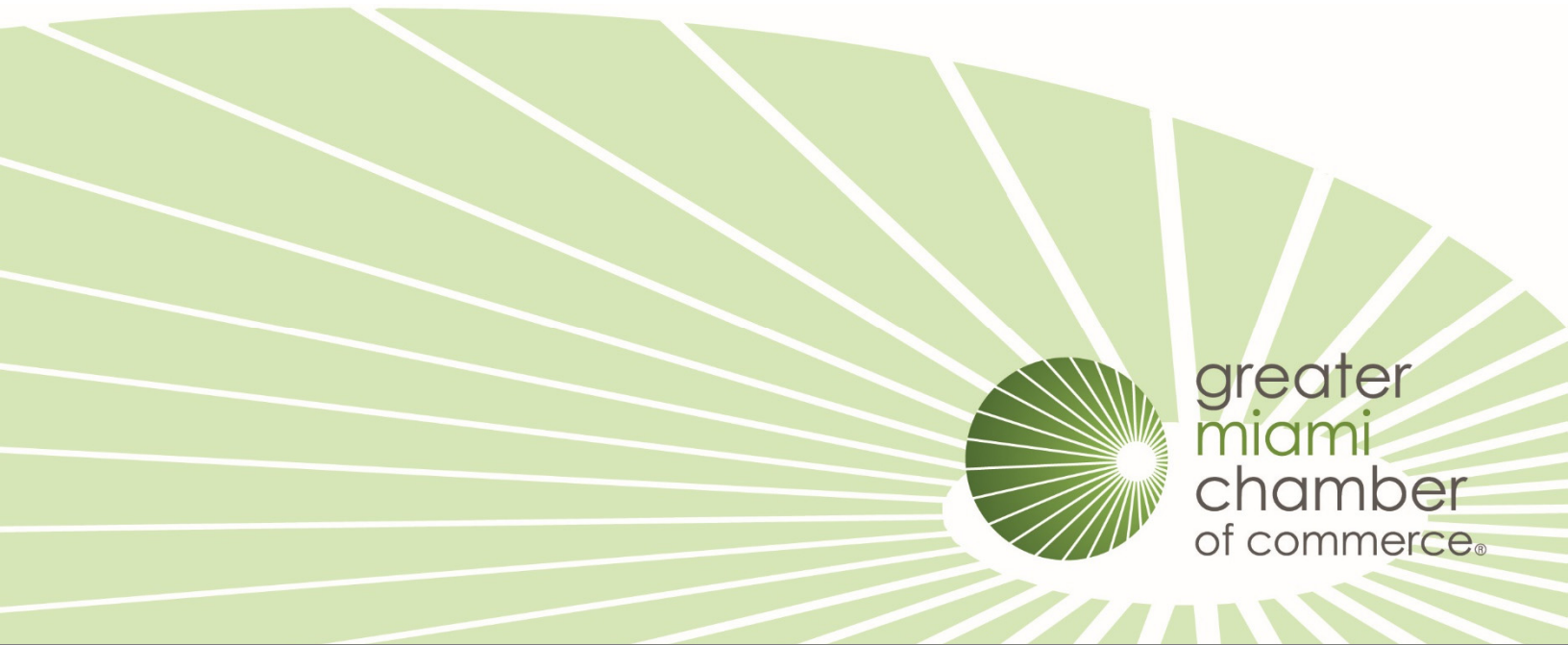


# LEGISLATIVE AGENDA 2017



greater  
miami  
chamber  
of commerce®

**THE VOICE OF BUSINESS IN SOUTH FLORIDA**



## **ABOUT THE CHAMBER**

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The Greater Miami Chamber of Commerce is the leader in business development and the voice of business in South Florida, representing more than 400,000 employees of member companies. Since its inception in 1907 as the Miami Board of Trade, the Greater Miami Chamber has been advancing issues and building a better community being widely recognized and well regarded for its legacy of leadership in economic development and community improvement.

The Greater Miami Chamber is a proactive chamber, regularly engaging in issues important to its member companies and individuals. To carry out its mission, the Greater Miami Chamber involves the private sector in community leadership and produces an annual program of work organized in seven areas: Disruption, Governmental Affairs, Industry Growth, International Business, Leadership Programs, and Marketing, Membership & Strategic Revenue Growth, and Urban/Community Growth to enhance the economic opportunities and quality of life in the area; while partnering with the community's economic development and tourism agencies and their initiatives to make our Greater Miami a better place to live, work and play.

