

## **Akron-Canton Advocacy Alliance 2024 Public Policy Agenda**

### **ABOUT THE AKRON-CANTON ADVOCACY ALLIANCE**

The Akron-Canton Advocacy Alliance (ACAA) is a joint effort of the Greater Akron Chamber (GAC) and the Canton Regional Chamber of Commerce (CRCC) to represent the needs of our collective 4,500 members to elected officials and policymakers for the benefit of jobs, investment, and growth for the Akron-Canton region. The Alliance aims to grow the regional business community's participation in the advocacy process, provide greater leverage to our collective advocacy efforts, and help drive a united approach from the Akron-Canton region on key policy issues.

### **MISSION**

The mission of the ACAA is to provide a regional forum to discuss, research and apply shared values, principles, and policies to public policy issues that stand to affect the Akron-Canton region. The ACAA actively engages member employers, community stakeholders, elected officials, and government representatives on issues of shared interest for the business community and advocates for legislative and regulatory policy priorities at the local, state, and federal levels.

The ACAA is responsible for developing and recommending positions and plans of action to create awareness; educate and inform; support or oppose government legislation, policy, or regulations affecting GAC and CRCC members and the overall well-being of the Akron-Canton region. It is through this forum that positions on legislative issues are debated and established or, in the case of ballot issues, recommended to the respective Executive Committees and Boards of Directors of the GAC and CRCC.

If you have questions about the ACAA, the issues we're working on, or how to get involved, please contact John Rizzo, Vice President of the Akron-Canton Advocacy Alliance at [jrizzo@akroncantonadvocacy.org](mailto:jrizzo@akroncantonadvocacy.org).

### **2024 POLICY PRIORITIES**

*Our 2024 Policy Priorities represent key focus areas from within our broader agenda that are most relevant to ongoing activities and critical to our region's economic growth and success.*

**Secure Transformational Investments for Key Initiatives** – Work with regional partners to secure transformational funding from various programs within state and federal agencies, including the National Science Foundation, United States Economic Development Administration (EDA), and Ohio Department of Development. In 2024, we are largely focused on landing awards from the Ohio Innovation Hub Program and the EDA's Regional Technology and Innovation Hub Program and Recompete Pilot Program.

**Strategic (re)Designation of Rubber** – Advocate for the federal government's redesignation of rubber as a strategic material and work to secure the necessary investment(s) needed to promote development, scale-up, and growth of alternate sources of natural rubber. Having a secured supply of this critically important material is of significant importance to our economy and national security.

**State Capital Budget/OTSCIF and Federal Appropriations** – Actively engage lawmakers at the state and federal level in support of key tax policies, program funding, and local infrastructure support that satisfy our region's broader economic development goals and business climate.

**Targeted Workforce Investments and Interventions** – Support efforts to pass legislation and implement programs that seek to retain Ohio’s graduates and attract future workforce through the utilization of state incentives in partnership with higher education institutions and businesses.

**IRB Modernization** – Advocate for long-needed regulatory improvements to industrial revenue bonds that would enable manufacturing companies to access more flexible and less expensive capital and enhance the industry’s overall capacity to grow.

**New Market Tax Credits (NMTC)** – In light of this program’s proven success as an economic development tool in attracting private capital into low-income communities, the ACAA will advocate for this program to be made permanent, and for an increase in annual funding and project investment caps.

**Protecting Healthcare Workers, Patients, and Visitors** – Advocate for legislation that helps keep our healthcare workforce safe and provides enhanced penalties for those who knowingly assault/intimidate hospital employees and their guests. This will help prevent future violence and other negative impacts on this key industry’s workforce.

**Immigration Reform** – Advocate for an increase in the number of and access to H-1B visas and other policies, regulations, and reforms that improves our region’s ability to attract and retain diverse and highly skilled talent.

**Industry Sector Partnerships** – Advocate for the continued funding and support of the Akron-Canton region’s existing ISPs, which are focused on manufacturing, healthcare, polymer, and tech industries. Explore funding and support for new ISPs targeted at critical regional workforce needs.

**Business Income Deduction** – Support efforts to make the Business Income Deduction permanent at both the state and federal level to support jobs and avoid raising taxes on small- and middle-market businesses.

**Retreaded Truck Tire Jobs, Supply Chain Security and Sustainability Act** – Advocate for legislation that would provide tax credits to fleet owners who purchase retreaded commercial vehicle tires, which will enhance sustainability, grow American jobs, and better capitalize on the environmental benefits of extending the life and utility of American-made tires.

