-Visa programs.
Support policy and investment that will provide a sustainable, safe, reliable, efficient, multimodal transportation network.

Champion transportation and transit improvements to reduce congestion and enhance the mobility of people, products and services, maximizing opportunities for job creation and economic success.

Protect and expand federal, state, regional and local transportation revenues to increase capacity, reduce congestion, enable business growth and expansion, support the needs of current and future military assets and advance the priorities included in the HRTPO and HRTAC long-range transportation plan.

Continue to develop and support Virginia’s economic gateways, including the Port of Virginia, and all modes of transportation that comprise the multimodal network that connects Virginia with the national and global economy.

Support development of intercity and high-speed rail.

Support investment in the infrastructure needed to enable success for airports throughout the region, including Norfolk International Airport, Newport News/Williamsburg International Airport, Hampton Roads Executive Airport and Chesapeake Regional Airport.

Support innovative and transparent approaches to Virginia’s transportation needs including consideration of public-private partnerships.