Supporting the Chamber's work is its not-for-profit arm, the South Florida Progress Foundation. For more than four decades, the foundation has invested in programs to improve the quality of life in our community.

The Greater Miami Chamber provides unique opportunities for members through committee involvement, educational seminars, member-to-member programs, new market development trips, branding and advertising opportunities, networking receptions and special events -- in all more than 150 events each year.

The Greater Miami Chamber is primarily funded by membership dues, allowing it an independent presence in the community. It offers countless opportunities and access for business and partnership in building a stronger South Florida.

## **MISSION**

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The Greater Miami Chamber of Commerce is a catalyst to help members grow, improve and protect their businesses. It is dedicated to building the best environment for business in the Americas and committed to improving the economic vitality of South Florida by educating and advocating for solutions to members' business needs.

## **CONTACT**

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## INDEX

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### **Transportation**

**Page 3**

ISSUE: Dedicate Excess Revenue from High-Occupancy Toll Lanes or Express Lanes to Support Express Bus Service  
 ISSUE: Clarify Liability and Indemnification Obligations with Respect to Railway Shared by Inter-City and Private Trains  
 ISSUE: Allocate Additional Recurring Funding for the Florida New Starts Transit Program

### **Economic Development**

**Page 4**

ISSUE: Support Increased Funding for Enterprise Florida

### **Education & Workforce Development**

**Page 5 - 6**

ISSUE: High Quality Early Education Funding  
 ISSUE: Funding for Workforce Program Capacity at Miami-Dade College (MDC)  
 ISSUE: Funding for the Florida Resident Access Grant (FRAG)  
 ISSUE: Florida International University (FIU) Strategic Land Acquisition  
 ISSUE: Funding for StartUP FIU  
 ISSUE: Increased K-12 Education Funding  
 ISSUE: Study to Measure the Impact of District Cost Differential (DCD) on School District's with Higher Costs of Living  
 ISSUE: Exempt K-12 and Workforce Education Spending from Budget Cuts Increase Title I, Title III, and IDEA Funding  
 ISSUE: Federal Funding for Unreimbursed Costs Associated with Educating Immigrant Students

### **Health & Human Services**

**Page 7**

ISSUE: Preservation of the Low Income Pool (LIP) and Increased Reimbursement Rates for Safety Net Hospitals  
 ISSUE: Expand Medical Tourism  
 ISSUE: State Funding for Area Agencies on Aging (AAA)  
 ISSUE: Expanded Access to the Florida KidCare Program

### **Housing**

**Page 8**

ISSUE: Funding for the Housing Choice Voucher Program  
 ISSUE: Continued Funding for the National Housing Trust Fund  
 ISSUE: Support Senate Passage of the Housing Opportunity through Modernization Act (H.R 3700)  
 ISSUE: Support Enactment of the Affordable Housing Improvement Act of 2016  
 ISSUE: Sadowski Housing Trust Fund  
 ISSUE: Workforce Housing

### **Immigration**

**Page 9**

ISSUE: Support Immigration Reform  
 ISSUE: Support Expansion of the E-2 Treaty Investor Visa Program  
 ISSUE: EB-5 Investor Visa  
 ISSUE: Support Increasing the H-1B Specialty Occupation Visa Quota

### **International Trade & Commerce**

**Page 10**

ISSUE: Reauthorization of the Export-Import Bank of the United State (EX-IM) Charter

### **Military Affairs**

**Page 10**

ISSUE: Expand the Protection against Unreasonable Delays in Community Association Approval Processes  
 ISSUE: Limit the Aggregate Amount of Advanced Rent and Security Deposit Collected from Active Duty Service Members  
 ISSUE: Authorize the Department of Transportation to Exempt Service Members from Tolls during their Daily Commute

### **Resilience**

**Page 11**

ISSUE: Sustained Funding for the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Project  
 ISSUE: Modify Statewide Building Code to Address the Effects of Sea Level Rise, Tidal Flooding, and Storm Surge Events

## TRANSPORTATION

### STATE ISSUES

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**ISSUE: Dedicate Excess Revenue from High-Occupancy Toll Lanes or Express Lanes to Support Express Bus Service**