**Repeal R&D Amortization** – Pass legislation to repeal a harmful provision (included within the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017) and return to pre-January, 1, 2022 policy that allowed businesses to deduct qualified research expenses in the year those costs were incurred. This provision creates significant cash flow problems for innovators and startup businesses and its repeal will ensure they can continue innovating and create jobs.

**Downtown Redevelopment** – Advocate for state and federal legislation that would create tax credits and other economic development tools to support efforts to redevelop obsolete office space into other commercial, retail, or residential use.

**Data Privacy** – Advocate for legislation that provides small businesses with clear, common-sense regulations that protects from fraud and abuse and encourages flexibility. Any such legislation should take steps to avoid stymieing innovation and competitiveness.

## **PUBLIC POLICY AGENDA**

*The ACAA’s Public Policy Agenda provides a sense of our members’ mutual interests and a collective point of view from the business community on a broad variety of policy issues and opportunities.*

### **INVEST IN HUMAN CAPITAL**

To continue supporting the development of the region's talent pipeline, the ACAA will work closely with key stakeholders to address regional workforce needs by identifying, connecting, and creating opportunities that effectively, efficiently, and cohesively bring together students, skills training opportunities, and in-demand jobs.

### Education Connectivity

- Support efforts to adequately fund higher education institutions by increasing the State Share of Instruction so they remain affordable and accessible, as well as continue providing strong educational foundations and skill development in alignment with the region's economic development priorities and workforce needs.
- Encourage communities, schools, and governments to work together to fund public education for the economic success of the region.
- Advocate for policies and funding that support and strengthen the cradle-to-career continuum, which helps ensure students are prepared, succeed academically, earn a post-secondary degree or accreditation, and/or acquire the necessary skills to enter the workforce.
- Continue to support the Akron Public Schools and Canton City Schools College and Career Academies and related programs that prepare students for 21st Century careers by linking coursework to industry themes with a strong focus on experiential learning opportunities.
- Advocate for standards that provide a rigorous curriculum to ensure students are college and career ready.
- Continue to support regional STEM platform schools that serve as the model program for the development and sharing of 21st Century skills.
- Advocate for increased funding and accessibility to programs, such as the Ohio College Opportunity Grant, that help ensure students who need financial assistance can receive a quality education.
- Support initiatives to create mutually beneficial partnerships among regional institutions and industry stakeholders to realize our region's higher education institutions' economic development capacity by converting their research capabilities into commercial and talent attraction opportunities.

### Talent Attraction and Retention

- Drive initiatives and advocacy efforts that facilitate internships, externships, apprenticeships, co-ops, job shadows, and other experiential learning opportunities to bridge the gap between small- and mid-market employers and an evolving student and mid-skill workforce.
- Support programs, initiatives, and advocacy efforts that work towards enhancing downtown vitality through the attraction and retention of talent and young professionals.
- Advocate for policies and legislation that create new tax/financial incentives and other innovative strategies designed to attract new nonresident students and retain recent graduates.
- Pursue policies at the state and federal level that further enable our region to retain talent through various reforms to immigration policy.
- Support policies and legislation that address Ohio's "benefits cliff" by removing disincentives and barriers to wage progression and gainful employment and replacing them with improved information and direction that leads to financial independence.
- Advocate for additional funding and continued improvements to Ohio's Step Up To Quality Program to ensure Ohioans have access to quality childcare services that position our youth for developmental success and enables parents to return to and stay in the workforce.
- Support policies and initiatives that provide a route to re-entry and further funding for wrap-around services for those affected by addiction, incarceration, trauma, and mental/behavioral health issues.
- Support efforts that strengthen talent pipelines for mental and behavioral health professions to ensure Ohio has an adequate workforce to properly treat those with mental illnesses, address the stigma of addiction, and provide employers with increased access to treatment and recovery resources for employees.

### Closing the Skills Gap

- Support public-private partnerships that provide programmatic support and targeted training opportunities designed to align employee skills with the needs of in-demand jobs and help employers bridge employment disparities.
- Advocate for policies and legislation that support mid-tech skills training opportunities for incumbent workers and those considered to be un- or under-employed, particularly for those in disadvantaged populations, enabling them to adapt to evolving workforce trends and in-demand jobs.

## **SUPPORT THE FOUNDATIONS OF GROWTH**

The ACAA will actively advocate for the utilization, creation, and preservation of policies and programs that are vital in supporting job creation and retention, capital investment, and improving Ohio's business climate.

### Entrepreneurship

- Advocate for legislation that funds state and federal programs whose purpose is to better connect small, early-stage, and minority- and women-owned companies with capital.
- Create opportunities and enhance support networks for emerging businesses and entrepreneurs to thrive and attain self-sufficiency.
- Pursue policy and funding opportunities in collaboration with regional partners to support entrepreneurial investment and innovation.
- Work with local and regional partners to support technology transfer and product development ecosystems.
- Facilitate and support programs and initiatives that mentor, support, attract and retain entrepreneurs of all backgrounds striving to do business in the Akron-Canton region.

