The 2020 Legislative Agenda is formed by input from our members gathered through the annual legislative survey along with conversations with our members throughout the year.

The political realities in New York make advocacy for business issues extremely important. 2019 was an extremely active year for legislators in Albany. Over 930 bills passed both chambers of the legislature. 2020 is likely to be just as active. The Chamber of Commerce will be fighting for a pro-growth, pro-business agenda along with our coalition allies. The Chamber will continue to support policies and agendas which create opportunities for the people and businesses of Broome County.

PETER NEWMAN
Chairman of the Board

STACEY DUNCAN
President and CEO

JOE MIRABITO
Chair, GAC

2019-2020 GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

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Richard Brauer, McFarland Johnson, Inc
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Melissa Hackford, Greater Binghamton Association of Realtors

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Mike Pemberton, DoubleTree by Hilton Binghamton
Jeff Smith, Binghamton Baseball Boosters
Tim Strong, Visions Federal Credit Union
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Terry Wood, Willow Run Foods, Inc.
According to recent reports, Broome County continues to have over 4,000 open jobs to fill. In certain circumstances, there exists a skills gap in which the skill employers need do not match the skills of the available talent within our community. The most searched-for soft skills required by employers in our community are: communication (verbal and written skills), customer service and being a cooperative team player.

The Chamber of Commerce continues to advocate for policies and initiatives that can reduce workforce barriers including Childcare and Transportation. Childcare centers face numerous challenges that make it difficult for them to stay open. The Chamber will continue to advocate for pro-business solutions that will help address the Childcare crisis in our community.

The Chamber's subsidiary organization, the Greater Binghamton Education Outreach Program (GBEOP), has laid the groundwork over the past few years for business-education career exploration initiatives. One big step taken this year has been taking all the career-related programs in our area and laying them out in a K-12 pathway to see how all the programs fit together. GBEOP has launched, or will be launching, some new programs to fill in gaps, including a large career exploration event called SPARK for area 8th grade students. GBEOP is also working with schools and businesses to facilitate company tours and increased interactions between students and business professionals. The Chamber and GBEOP, with the support of the Broome-Tioga Talent Taskforce, will work with our schools and businesses to advocate for necessary change in education policy to make it feasible to prepare our future workforce. The Chamber of Commerce will also continue to work with all relevant community stakeholders to advocate for workforce development initiatives that match the needs of employers in our area.

The Chamber will continue to support initiatives to keep low-level offenders out of prisons and get them into the workforce. Providing someone with a job is often the best type of social program. Employment for someone with a prior criminal record typically reduces recidivism and is beneficial to the well-being of our community. The Chamber will support initiatives based on the voluntary cooperation of employers in our region.

New York State was ranked the number-one highest tax burden in America according to an analysis done by wallet hub. According to this analysis, New York had a tax burden of 12.8%, meaning that, when taking into consideration property taxes, income tax, and sales tax, New Yorkers spend more than any other state as a percent of income on local and state taxes. New York also has the second largest state budget in the country, and it is significantly larger than those of more populous states such as Florida and Texas. The Chamber is a strong advocate for fiscal responsibility that includes less spending and lower taxes.

The Chamber supports lower taxes in order to create a more favorable business climate. High taxes and high spending lead to an environment where businesses suffer. The Chamber supports initiatives at the federal, state, and local level that consolidates or eliminates ineffective government services or programs in an effort to lower taxes and keep more resources in the hands of citizens and businesses within our community.

The Chamber supports the permanent property tax cap that was passed during the budget process for 2019. The property tax cap has saved taxpayers approximately 25 billion dollars since it was first enacted in 2012. The Chamber will stand against any attempt to diminish the integrity of the cap. https://wallethub.com/edu/states-with-highest-lowest-tax-burden/20494/

Publicly Financed Campaigns
The Chamber of Commerce does not support tax dollars going toward yard signs, robo-calls and political television ads. Instead, tax dollars should be going toward beneficial initiatives such as improving infrastructure, workforce development, and tax relief.

Golf Course Tax Assessment Legislation
Last year, legislation was introduced to assess golf courses at their highest and best use rather than their current use. The Chamber will stand against any attempt to raise property taxes on one specific industry.
Supporting the Gig Economy
There are several proposals circulating regarding benefits to gig economy workers. Any reform involving the gig economy, must be done in such a way that it does not pose an existential threat to the success and innovation created by these workers and businesses.

Rent Control/Stabilization
The NYS legislature passed a rent reform package in 2019 that shifted the landscape for tenants and landlords. One key provision was that Upstate Communities can now opt into NYC-style rent stabilization. If landlords are required to go before a rent control board to determine the amount they are allowed to raise rent, this will significantly hurt investment in our housing stock.

The Chamber will advocate for housing policy that encourages growth and reinvestment into our current housing stock, and will therefore oppose any efforts for Broome County local governments to “opt-in”

Reform MWBE Contract Requirements
Many businesses in New York State are unable to meet their MWBE requirements due to a lack of certified providers. The Chamber will advocate that the MWBE process be streamlined to make it easier to find eligible businesses and for MWBEs to become certified.

