



AKRON-CANTON ADVOCACY ALLIANCE
CANTON REGIONAL CHAMBER + GREATER AKRON CHAMBER

PUBLIC POLICY AGENDA



2025-2026

CONTENTS

03.

About the Akron-Canton
Advocacy Alliance

04.

2026 Action Plan

06.

Public Policy Agenda

17.

Our Sponsors

18.

Connect with Us and Our Work

A NOTE FROM THE CEOS:

Following years of close collaboration, the Greater Akron Chamber (GAC) and Canton Regional Chamber of Commerce (CRCC) have officially formed the Akron-Canton Advocacy Alliance (ACAA) with the mission of providing a regional platform for discussing, researching, and applying shared values and principles to public policy issues in the Akron-Canton region.

Alongside member employers, community stakeholders, elected officials, and government representatives, the ACAA advocates for legislative and regulatory priorities at the local, state, and federal levels – providing us with a truly unified front when addressing the most pressing issues facing the business community.

We strongly encourage members of our regional business community to participate in the advocacy process and help us bring greater leverage to our work in Columbus and Washington, D.C. We’re very excited about the work ahead of us and as always, are deeply appreciative of our members’ leadership, engagement, and support in our work of being the Akron-Canton region’s voice of business!



STEVE MILLARD
President & CEO
Greater Akron
Chamber



JEFF DAFLER
President & CEO
Canton Regional
Chamber of Commerce

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.

2026 ACTION PLAN

Our 2026 Action Plan represents key policy and advocacy to-dos that are timely, relevant, and require a majority of our time and attention throughout the year.



READ THE FULL PLAN



2026 ACTION PLAN

STATE CAPITAL BUDGET

(State)

Advocate for a robust state capital bill that includes funding for community projects, and proactively support priority projects identified during the Capital Budget Task Force process.

TECH CRED

(State)

In respect to the program's pause in 2026, engage in policy discussions focused on appropriate reforms to Ohio's TechCred program to ensure long-term programmatic sustainability, efficiency, and effectiveness.

R&D LEGISLATION

(State)

Drive efforts to pass new legislation to expand the State of Ohio's R&D tax credit, enabling small businesses to utilize and benefit from it.

CONGRESSIONAL APPROPRIATIONS

(Federal)

Continue advocating for critically important funding in support of several key initiatives, including polymers, workforce, and economic development.

DOWNTOWN (RE)DEVELOPMENT

(State & Federal)

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.

POLYMER INDUSTRY CLUSTER

(State & Federal)

Ensure the policy and funding needs of the Polymer Industry Cluster are appropriately addressed across all advocacy activities and establish a government affairs functionality for the initiative.

STRENGTHEN FEDERAL INNOVATION PROGRAMS

(Federal)

Support efforts that bring long-term stability and viability to programs that support startups and small businesses across technology areas and markets to stimulate innovation, meet R&D needs, and drive commercialization.

[READ THE FULL PLAN](#)

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.



Ohio's success over the past 200 years can be greatly attributed to its manufacturing legacy. The work that the ACAA is doing across multiple fronts such as Workforce Development and Immigration Reform will help ensure that Ohio can continue its enviable position as one of America's top manufacturing hubs. The formation of the ACAA is the perfect example of neighboring communities strengthening their voice through collaboration.

BRADLEY BELDEN

President & COO

The Belden Brick Company

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.
- Advocate for legislation that would provide tax credits that enhance sustainability, grow American jobs, and better capitalize on the environmental benefits of extending the life and utility of domestically-produced goods.



The ACAA's Public Policy Agenda is the cornerstone for driving regional growth and prosperity for small and large businesses. The Policy provides the advocacy framework for transformational investments, investing in human capital, and revitalizing physical assets while leveraging regional, state, and federal resources. The alliance's collaboration will enhance a thriving business environment and drive sustainable growth for the Akron-Canton region.

DWAYNE GROLL

Chief Executive Officer
Environmental Design Group

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

- 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.
- 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.



The ACAA's mission to drive growth and prosperity for Akron-Canton's business community is on display in our 2026 Public Policy Agenda. It reflects our commitment to reducing regulation, supporting business startups/expansions, revitalizing urban cores, improving the movement of goods and people, and pursuing workforce solutions. Through this vehicle, we advocate for policies at the state and federal level that encourage and incentivize the attraction of both new talent and business investment to our region.

JULIE BRANDLE

President

Metis Construction Services, LLC

REVITALIZE AND MAINTAIN PHYSICAL ASSETS

The ACAA 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 retain and attract commercial airline, corporate flight, Advanced Air Mobility, 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.



We share the Chamber's belief that the region's long-term economic growth and success hinges upon a strong and educated workforce and ensuring this success starts at the earliest levels. Our two decades of support for early childhood education through PNC Grow Up Great represents a strategic investment to help broaden opportunities for social and economic mobility among pre-k children. It's also an investment in our future workforce and our communities.

JOE LUCKRING

Regional President –
Akron/Canton/Wooster Region
PNC



THANK YOU
FOR YOUR CONTINUED SUPPORT OF OUR WORK

PRESENTING SPONSORS



PREMIER SPONSORS



SUPPORTING SPONSORS





CONTACT

JOHN RIZZO, VICE PRESIDENT

jrizzo@akroncantonadvocacy.org

330-237-1263

DAISHA OKOLO, MANAGER

dokolo@akroncantonadvocacy.org

234-303-1595



ADVOCACY CENTER