Enact legislation that will dedicate a percentage of certain toll revenues to be used expand and support express bus service. The Department of Transportation has the authority issue bonds secured by toll revenue on high-occupancy toll lanes or express lanes. The Department can continue to collect toll revenue on these facilities after the bond indebtedness is discharged. This toll revenue must first be used to pay annual operation and maintenance costs. Currently, any remaining toll revenue may be used for the construction, maintenance, or improvement of any road in the State Highway System within the County/Counties in which it was collected, or to support express bus service on the facility from which it was collected. By mandating that a certain percentage of this revenue to be used expand and support express bus would create a dedicated funding source and allow for continued expansion and improvement of express bus service.

**ISSUE: Clarify Liability and Indemnification Obligations with Respect to Railway Shared by Inter-City and Private Trains**

Enact legislation that will clarify liability and indemnification obligations related to railways shared by privately and publicly operated trains. The clarification of these obligations is a critical component of the completion of the Downtown Miami Link and the Coastal Link because Tri-Rail will need to run on privately owned FEC railway. In the 2016 Florida Legislature's session a provision was amended into House Bill 7061 (HB 7061), the omnibus transportation bill, which would have clarified these obligations. The bill with such a provision was passed out of the House, but amended the final HB 7061 that was passed by the Senate.

**ISSUE: Allocate Additional Recurring Funding for the Florida New Starts Transit Program**

Allocate additional funding for the Florida New Starts Transit Program (NSTP). The NSTP was established by the 2005 Florida Legislature to assist local governments in developing and constructing fixed-guideway and bus rapid transit projects to accommodate and manage urban growth and development. The NSTP provides transit agencies with up to a dollar for dollar match of the local (non-federal) share of project costs for transit fixed-guideway projects and facilities that qualify under the FTA New Starts Program. The definition of eligibility includes rail transit and bus rapid transit (BRT) systems. This program also allows a dollar for dollar match of local funds towards project costs for projects funded with state and local funds only. All the projects identified by the Strategic Miami Area Rapid Transit (SMART) Plan would potentially be eligible for funding under this program. Increasing the funding available under the NSTP would expand the available funding for the construction of routes identified by the SMART Plan once the planning phase is completed.



## ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

### STATE ISSUES

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**ISSUE: Support Increased funding for Enterprise Florida**

Support the funding of Enterprise Florida's (EFI) toolkit to attract new jobs and investments to our state. Support increasing EFI'S base budget for international trade and marketing promotion activities. International trade and commerce needs an environment that is conducive to increased activity. Trade is a significant generator of jobs and growth but is not a tool that can achieve results alone. Miami is a major trade gateway for the state and 45% of all US Exports to Latin America move through the Miami Customs District. Miami continues to rank as on the leading international trade hubs in the world and set a new national record for trade surplus of \$25.70 billion.

## EDUCATION

### STATE ISSUES

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#### **ISSUE: High Quality Early Education Funding**

The foundation for communication, critical thinking, problem solving, and teamwork – skills that employer cite as critical to workplace success – is largely developed by the age of five. High quality early learning opportunities, as well as early detection and treatment of childhood developmental and behavioral challenges, are essential for children’s development and later success in school and life. Additionally, affordable childcare is essential for low-income and working parents to maintain employment and become financially self-sufficient which leads to increased state tax collections and economic productivity.

- ***Increase School Readiness (SR) program funding – \$85 million.***
- ***Restore Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten (VPK) funding to 2007 levels (\$2,677 per child) – \$40 million.***
- ***Expand the Help Me Grow (HMG) program – \$4 million.***

#### **ISSUE: Funding for Workforce Program Capacity at Miami-Dade College (MDC)**

Secure additional funding for workforce programs at Miami-Dade College (MDC). There are thousands of jobs that go un-filled due to the lack of well trained and skilled workers in targeted fields. According to the Florida Department of Economic Opportunity, there are over 1,200 job openings in the identified sectors for Miami-Dade and Monroe counties and only 280 graduates qualified to fill them each year. MDC is working with the business community to create industry-driven college-to-workforce training programs to meet local labor force demand in targeted sectors. These sectors include drone navigation, immersive virtual reality, cybersecurity, data analytics, and advanced manufacturing – all of which have higher than average starting salaries.