The Chamber will advocate against attempts to expand the MWBE system. Any increase in the number of contracts that would be required to meet MWBE goals, or a further increase in the % goal itself will make it more difficult for businesses to comply. This change would increase the administrative cost for businesses and is another way NYS businesses will lose their competitive edge.

Scaffold Law
Scaffold law imposes an absolute liability standard on contractors and property owners for gravity-related construction accidents. This law was once intended to champion safety but making the employer 100% liable for all gravity related accidents has had the reverse effect. Additionally, this law drives up construction costs nearly $800 million annually due to its effect on insurance costs.

The repeal of this law would allow more development to occur in NYS. The Chamber supports repealing the scaffold law in order to spur more development in our area.
It is necessary for our local businesses to have access to the energy they need at a price that keeps them competitive. With a global economy, our businesses compete with companies from around the world. Our statewide energy policy must be affordable and reliable if our community is going to be able to thrive.

Unfortunately, in the 2019 legislative session, the ESCO tax exemption was repealed. This provision was put in place to help energy service providers to be able to compete with utility companies, which led to more competitive prices. The repeal of the ESCO tax exemption will lead to higher energy costs for many of our businesses and nonprofits such as hospitals.

The Community Leadership Climate and Protection Act was signed into law in 2019. This legislation requires New York to cut greenhouse gas emissions to 15% of 1990 levels by 2050. It also requires 70% of statewide electricity to be sourced from renewables by 2030 and go carbon-free by 2040. One of the major problems with this legislation is that this bill was passed without enough information available on the cost and feasibility of the proposal. The Chamber will be advocating that the new mandates be implemented with as little cost to the business community as possible. New York must be aware that increased energy costs will drive more businesses out of NY, which will create more pollution when the businesses operate in less environmentally-conscious states.

- EMPLOYER REGULATION -

The Chamber will advocate for pro-growth solutions involving employer regulations.

Workers Comp
In total, New York State employers pay approximately $10 billion in workers compensation premiums annually. While worker’s compensation reform had previously been a big win for most businesses in New York, much work remains to be done. New York’s worker compensation expenses continue to be some of the highest in the nation.

Minimum Wage
The Chamber of Commerce strongly shares the goal of wanting people to have higher wages. However, we believe the best way for this to be accomplished is, first, through a robust economy and a need for talent and, second, through programs for upskilling and training our workforce. One of the challenges of the minimum wage increases that we have seen is that the entry-level positions that provide an opportunity for an employee to learn the skills necessary to move up tend to go away. We have seen companies across the US, Target and others, begin to raise their minimum wage because the economy and their margins are allowing them to. The strong economy and demand for labor will always raise wages in a way that businesses can sustain.

Natural competition for labor drives up wages. In Broome County, wages rose approximately 4.1% in 2018. By creating a friendly business climate, NYS can create a place where wages rise naturally.

Tipped Wage
In 2020, Upstate New York food service workers make $7.85 an hour plus tips. While this is below the minimum wage, all waiters are guaranteed at least a minimum wage. The elimination of this model would be devastating for restaurants and restaurant workers. By imposing a $15 dollar minimum wage on wait staff, the restaurants will be forced to charge more, the customers will have to pay more, and the waiters and waitresses will receive less in tips. This creates a bad situation for all stakeholders.

The Chamber will fight against any attempt to change this model either through the legislative process or the rule-making process.
Streamline the economic development process
The economic development processes are often burdensome and time consuming for businesses looking to locate or expand operations. The current process does not match the needs of businesses in our area.

Ideally, New York would operate with a favorable, pro-growth tax structure. However, that is not a current reality, and this makes tax incentives and other economic development strategies very important.

Improve transportation and infrastructure
Transportation is a critical workforce barrier. Typical bus-lines often do not align with the needs of employers. The Chamber will continue to work to find solutions to this problem including creative private-public partnerships that will allow workers to overcome this barrier.

For communities to revitalize across Upstate NY, the downtown area of a community must be an area of key investment. Empty buildings and vacant lots should be either torn down or repaired to help bring a sense of order and community to an area. The Chamber strongly supports community revitalization efforts.

- ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT -

The Chamber will champion economic development processes that match the needs of businesses.

Predictive Scheduling
The Department of Labor previously considered placing restrictions on the ability of employers to change employee work schedules. The employer was punished for work schedule changes by having to pay a fine to the employee for schedule changes. Compliance with these types of laws is very difficult especially in sectors that fluctuate such as retail and restaurants. This law severely limits the flexibility of the employers and has the potential to sour the employer-employee relationship.

The Chamber will stand against onerous scheduling mandates proposed by the State of NY.

Paid Family Leave/ Bereavement Leave
New York State is on its third year of Paid Family Leave. Many employers have experienced workforce issues because of this program. The current benefits are 10 weeks of paid leave at 60% of employee’s average weekly wage. It is likely that increased benefits will lead to greater use of the program which can be devastating to a small business.

