JOIN THE MOST POWERFUL VOICE OF LOCAL BUSINESS
2015 GENERAL ASSEMBLY OUTCOMES

The Hampton Roads Chamber of Commerce promotes pro-business policies in local and State government, advocating for a variety of business-related issues on behalf of nearly 2600 businesses representing more than 300,000 working men and women in Hampton Roads.

On Friday, February 27th the 2015 Session of the Virginia General Assembly ended. While 2015 was a non-budget year for the state legislature, much of the emphasis of the session was on adopting a revised balanced budget to adjust to lower than expected revenue. Ultimately a budget was adopted that spends $1 Billion less in general fund revenue than the originally adopted budget. Noteworthy budget inclusions were teacher pay raises, additional funding for a healthcare safety net and funds for two veterans care centers.

The Hampton Roads Chamber of Commerce will continue to be engaged in public policy and state legislative issues in the months ahead as all 140 members of the Virginia General Assembly are facing election in November. Your “Voice of Business” in Hampton Roads will represent your interests in Richmond each and every day.

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**ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

Budget includes $27 million in funding to the Governor’s Development Opportunity Fund (HB 1400/SB 800). *(SUPPORTED)*

**Impact on Business**

The Governor’s “deal closing” fund enables the Commonwealth to compete for job creating projects in Hampton Roads and the Commonwealth. The Jefferson Lab Ion Collider at Hampton University also received $4 million for future expansion/development.

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**HOSPITALITY AND TOURISM**

The General Assembly defeated all measures that would have eliminated the post-Labor Day school opening requirement (HB 1550/HB 1838/HB 1941/SB 830/SB 1078/SB 1131/SB 1249). *(OPPOSED)*

**Impact on Business**

A uniform start to Virginia’s public schools prior to Labor Day would result in a loss of $360 million in business revenues and significant loss of employment across the State.

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**WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT**

Supported legislation makes several changes to the Virginia Board of Workforce Development via establishing state – level metrics and requiring each local workforce development board to develop and execute a strategic plan (HB 1986) *(SUPPORTED)*

**Impact on Business**

The business community will benefit from a more efficient workforce training and delivery system.
**Transportation**
The Commonwealth’s Public–Private Transportation Act was amended so that in the future a finding of “public interest” must be found by an Advisory Commission established by the General Assembly. In addition, transportation funding considerations will include the “state of good repair” and a priority ranking system for structurally deficient bridges and deteriorated pavements (HB 1886/HB 1887). *(SUPPORTED)*

**Impact on Business**
The movement of goods and services across an efficient transportation network is the top legislative priority of the Chamber. An overhaul of the Commonwealth’s Public Private Transportation Act will add important safeguards prior to the execution of any comprehensive agreement in the future.

**Workers Compensation**
The payment of medical services will be studied prior to the 2016 session of the General Assembly. The Virginia Worker’s Compensation Commission will establish the recommended prevailing community rate for medical, surgical, or hospital services (HB 1820). *(SUPPORTED)*

**Impact on Business**
The rising cost of workers compensation for medical services is an important “cost of business” issue. The ability to utilize data to establish a prevailing community rate will be the key to the General Assembly making a balanced policy decision in 2016.

**Energy**
Existing electric rates in the Commonwealth will be in place for the next five years. The utilities will not be subject to biennial reviews from the State Corporation Commission from January 1, 2015 to December 31, 2017 (SB 1349). *(SUPPORTED)*

**Impact on Business**
The cost of electricity in Virginia ranks 24th in the nation when factoring the annual average price per kilowatt hour. The 2015 General Assembly adopted legislation that provides for rate stability for a five year time period.

**Clean Energy**
The General Assembly passed legislation that develops underwriting guidelines for the financing of clean energy loan programs (HB 1446). *(SUPPORTED)*

**Impact on Business**
Commercial and Multifamily real estate, energy efficiency contractors and banking interests will benefit from the option of using a private loan program (local option) to make clean energy or energy efficiency improvements to older income producing properties.

**Labor and Employment**
The General Assembly defeated all measures that would raise the minimum wage in the Commonwealth and have provisions for future increases linked to an economic index (HB 1512/HB 1654/HB 2198/SB 681/SB 704/SB 706). *(OPPOSED)*

**Impact on Business**
The business community opposed expansion of the state minimum wage that exceeded federal law. The Chamber supports the minimum wage being established on a federal level. Higher wages drive up the cost of conducting business and take away from Virginia’s business strengths.
Veterans
State Funding was provided to construct a Hampton Roads Veterans Care Center and support the transition of veterans into the civilian workforce through education and training (HB 1275/HB 1400). (SUPPORTED)

Impact on Business
Forty-six percent of the Hampton Roads economy is derived from the Department of Defense spending. The Commonwealth has a clear objective to enhance its reputation as the most “military friendly” state in the nation. This new facility will assist in securing more military assets and in protecting those we currently have.