***Appropriation request of \$20 million from General Revenue for the Florida College System.***

#### **ISSUE: Funding for the Florida Resident Access Grant (FRAG)**

Support additional funding for the Florida Resident Access Grant (FRAG) program in the amount of \$3,000 per student. The FRAG program is a tuition assistance grant awarded to full-time Florida resident undergraduate students attending of the 31 Independent Colleges and Universities of Florida (ICUF). A lack of response to the growth in this student population would have a direct negative impact on many future students. The FRAG program only represents approximately 1.5% of the state’s higher-education budget, despite the fact that the ICUF institutions it benefits award 1/3 of the bachelor and advanced degrees in Florida.

#### **ISSUE: Florida International University (FIU) Strategic Land Acquisition**

Support FIU’s efforts to secure state funding for the relocation of the Miami-Dade County Fair and expansion of the University’s footprint. FIU has maximized the use of its existing space and needs to expand in order to meet the needs of the growing student population and continue its service to the South Florida community.

***Anticipated appropriations request of \$20 million from Public Education Capital Outlay (PECO) funds.***

#### **ISSUE: Funding for StartUP FIU**

Support Florida International University’s (FIU) efforts to secure funding for StartUP FIU, an initiative aimed at harnessing, encouraging, and supporting the multitude of entrepreneurial activities at FIU. This initiative reflects a university, regional, and state emphasis on job creation, workforce development, and post degree employment. As a federally designated minority institution of over 54,000 students, the impact FIU on Miami’s and Florida’s economy is significant.

***Appropriation request of \$6.1 million of which \$4.7 million is recurring.***



**ISSUE: Increased K-12 Education Funding**

Increase the base student allocation by at least \$200.00 per student. Despite recent increases in education funding, per student funding is still below 2007-2008 levels and Florida currently ranks 41<sup>st</sup> in per pupil K-12 funding. Adequate state funding is required to provide the high quality K-12 education necessary to ensure Florida’s economic competitiveness now and in the future.

**ISSUE: Study to Measure the Impact of District Cost Differential (DCD) on School District’s with Higher Costs of Living**

Secure funding to conduct a study on the restoration of the original District Cost Differential (DCD). The DCD was added to the base funding formula to compensate school districts that operate in higher cost of living areas to ensure they could offer competitive salaries and recruit and train high quality teachers. In 2004-05, the “Amenity Factor” was added to the DCD under the theory that if salaries are lower in a particular county then people must be willing to work for less and the county’s district should receive less funding. The result has been a significant redistribution of taxpayer dollars. This year, Miami-Dade taxpayer will pay \$1,064 per student more than the State average in local funding, but the county’s district will only receive more than \$99 more than the State average in total funding. A study is necessary to demonstrate the negative impact this has had on Miami-Dade County and other high cost of living districts across the state.

## **FEDERAL ISSUES**

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**ISSUE: Exempt K-12 and Workforce Education Spending from Budget Cuts Increase Title I, Title III, and IDEA Funding**

Prevent the reduction of federal funding as part of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) reauthorization and increase funding in the following areas that benefit fragile students that school districts are federally mandate to provide additional services for.

- Title I funding is for low income, migrant, neglected, or delinquent students.
- Title III funding is used to provide service for English Language Learners.
- IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) provides services for disabled students.

**ISSUE: Federal Funding for Unreimbursed Costs Associated with Educating Immigrant Students**

Secure additional funding and waiver of the \$1 million award ceiling for the Refugee School Impact Program, which provides funding for the effective integration and education of refugee children. Miami-Dade County has seen a spike in immigrant students, especially Cuban born students. It is estimated that there is a cost of \$2,720 per student that is borne by the school district and not reimbursed by federal or state funding. The Florida Director of Refugee Services estimates that 71% of newly arrived Cubans are concentrated in Miami-Dade County, which costs Miami-Dade County Public schools \$11 million per year. The school district is currently required to allocate general funds to cope with the impact of unfunded federal immigration policies. Additional funding and the waiver of the \$1 million award ceiling for the Refugee School Impact Program are necessary to alleviate the burden of this unfunded federal mandate on Miami-Dade County.



## HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES

### STATE ISSUES

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#### **ISSUE: Preservation of the Low Income Pool (LIP) and Increased Reimbursement Rates for Safety Net Hospitals**

Support preservation of the low income pool (LIP) and increased Medicaid provider reimbursement rates for teaching, public, and children's hospitals. Federal CMS has charged Florida to move toward a significantly reformed Medicaid payment system. Federal CMS has indicated that the Low Income Pool program may only be used to fund hospitals' uncompensated care costs and may not be used to pay for Medicaid hospital reimbursement. Removing LIP from Medicaid hospital reimbursement would result in a 54.7% cut to the Medicaid hospital reimbursement budget, which would leave the entire Medicaid hospital reimbursement budget in severe deficit and vulnerable to collapse. In addition to preserving the LIP, Medicaid provider reimbursement rates for teaching, public, and children's hospital systems need to be increased. These hospital systems play a crucial role in caring for our state's neediest citizens, providing highly specialized medical care, and training our next generation of doctors to ensure a healthy future for Florida.

#### **ISSUE: Expand Medical Tourism**

Support Visit Florida and the Legislature's efforts to develop marketing and incentive programs to promote individual and medical convention travel to Florida from collaborative partnerships. Supplement the program appropriation from \$5 million to \$10 million.

#### **ISSUE: State Funding for Area Agencies on Aging (AAA)**

Provide additional funding commensurate with increased appropriations for new Medicaid Managed Long Term Care Program slots. New program slots have a direct workload impact on Area Agencies on Aging. ALL elders and adults with disabilities applying for new community-based Medicaid Managed Long Term Care program slots must apply through the 11 AAAs. The 11 AAAs assist applicants with long term care program education, eligibility screening, and provide hands-on assistance with Medicaid financial eligibility. The 11 AAAs received \$1.3 million in non-recurring appropriations in prior fiscal years to support a workload increase under the Medicaid Managed Long Term Care Program.

***Appropriation request of \$1.3 million in recurring funds for all AAA's and an additional \$300,000 in recurring funds for Region 11 (Miami-Dade) which has the largest number of Medicaid long term care applicants.***

#### **ISSUE: Expanded Access to the Florida KidCare Program**

Extend KidCare coverage to include all children allowed by federal law under provisions of the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP). By even the most conservative estimates, more than a half-million children in Florida do not have access to health insurance. Thirty-two percent of Florida's uninsured children do not have a regular place of care, and as a result, many uninsured children do not swiftly seek treatment when they are ill. When uninsured children finally are able to enter a hospital in Florida, they are 1.5 times more likely than insured children to die in the hospital. Research shows that those with better childhood health earn and save more money, are more productive, and are less dependent on welfare and public subsidies.

***Appropriations request of \$14 million.***



## HOUSING

### STATE ISSUES

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**ISSUE: Sadowski Housing Trust Fund**

Support preservation of the Housing Trust Fund and oppose fund diversion. Since the Sadowski Affordable Housing Act was passed in 1992, Florida has benefited from a dedicated revenue source to support housing programs, including down-payment and mortgage assistance for first-time homebuyers and support for new construction and rehabilitation of properties for rental and ownership. The fund is sustained entirely by a portion of documentary stamp taxes paid on deeds. Since 2008, an increasing portion of the Trust Fund's revenues have been swept into the general revenue, reaching 100% in 2011.

**ISSUE: Workforce Housing**

Support an increase in funding for rental housing under the Community Contribution Tax Credit Program (CCTCP). The CCTCP was initially created to provide a dedicated revenue stream to revitalize blighted communities, but has since been expanded to the development of low income housing. The current allocation of funds of the CCTCP does not match the state's current housing needs. Only a small percentage of the revenue from the CCTCP is used for rental housing, as the largest percentage of the funding is used for homeownership projects.

### FEDERAL ISSUES

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**ISSUE: Funding for the Housing Choice Voucher Program**

Support funding for the Housing Choice Voucher (voucher) program at the level requested by the Administration for FY 2017. House appropriators allocated \$20.19 billion for the voucher program, representing \$560 million more than last year, but still \$243 million less than Senate and \$475 million less than the Administration's FY 2017 request. Additionally, the House allocated \$1.65 billion to cover the public housing authorities' administrative costs of running the voucher program - \$427 million less than the Administration's request.