The Chamber will advocate that the Paid Family Leave program does not expand from its current form. The Chamber will also stand against any attempt to shift the cost of Paid Family Leave onto the employer.

Marijuana Legalization
The legalization of Marijuana stalled in the legislature during the 2019 legislative session, but it is very likely that this will once again be a hot topic during 2020.

While the Greater Binghamton Chamber of Commerce takes no official stance on the legalization of marijuana, the Chamber has adopted the position that employers must retain their right to maintain a drug free work environment.

Because there is no real test to determine impairment at the workplace, the Chamber is advocating that businesses retain the right to fire an employee for a failed drug test. Because marijuana stays in someone’s system over an extended period, this means that employers maintain the right to fire someone for after-hour marijuana use.
A constant complaint from membership is the high cost of healthcare coverage in New York State. Over 50% of our membership agree that affordability in the healthcare system is their top healthcare concern.

**Single Payer Healthcare**
This issue will likely be a top priority for many legislators heading into the 2020 legislative session. In 2019, the Senate and Assembly held several hearings on the topic with more to follow. The Chamber supports moving towards more people having health insurance, but not through a Single-Payer, government financed system. Approximately 5% of New Yorkers are uninsured, and only 1% do not qualify for some type of other insurance coverage such as the Essential Plan, Medicaid or ACA. Only 3.5% of Upstate New Yorkers’ remain uninsured.

Assuming Medicaid reimbursement rates are used under a single-payer system, our local hospitals would each lose significant revenue, which would undoubtedly affect the quality of care.

Medical technology is rapidly advancing and has the potential to reduce the cost of healthcare. The Chamber is supportive of finding ways that technology can be used to reduce this burden.

The Chamber of Commerce believes that universality, affordability and quality of care are all important factors in a healthcare system. The best way to achieve this is through a gradual approach and sustained efforts, not through a government takeover of the health insurance industry.

**UPSTATE LEGISLATIVE CAUCUS**
The Greater Binghamton Chamber of Commerce, along with other business community allies such as Unshackle Upstate, supports the formation of a bicameral, bipartisan Upstate Interest Caucus that would meet regularly to discuss and consider the unique issues most important to the economy and employers of Upstate New York. Downstate’s political influence has increased and we must take steps to ensure the interests of the Southern Tier are not drowned out by voices from NYC. This delegation would provide a venue for the legislature to discuss issues from a regional perspective and it would allow advocacy organizations representing the interests of Upstate New York a chance to engage with these members.

**SUMMARY**
The Chamber of Commerce is committed to seeing economic growth and community flourishing in the Greater Binghamton area. When Broome County businesses prosper, our community prospers. This means that the Chamber is committed to a pro-growth pro-business agenda that will help alleviate poverty, increase the competitiveness of our local businesses, and allow residents and businesses to keep more of their hard-earned money. Creating a healthy business climate is critical when we are trying to revitalize our area and create prosperity. The Greater Binghamton Chamber of Commerce will be actively looking for ways to collaborate and advocate for our region.
# 2020 Greater Binghamton Legislative Directory

## County

**County Executive - Jason T. Garnar**  
60 Hawley Street  
6th Floor  
Binghamton, NY 13902  
607.778.2109  
countyexecutive@co.broome.ny.us

**Legislative Chair - Daniel J. Reynolds**  
60 Hawley Street  
6th Floor  
Binghamton, NY 13902  
607.778.2131  
daniel.j.reynolds@co.broome.ny.us

## State

**Governor - Andrew M. Cuomo**  
State Capital  
Albany, NY 12224  
518.474.8390  
governor.ny.gov

**Senator - Frederick J. Akshar II**  
District Office  
44 Hawley Street  
Room 1607  
Binghamton, NY 13901  
607.773.8771  
akshar@nysenate.gov

**Assemblywoman - Donna Lupardo**  
District Office  
44 Hawley Street  
Room 1704  
Binghamton, NY 13901  
607.723.9047  
lupardoD@nyassembly.gov

**Assemblyman - Clifford W. Crouch**  
District Office  
44 Hawley Street  
Room 1607  
Binghamton, NY 13901  
607.773.8771  
crouchC@nyassembly.gov

**Assemblyman - Christopher S. Friend**  
District Office  
1250 Schweizer Road  
Suite 1  
Horseheads, NY 14845  
607.562.3602  
friendC@nyassembly.gov

## Federal

**Congressman - Anthony Brindisi**  
329 Cannon HOB  
Washington, DC 20515  
202.225.3665  
brindisi.house.gov/contact

**Congressman - Tom Reed**  
2263 Rayburn HOB  
Washington, DC 20515  
202.225.3161  
reed.house.gov

**U.S. Senator - Kirsten E. Gillibrand**  
478 Russell Senate Bldg.  
Washington, DC 20510  
202.224.4451  
gillibrand.senate.gov

**U.S. Senator - Charles Schumer**  
313 Hart Senate Bldg.  
Washington, DC 20510  
202.224.6542  
schumer.senate.gov