### Innovation Ecosystems

- Promote policies and funding that enhance the retention and expansion of local industry clusters such as Advanced Materials (metal, plastics/polymers, biomaterials, and liquid crystals); Advanced Manufacturing; Healthcare (biomedical); Oil, Gas and Water; Communications; Instruments, Controls and Electronics; Logistics and Distribution; Defense; and Service (Finance/Insurance/ Real Estate/Housing) as an integral part of our economic growth strategy.
- Build upon the existing momentum of regional assets such as the Polymer Industry Cluster, Appalachian Regional Clean Hydrogen Hub, Bounce Innovation Hub, Akron Biomedical Corridor, NEOMED/REDI Zone, Walsh SPARQ Lab, Canton Innovation District and other innovation ecosystems focused on biotech, life sciences, manufacturing and healthcare industries.
- Continue to strengthen public-private partnerships to enable creative collaboration and sustainable investment opportunities.
- Work with regional partners to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of economic development efforts and research partnerships within Northeast Ohio.

### Taxation

- Oppose policies and legislation that create undue burdens for individual sellers, entrepreneurs, and small businesses during tax season.
- Support efforts to enact common sense reforms to Ohio's state and municipal income tax laws that favor uniformity over complexity and balance employer interests and the needs of Ohio's metropolitan cities.
- Advocate for pro-growth tax policies that preserve global competitiveness, improve stability and predictability, and create a tax climate that strengthens the regional business community's ability to invest in new products, equipment, and employees.
- Advocate for the maintenance of pro-business tax policies, such as the Business Income Deduction, to maintain jobs and avoid raising taxes on small- and middle-market companies.

- Support legislation that sustains and creates tax credits that help secure funding for economic development projects and support business attraction, retention, and expansion efforts. We will similarly support bills that enable the continued use of tax incentives that encourage and expand the ability of employers to hire workers who traditionally have barriers to employment.
- Oppose efforts to suspend and/or repeal state and federal gas taxes to avoid significantly reducing the investments made in surface and multimodal transportation.
- Oppose efforts to impose punitive taxes on individual economic sectors and activities.

## **STRENGTHEN REGIONAL BUSINESS**

The ACAA will advocate for policies and legislation that enables regional businesses to operate in cost-effective and innovative ways and support initiatives that strengthen their ability to grow and succeed.

### Healthcare

- Support policies that keep health benefits affordable and accessible for employers and employees. This includes opposing any policy proposals that would: 1) drive-up the cost of employer sponsored healthcare in Ohio, 2) erode ERISA protections 3) inhibit an employer's right to privately contract with insurance companies, and 4) impose healthcare mandates on employers.
- Oppose policies that infringe upon the rights of employers, such as anti-vaccine legislation, which substantially alters their capacity and flexibility to make decisions they determine to be in the best interest of their employees and customers.
- Continue to support market-driven solutions to control growth in health care costs and foster competition in the private health insurance market.
- Support efforts to maintain adequate, predictable, and sustainable payment for health care services provided through the Medicaid program.
- Support sustainable public-private solutions to increase citizen access to health insurance coverage and decrease the number of uninsured.
- Support initiatives that enable healthcare institutions to be fiscally sustainable and provide quality health care.
- Advocate for a competent worker's compensation system that works for both state-funded and self-insured employers and proficiently balances providing proper medical treatment for injured employees and cost for employers.
- Support efforts to attract funding to help with select healthcare priorities such as behavioral health workforce development efforts and assets.

### Rules and Regulations

- Support efforts to improve Ohio's unemployment compensation system that addresses fraud, pursues long-term fiscal solvency, and promotes tools, resources, and incentives for beneficiaries to obtain gainful employment as soon as possible.
- Advocate for the reduction or elimination of red tape and bureaucratic barriers that impose undue burden on businesses and/or harm productivity and profitability.
- Support efforts that work to ensure government is creating and implementing policy that is responsive to both business and citizen needs.
- Monitor the local, state, and national economy and partner with elected officials and governmental entities to address economic and business concerns.
- Support policies and legislation that would create employment protections for all Ohioans, regardless of gender, gender identity, or sexual orientation.
- Oppose policies and legislation that do not balance employer and employee interests.
- Advocate for policies and legislation that provide businesses with a stable, predictable body of law and protects Ohio's Constitution from out-of-state interests, ensuring that our laws reflect the values and preferences of Ohioans.