**ISSUE: Continued Funding for the National Housing Trust Fund**

Support continued funding for the National Housing Trust Fund (NHTF). The NHTF was established in July 2008 as part of the Housing and Economic Recovery Act of 2008 (HERA) to create a dedicated funding source for rental housing for very low-income and extremely low-income households. Funds would be contributed through a portion of profits from Freddie Mac and Fannie Mae. However, after the economic downturn in September 2008, Freddie Mac and Fannie Mae were taken into conservatorship by Federal Housing Finance Agency. If implemented, Florida would receive \$266 million for every \$5 billion contributed to the fund.

**ISSUE: Support Senate Passage of the Housing Opportunity through Modernization Act (H.R 3700)**

H.R. 3700, introduced by Representative Blaine Luetkemeyer (R-MO), would streamline the administration of public and assisted housing, incentivize resident to increase their earned income, help voucher holder move more quickly into private apartments, improve the project-basing of vouchers, and impose limits on housing assistance for high income families. H.R. 3700 was passed unanimously by the U.S House of Representatives on February 2, 2016. It now awaits Senate passage, and has been referred to the Senate Committee on Banking, Housing and Urban Affairs.

**ISSUE: Support Enactment of the Affordable Housing Improvement Act of 2016**

Senators Maria Cantwell (D-WA) and Orrin Hatch (R-UT) introduced the "Affordable Housing Credit Improvement Act of 2016" on July 14. If enacted, this legislation would take important steps toward alleviating the growing housing affordability crisis across the nation by expanding and improving the Low Income Housing Tax Credit (Housing Credit) program. The reforms included in the legislation will incentivize developers to better serve those families with the greatest and clearest needs—families experiencing homelessness or with extremely low incomes. The bill is co-sponsored by Senate Finance Committee Ranking Member Ron Wyden (D-OR).

## IMMIGRATION

### FEDERAL ISSUES

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#### **ISSUE: Support Immigration Reform**

Support of immigration Reform that includes the following components:

- Improves border security
- Provide an earned pathway to legalization for undocumented workers already contributing to our economy, provided that they are law-abiding and prepared to embrace the obligations and values of our society.
- Create a carefully monitored guest worker program to fill the growing gaps in America's workforce recognizing that, in some cases, permanent immigrants will be needed to fill these gaps.
- Refrain from unduly burdening employers with worker verification systems that are underfunded or unworkable.
- Ensure the continuity and expansion of H-1B and L-1 visas for professionals and highly valued workers.
- Introduce a visa category for foreign real estate investors.
- Introduce a visa category for foreign entrepreneurs and foreign-owned startups in the U.S. that create U.S. jobs and stimulate the U.S. economy.

#### **ISSUE: Support Expansion of the E-2 Treaty Investor Visa Program**

To allow citizens of additional countries (such as Brazil) to be able to invest in job-creating business enterprise in Greater Miami and thereby obtain an E-2 visa to come to the U.S. to manage their business

#### **ISSUE: EB-5 Investor Visa**

Support making permanent as well as improving the EB-5 Immigrant Investor Visa Program for foreign nationals to invest \$1 million or \$500,000 into U.S. enterprises that create 10 U.S. jobs per investor:

- Currently the initial application for EB-5 investor (I-526) takes over one year for USCIS to process. GMCC urges USCIS to find ways to speed up this process so as to not dissuade potential investors from investing in our country.
- GMCC proposes introducing premium processing for an additional fee such that the I-526 can be processed within 1 or 2 months. EB-5 investors would be willing to pay a several thousand dollar premium processing fee (that should more than cover USCIS resources to speed up processing) in exchange for getting a decision on their I-526 within 2 months.

#### **ISSUE: Support Increasing the H-1B Specialty Occupation Visa Quota**

Since the quota has been reached on day one of its opening and therefore we are shutting out highly skilled workers that would substantially contribute to our economy and we are denying U.S. employers the specialized foreign workers that they desperately need in order to compete on a global level. The high costs and regulatory hurdles that employers must incur to access the H-1B program drive employers to seek U.S. workers, but there are not a sufficient amount of qualified U.S. workers for these jobs, thus requiring employers to resort to the H-1B program. This is particularly problematic for foreign students who come to study in our universities but are then locked out of the H-1B program due to the quota and then end up taking their talents to companies in foreign countries.

