



Public Policy Agenda

FY2018

Advancing North Central Massachusetts

Approved: September 21, 2017

As an organization, we are committed to advancing North Central Massachusetts by promoting and leveraging **economic competitiveness** with our state, region, and nation; advocating on behalf of **small business**; asserting our role as the Commonwealth's hub of **manufacturing**; and appreciating that we cannot do any of this without innovative and leading **education** strategies and a strong **transportation** infrastructure.

This document is intended to serve as the guideline for the Chamber's government affairs efforts, and has been reviewed and approved by the Government Affairs Committee and the Board of Directors. Adjustments and additions to these policies will be made as necessary.

Please contact Christopher McDermott at 978.353.7600 ext. 224 with any questions you may have regarding this Public Policy Agenda.

Economic Competitiveness

At the heart of the Massachusetts economy is innovation. To remain competitive, North Central Massachusetts must aggressively advocate for the tools and resources necessary to be a leader locally, regionally, nationally, and globally. As we integrate our emerging sectors and clusters to become a leading region in the Commonwealth, we not only need to recognize our strengths, but understand what is standing in the way of our potential.

Regional Equity

Our position relative to I-495 should not make a difference in how we are viewed by state government. We will call on state government decision makers to increase investments outside of Greater Boston. As we position ourselves to be the next growth region, we need partners on Beacon Hill to change the way they view communities in our region.

Public Infrastructure

Essential to any regional economy are the public resources which all businesses rely upon. As one of the Commonwealth's oldest manufacturing hubs, many of North Central Massachusetts' roads, utility mains, drainage systems, and electrical lines are in need of repair or improvement. To this end, the Chamber will support efforts at both the municipal and the state levels to address these needs in a timely fashion.

Broadband and High Speed Internet

Emerging sectors rely on technology now more than ever. Ensuring that all areas of North Central Massachusetts have access to high speed internet is a priority. We will continue to aggressively advocate for increased access for underserved areas in the region, and call for parity with the rest of Massachusetts.

Property Tax Rates

Since the inception of Proposition 2 ½, local governments have faced challenges when it comes to balancing budgets. Growing the commercial tax base should be a priority of every local government. Presenting business friendly environments through single property tax rates will continue to be a priority. Neither residents nor businesses should be overburdened by taxes, A single rate creates a fair and balanced environment for local receipts.

Investments in the Public Promotion of Tourism

North Central Massachusetts is home to a burgeoning tourism and travel destination. An evolving market has ushered in hundreds of millions of dollars in private investments over the last several years, positioning North Central as one of the highest growth regions in the Commonwealth. To continue that momentum, we need to continue to encourage investments and partnerships at the state and local level.

Regulatory Reform and Streamlined Permitting

In order to recruit, grow and retain businesses to our region, we must encourage state and local government to reduce regulatory burdens and make it easy for businesses to open. Permitting and red tape should be eliminated where possible and "speed-to-market" strategies should be embraced by local government.

Small Business

Affordable properties and a market that embraces local shopping presents North Central Massachusetts as one of the last places in the State where owning a small business is feasible. We must continue to embrace small businesses as the heartbeat of our economy, and remove any roadblock that impedes success.

Minimum Wage

Significant increases in minimum wage place business in Massachusetts at a severe competitive disadvantage. Ultimately, higher payroll will drive shoppers to e-commerce shopping, meaning job-losses and the shuttering of small retailers. Sunday Premium Pay puts the starting wage at \$16.50 an hour – forcing many businesses to close on Sundays, decreasing payroll and sales taxes to the State as a result.

Unemployment Insurance Taxes

Massachusetts provides laid-off workers with the most generous benefits of any state and has the highest maximum duration period for them. Massachusetts also has the weakest earnings and time worked tests in the nation, which significantly drive up costs for small businesses.

Micro-lending and technical assistance investments

With the advent of increased banking and financial regulations, many small businesses are unable to access traditional bank and credit union capital. Supporting emerging businesses and entrepreneurs with important financing is a priority for our region. Partnerships with the state and federal government help support higher-risk loans, and business counseling. Micro-lending helps open business that under any other circumstances would not open.

Health insurance & health care costs

The cost of health care is a major detriment to economic growth in Massachusetts. Small business already struggle to afford coverage to their employees. We'll fight hard for small businesses against high rate increases, increased benefits, and other costly mandates that make it difficult for small businesses to best address the needs of their employees.

Energy costs

Massachusetts has the second highest energy costs in the contiguous United States. This continues to be an incentive for businesses to re-locate to other states and it's time we take an aggressive approach. We therefore need to advocate for a diverse portfolio of power sources including natural gas.

Manufacturing

North Central Massachusetts is home to the highest concentration of manufacturers in Massachusetts. The region's 445 manufacturing firms account for one fourth of the jobs in the region. Supporting careers in advanced manufacturing and serving as fierce advocates for our large employers will remain a major priority for the Chamber.

Removing the Stigma Associated with Manufacturing

As both students and parents think about career paths, manufacturing is often associated with dirty, unattractive work. By positioning ourselves at the intersection of manufacturing employers, K-12 school systems, and institutions of higher education, we will advocate against the stigma associated with careers in advanced manufacturing and change the narrative too often associated with the industry.

Removal of the Inventory Tax

Reducing burdens that manufacturers face is what will keep these companies from off-shoring or moving out of Massachusetts. We will aggressively support the removal of the Inventory Tax, a tax that is prohibitive to growth and competition for our region's manufacturers.

Education

At the backbone of a successful economy is a framework of excellence in education. As we seek to be more competitive, we will support high quality education systems that align with workforce needs and the strengths of North Central Massachusetts.

Support High Quality Education

With a commitment to our students we will support increased investments in education and education alternatives that provide high-quality training and resources to students.

Aligning K-12 Curriculum with Workforce Development Initiatives

Ensuring our students are equipped with the tools and foundations necessary to compete in the workforce will be a priority. Our education system will be the fabric of our advocacy and efforts as we look to advance the North Central Massachusetts economy.

Transportation

The Route 2 corridor is poised to be the next area of expansion in Massachusetts. Without transportation infrastructure improvements, we will be unable to grow and expand residential, commercial, or industrial tax bases. Advocating for transportation improvements, extended commuter rail access, and increased reverse commute options will be essential to ensuring growth.

Widening of Route 2

A two lane highway will not support the travel and capacity needed for economic expansion. Working with our transportation partners and state and federal government, we will explore options for widening Route 2 to expanded traffic.

Increased Public Transportation for Employees

In North Central Massachusetts, a job surplus is usually related to transportation access. We will advocate for expanded transportation routes and schedules that are conducive to work shifts and employee needs. Ensuring that employees are connected to public and alternative transportation will therefore be among our transportation improvement goals. Development of multiuse paths, such as the Twin Cities Rail Trail, provides another transit option many young professionals find highly desirable.

Roadway Improvements

Roads, bridges and other public ways have long been neglected. Maintenance and re-construction of these roads is imperative to remaining competitive as a region of growth.

Airport Improvements

The Fitchburg Regional Airport is a vital component of the local economy, employing hundreds, attracting clients throughout Massachusetts and Southern New Hampshire, and supporting dozens of businesses that service it. The Chamber will support any efforts made to improve its services or increase its capacity. This includes updating its technology, expanding its runways, and decreasing barriers to business attraction.

While these statements are policy as of the effective date of this document, the Chamber reserves the right to adopt changes and make modifications and additions to its Public Policy Agenda, and will continue to monitor legislation and issues as they develop.