

PACP January Column
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For more information, contact
Tricia Harris, Director of Public Affairs
717.720.5447

Looking to a Fresh Start in the New Year

The New Year brings a new legislative session and a chance for a fresh start. The distribution of the COVID-19 vaccine is a much needed light at the end of what has felt like a long and ominous tunnel, but our work is nowhere near done. You are all too aware of the economic devastation the pandemic has had on local communities across the state. Yet, despite the ongoing obstacles, the employer community has continued to rise to the challenge. Working together, I'm confident that our unified voice will help to bring to fruition the changes needed to help the Commonwealth's broad-based business community continue to survive- even thrive - and move the state's economy forward.

Our [2021 Legislative Agenda](#) focuses on policies that will improve the Commonwealth's business climate and put the state on a path to long-term prosperity. A pro-growth, forward-thinking agenda has the potential to create a compelling vision; attract emerging, expanding and reshoring industries; and encourage existing employers to increase their commitment on their Pennsylvania investment. Throughout the 2021-22 legislative session we will be working with lawmakers on a multitude of policy fronts, including: addressing the Commonwealth's workforce issues – which have been made worse by the pandemic; enacting long-overdue reforms to the state's Tax Code; streamlining the permitting and regulatory processes; rightsizing unbalanced labor laws and removing government mandates.

The state's legal climate also continues to present a serious burden for employers – especially during the pandemic; and this point was recently underscored in the [2020 annual report of the nation's worst "Judicial Hellholes" by the American Tort Reform Foundation](#). While the Philadelphia Court of Common Pleas – long known for its plaintiff-friendly rulings - has made regular appearances on the list in the past, this year the Court is tied with the Pennsylvania State Supreme Court to nab the No. 1 spot in the yearly ranking. In this new legislative session, we will continue to push for civil liability reform and will also be strongly advocating for targeted COVID-19 liability protections. The governor's veto of H.B. 1737 – which would have provided temporary and targeted safe harbor protections to those following public health guidelines in good faith – was a harsh blow to nonprofits; daycares; and the business, education and medical communities. These protections are a necessary component to our economic recovery and we will not stop fighting for them on both the state and federal levels. To that end, we are continuing our video testimonial campaign on social media. If you have an employer that is willing to share why these safe harbor protections are important to their business and industry, please contact Tricia Harris at tharris@pachamber.org.

As businesses continue to navigate this pandemic landscape, the PA Chamber's multi-year "Bringing PA Back" initiative will continue to provide the clarification and support they need to continue to operate. Your feedback on what you're hearing from your local businesses and community partners have been critical in this effort. Since the early days of the pandemic's arrival in Pennsylvania, the timing of announcements and new mitigation orders by the Wolf administration has led to a chaotic, stressful and confusing environment for the state's business community. Unfortunately, this was recently highlighted when the governor announced updated orders banning indoor dining and the forced closure of gyms, theaters and museums. As we try to get to the bottom of what these orders mean for the business community and work toward solutions that will allow for public health protection while encouraging re-investment and economic growth, we know that the open line of communication we have with our local chamber partners is critical to keeping the business community informed.

In a year of seemingly unending challenges for businesses across the state, I'd like to take this opportunity to thank all of our local chamber partners for all of your hard work and collaboration. The past year highlighted how vital our chamber community is – both to each other and the businesses that we represent. We at the PA Chamber look forward to continuing this close relationship as we work together to help Pennsylvania's economy to not only rebound but strengthen going forward. Wishing you all a very safe holiday season and a Happy New Year!

Gene Barr

President and CEO

PA Chamber of Business and Industry

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The Pennsylvania Chamber of Business and Industry is the state's largest broad-based business association, with its statewide membership comprising businesses of all sizes and across all industry sectors. The PA Chamber is The Statewide Voice of Business™.