- The H-1B quota should be increased from 65,000 to at least 130,000 visas.
- Explore avenues for foreign students in our universities completing their F-1 OPT to be able to remain in the U.S. and extend their OPT until they can get an H-1B application accepted under the quota.
- Focus on expanding the H-1B visa program and/or providing H-1B cap exemption for highly sought-after graduates in the STEM disciplines as well as other fields where specialized workers are in high demand and cannot be found in the local workforce.



## INTERNATIONAL TRADE & COMMERCE

### FEDERAL ISSUES

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**ISSUE: Reauthorization of the Export-Import Bank of the United States (EX-IM) Charter**

In 2015, Congress reauthorized the Export-Import Bank (Ex-Im Bank) but the Senate has yet to confirm the President's nominee to the bank's board of directors. Without this confirmation, the board of directors is not fully operational and cannot achieve the quorum required to approve certain transactions. The Ex-Im bank facilitates the sales of goods made in the United States to overseas customers. The bank estimates that since 2009, 40% of the companies that have benefited from board-approved transactions have been small businesses. These are the transactions that are currently on hold due to the lack of quorum. In Florida alone, over \$8 billion dollars in exports from 872 companies representing 52,231 employees were supported by the bank through 2014. The lack of quorum is negatively impacting these exporters that depend on full functionality of the bank, and because financing cannot be achieved many customers are electing to import goods from other countries.

## MILITARY AFFAIRS

### STATE ISSUES

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**ISSUE: Expand the Protection against Unreasonable Delays in Community Association Approval Processes**

In 2016, Senate Bill 0184 passed into law as Chapter 2016-242 and relieved service members of unreasonable temporary lodging expenses by limiting the amount of time landlords and residential community associations take to approve a service member's residential tenancy to no more than seven days. Recently, military housing offices have received complaints that some landlords and community association are interpreting the provision as not being applicable to a service member's dependent, and are using background checks and approvals for the adult dependents to circumvent the seven day limitation. Amending F.S. 83.683 to include service members' dependents will close this loophole and ensure that service members and their families can acquire and occupy affordable rental housing in a timely manner without incurring significant out-of-pocket expenses while waiting for lengthy approval processes to be completed.

**ISSUE: Limit the Aggregate Amount of Advanced Rent and Security Deposit Collected from Active Duty Service Members**

It is common practice in South Florida rental markets to require first and last month's rent and a security deposit of one month's rent (a total of three months' rent) upon entering into a residential lease agreement. Most other markets don't require more than two months' rent up front and many waive security deposits for service members. The military population in South Florida is very small, and these advantages are not well understood. Amending FSS 83.49 to limit the aggregate amount of advanced rent and security deposit collected from active duty service members to two months' rent will reduce the upfront out of pocket cost to what service members commonly experience (and plan for) in other markets.

**ISSUE: Authorize the Department of Transportation to Exempt Service Members from Tolls during their Daily Commute**

In order to find affordable housing and quality schools and healthcare, service members assigned to some installations in Florida are forced to live 20-50-miles from their place of duty. In South Florida, many active duty service members are required to commute via state and local toll roads and face monthly tolls in excess of \$100 – exceeding the monthly Cost of Living Allowance with just this one expense. Allowing the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) and/or other governing bodies to extend toll exemptions to active duty service members assigned in Florida would reduce the out-of-pocket costs our service members incur to live and work in Florida, making Florida a more military friendly state.

## RESILIENCE

### STATE ISSUES

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**ISSUE: Sustained Funding for the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Project**

Provide continued, sustained funding for the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Project including the following Miami-Dade projects:

- Completing Phase 1 of the C-111 Spreader Canal and completing Phase 1 of the Biscayne Bay Coastal Wetlands Project and initiating planning for Phase 2 is critical to ensuring Miami-Dade County receives the economic and ecological benefits of Everglades' restoration.
- Provide adequate funding to complete the remaining land acquisition necessary to move Biscayne Bay Coastal Wetlands Phase 1 towards completion, approximately \$6 million.

**ISSUE: Modify Statewide Building Code to Address the Effects of Sea Level Rise, Tidal Flooding, and Storm Surge Events**

The impacts of sea level rise – especially on coastal communities – will continue to increase. These impacts include increased tidal flooding and more frequent storm surge events. In addition to mitigation efforts that are underway all across the State, it is important to address future infrastructure impacts by modifying the statewide building code to ensure that all future projects incorporate resilient construction and design.