Right to Work
The General Assembly passed a Resolution that places the Commonwealth’s “Right to Work” law into the State Constitution (HJ 490). (SUPPORTED)

Impact on Business
Present law provides that any agreement or combination between any employer and any labor union or labor organization whereby persons not members of such union or organization are denied the right to work for the employer is against public policy and constitutes an illegal combination or conspiracy and is void.

Port of Virginia
Legislation approved during the 2015 Session allows a qualified company to receive a second grant from the Port of Virginia Economic Development Grant Fund if the company locates or expands in the Commonwealth and creates at least 300 new permanent full-time positions (SB 1007). (SUPPORTED)

Impact on Business
The Port’s economic impact statewide is 374,000 jobs and $60 billion in spending. Programs authorized under SB 1007 will support economic expansion in the region.

Port of Virginia
Add the temporary transfer of use of property between state agencies and leases to private entities to the list of exemptions for the Virginia Port Authority – subject to the approval of the Secretary of Transportation (SB 1359). (SUPPORTED)

Impact on Business
Enables the Port Authority to have specific exemptions from the Public Procurement Act to allow the organization to function more like the private sector.

Coal Tax Credit/Port of Virginia
limits the aggregate amount of credits that may be allocated or claimed for the coal employment and production incentive tax credit to $7.5 million. The bill extends the sunset date through 2019 (SB 1161/HB 1879). (SUPPORTED)

Impact on Business
The Hampton Roads regional port facilities are well positioned to ship coal throughout the world. Tax incentives for Virginia Coal increase the competitive advantage for this Virginia mined product.
**Transportation Network Companies**

The Assembly passed legislation establishing a process for licensing of transportation network companies such as Uber and Lyft by the Department of Motor Vehicles (HB 1662/SB 1025). *(SUPPORTED)*

**Impact on Business**

Existing taxi/limo companies in the Commonwealth had a number of competitive operating concerns about Uber and Lyft. This bill limits the personal vehicle seating capacity to seven, requires specific insurance coverage and operational requirements like disclosure policies and individual information.

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**State and Local Conflict of Interest Act (Ethics)**

The General Assembly passed legislation to prohibit certain gifts ($100 value), require approval for certain travel and requirements for disclosure of such gifts (SB 1424/HB 1598/HB 1167/HB 1689/HB 1919/HB 1947/HB 2060/HB 2070). *(SUPPORTED)*

**Impact on Business**

Organizations such as the Chambers of Commerce and other business organizations lobbied for an exemption for gifts received at widely attended events (those attended by at least 25 persons). The Chamber remains concerned about the access to elected officials participating in normal Chamber events or programs.

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**Healthcare**

The General Assembly amended the “certificate of need” statute regarding the definition of a “project” for when a certificate is required to include capital expenditures of $15 million or more on behalf of a medical care facility other than a general hospital. The legislation directs the Secretary of Health to convene the stakeholders to review the current “Certificate of Public Need” process and its impact on Healthcare in the Virginia (SB 1283/SB 1415/HB 2177). *(SUPPORTED)*

**Impact on Business**

the State’s COPN process has been in place for a number of years to establish the “public need” for new capital improvements by Medical providers. Basically, it provides a checks and balances system for health care provider systems in developing additional capacity or providing treatment infrastructure. The measure is critical to insuring cost containment in healthcare delivery.

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**Employment Applications**

Senate Bill 1017 was defeated that would have prohibited State Agencies from including on any employment application from including a question inquiring whether the prospective employee has ever been arrested or charged with, or convicted of, any crime. *(OPPOSED)*

**Impact on Business**

The business community has historically opposed this “check the box” legislation due to the fact that it would start limiting the ability to do proper screening of prospective job applicants.

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**Environmental Protection Agency Emission Guidelines**

The House of Delegates passed HJ 608, a resolution stating the Commonwealth’s opposition to the proposed EPA’s emissions guidelines for the regulation of carbon dioxide emissions from existing power plants. The bill was not acted on in the Senate Rules Committee. *(SUPPORTED)*

**Impact on Business**

Environmental regulations are a key “driver” in the cost of producing energy in the Commonwealth and the nation.
Medicaid Review Study

A joint House Resolution (HJ 637) passed the General Assembly that directs the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission to study the Commonwealth’s Medicaid programs. (SUPPORTED)

Impact on Business

The provision of medical services through Medicaid has a significant impact on area physician practices and hospital systems. Much of the data collected from the JLRAC study will come from the private sector in 2015.