### Underserved Enterprises

- Advocate for legislation that creates/expands policies which increase business opportunities for minority- and women-owned business enterprises.
- Support the growth and sustainability of businesses owned by minorities, women, veterans, and disabled persons by supporting them in procurement initiatives and proactively sharing business-related information, resources, and opportunities.
- Drive policies and initiatives that provide employment opportunity and economic inclusion for all residents of the Akron-Canton region.

### **REVITALIZE AND MAINTAIN PHYSICAL ASSETS**

The ACA recognizes the massive economic implications that having well-maintained cultural amenities, a strong physical infrastructure, and robust regional transit systems has for Ohio. Because of this, we will advocate for policies, legislation and related funding that enables the continued maintenance and development of the Akron-Canton region's physical assets and the reliability and affordability of workforce mobility.

### Regional Assets and Opportunities

- Support efforts that promote community planning concepts that provide balance for citizens to live, work, and play.
- Support projects that would preserve, expand, and revitalize our urban core and adjoining neighborhoods to provide a variety of housing options for residents of all income levels and ethnic and racial backgrounds.
- Advocate for funding of sustainable development opportunities that enhance regional corridors, redevelop/repurpose obsolete sites and vacant buildings, and improve existing historical assets.
- Support awareness efforts around how public safety impacts the business community and its role in our broader economy so decision makers understand the importance of adequately funding and supporting local services.

### Digital Connectivity & Communication

- Advocate for legislation that helps bring increased broadband access and 5G technologies to locations in the Akron-Canton region and parts of Ohio considered to be unserved or underserved areas.
- Support policies and initiatives that further develop and implement new technologies that position educators, businesses, and healthcare systems to be more effective and efficient.
- Advocate for legislation and policies that support investments in effective adoption and affordability programs that address barriers preventing people from connecting to broadband services and otherwise help close the digital divide.
- Oppose efforts that obstruct the effective and efficient provisioning of fast, reliable, accessible, and affordable broadband services to avoid detrimental impacts on economic development across Ohio.
- Support policies and legislation that maximize Ohio's ability to close the digital divide and oppose efforts that would constrain expansion and connectivity efforts or limit the options available to communities by disabling existing services and/or prohibiting public-private partnerships.

### Transportation and Infrastructure

- Support Akron-Canton Airport's (CAK) capital improvement plan and efforts that effectively utilize CAK as a vital regional asset.
- Support advocacy efforts and initiatives that promote new economic activities and attract additional commercial airline and cargo services to CAK, positioning it for long-term economic growth and vitality.
- Advocate for federal and state funding to extend the four-lane U.S. Route 30 highway from Canton to the Pennsylvania border.

- Advocate for transportation policies and related funding that improves the movement of goods and people in a way that enables economic growth.
- Support efforts to educate state leaders on the critical needs of Ohio's transportation infrastructure and advocate for dedicated funding and sustainable resources to support Akron-Canton's public transit systems and their effective and affordable transport of displaced workers in urban communities to Job Hubs.

### Energy

- Advocate for a regulatory structure that provides a fair balance between keeping prices reasonable, stable, and affordable for customers, while ensuring utilities have the resources they need to make appropriate investments in service reliability, including the replacement of aging infrastructure.
- Advocate for the diverse supply of reliable and affordable energy, with a focus on maintaining in-state electric generation that supports sustainable jobs, a consistent tax base and economic development.
- Advocate for renewable and alternative energy resources where it does not distort competitive markets or increase the burden on taxpayers and ratepayers.
- Support the responsible development of the state's Utica and Marcellus Shale resources to provide lower energy costs for the region and expand economic development and employment opportunities within our region.
- Promote free market, cost-effective energy efficiency programs that can help our member companies make financially efficient decisions without increasing costs for any consumer.
- Support the region's growing capacity to produce, transport, and develop hydrogen energy resources and their application in transportation, power generation, and industrial sectors.

### Cultural and Recreational Amenities

- Promote projects that would support the arts, sports, and other recreational activities that create or sustain economic impact or play a role in talent attraction and retention.
- Support the ongoing growth and development of the Pro Football Hall of Fame and Hall of Fame Village as nationally recognized attractions.
- Explore federal and state support for redevelopment of the Canton Memorial Civic Center and Cultural Center campus.

### Prisons and Corrections

- Continue supporting the utilization and expansion of successful, cost-saving, community corrections programs that help make communities safer, hold offenders accountable, and provide opportunities for offenders to improve their lives.
- Support alternative sentencing for appropriate offenders, specifically for those who are better served by our region's Drug Courts, which will save the state hundreds of millions of dollars that could be better spent on education, rehabilitation, healthcare, and workforce development.