



Ocean City, Maryland
Chamber of Commerce

2026

LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Greater Ocean City, Maryland Chamber of Commerce's 2026 Legislative Priorities reflect a focused commitment to protecting tourism, supporting a stable business climate, and ensuring long-term economic vitality for Ocean City and Maryland's coastal communities.

Tourism remains the backbone of our regional economy, supporting jobs, small businesses, and contributions to state and local tax revenue. As such, the Chamber will prioritize policies that strengthen Maryland's tourism promotion efforts, protect the Ocean City viewshed and commercial fishing industry, preserve access to a reliable seasonal workforce, and maintain employment systems that support hospitality workers.

In addition to tourism-centered advocacy, the Chamber will actively monitor and engage on broader business and quality-of-life issues facing Maryland, including energy affordability and reliability, state budget decisions, healthcare access, transportation and infrastructure investment, education funding mandates, and proposed tax and regulatory changes that could disproportionately impact small businesses.

Through our Government Relations Committee and contracted Annapolis representation, the Chamber will work collaboratively with elected officials, agency leaders, and partner organizations to advance pragmatic, business-informed solutions that support economic growth while balancing fiscal responsibility.

ABOUT THE CHAMBER'S GOVERNMENT RELATIONS COMMITTEE

The Chamber's Government Relations Committee, in partnership with our lobbyist, Dennis Rasmussen, actively engages with Maryland's Eastern Shore Delegation and federal representatives on issues that may impact our members. The priorities outlined reflect areas of active advocacy and monitoring for the 2026 Legislative Session.

Throughout the session, the Chamber will provide regular legislative updates to members, maintain a current tracking list of relevant bills, and meet weekly with our lobbyist to assess developments and determine appropriate action. We will also collaborate closely with local and statewide partners whose districts share common economic and policy priorities.



LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

PRIORITY: PROTECT TOURISM

Tourism is the anchor industry of the Greater Ocean City economy and a critical driver of jobs, tax revenue, and small business sustainability across Maryland's coastal communities. The Chamber will remain vigilant on policies that directly or indirectly affect the visitor economy.

1 STATE TOURISM BUDGET

Why We Are Monitoring: Maryland's visitor economy continues to deliver strong returns. According to the Maryland Office of Tourism, visitor spending reached \$21.2 billion in 2024, generating \$32.3 billion in total economic impact and \$2.5 billion in state and local tax revenue. Tourism supports nearly 194,000 jobs statewide, approximately one in every 21 jobs. In a challenging budget environment, tourism remains a proven, high-ROI investment.

Chamber Position: We advocate for increased state investment in tourism promotion and marketing. Even in a constrained budget year, strengthening tourism funding is a fiscally responsible strategy that produces immediate economic and tax benefits for Maryland.

2 OFFSHORE WIND DEVELOPMENT

Why We Are Monitoring: Current offshore proposals place turbines as close as 10.7 miles from the Ocean City shoreline, where they would be visible day and night. Plans also include the use of the West Ocean City Commercial Fishing Harbor as a maintenance facility, displacing one of the region's last remaining commercial fishing piers. These impacts pose significant risks to both the tourism experience and the commercial fishing infrastructure.

Chamber Position: We oppose offshore wind development that negatively impacts Ocean City's tourism economy, coastal viewshed, and commercial fishing infrastructure.



LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

3 J-1 SUMMER WORK TRAVEL (SWT) PROGRAM

Why We Are Monitoring: Federal delays in processing international workforce visas threaten the availability of J-1 SWT participants, who are essential to Ocean City's seasonal workforce. The community employs approximately 2,000-4,000 SWT students each season and is recognized nationally as a model host destination for this U.S. Department of State cultural exchange program.

Chamber Position: We oppose any federal immigration reform or regulatory action that limits or inhibits the J-1 Summer Work Travel Program. Preserving this program is critical to maintaining a viable hospitality workforce and sustaining Maryland's tourism economy.

4 TIPPED WAGE CREDIT

Why We Are Monitoring: Proposals to eliminate the tipped wage credit would significantly disrupt the restaurant and hospitality sectors, increasing labor costs and reducing earning opportunities for tipped employees.

Chamber Position: We support the Maryland Restaurant Association's effort to maintain the current tipped wage system and oppose One Fair Wage or any similar legislation that would eliminate the tipped credit for workers.

ADDITIONAL BUSINESS AND ECONOMIC ISSUES

1 ENERGY POLICY AND COSTS

Why We Are Monitoring: Energy availability, reliability, and cost will be central policy debates, with direct impacts on businesses and consumers alike.

Chamber Position: We support adjustments to the Building Energy Performance Standards (BEPS) and related policies that balance environmental objectives with energy supply realities and ratepayer affordability.



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2 STATE BUDGET DEFICIT

Why We Are Monitoring: Maryland's projected \$1.5 billion budget deficit will dominate the 2026 Session and could result in spending cuts, revenue increases, or both.

Chamber Position: We will closely monitor and engage on budget actions to minimize negative impacts on tourism, small businesses, and local economic development.

3 HEALTHCARE AND INSURANCE COSTS

Why We Are Monitoring: The repeal of federal Medicaid subsidy enhancements, effective January 1, 2026 unless reversed, has driven significant premium increases and coverage losses. Rural hospitals are particularly vulnerable, exacerbating challenges related to staffing shortages, emergency room wait times, and access to care for residents and visitors.

Chamber Position: We will engage with local healthcare providers and policymakers to support solutions that preserve access to affordable, reliable healthcare in our region.

4 TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE

Why We Are Monitoring: Transportation infrastructure is critical to tourism, workforce access, and regional economic growth.

Chamber Position: We support:

- Dredging of the West Ocean City Commercial Fishing Harbor
- Expansion of Route 90
- Expansion of the Salisbury Regional Airport (SBY) runway
- Increased investment in public transportation, particularly as it relates to workforce housing challenges



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5 BLUEPRINT FOR MARYLAND'S FUTURE (KIRWIN)

Why We Are Monitoring: Under the current structure of the Blueprint, counties, including Worcester County, will shoulder a growing share of funding obligations in the coming years, placing pressure on local budgets.

Chamber Position: We support targeted modifications to Blueprint funding requirements to better balance near-and mid-term budget realities.

6 INTERNET GAMING (IGAMING)

Why We Are Monitoring: The expansion of internet gaming has potential implications for brick-and-mortar businesses, tourism-driven entertainment, and local tax structures.

Chamber Position: We oppose the implementation of internet gaming in Maryland.

7 CONDOMINIUM AND HOA ACT REFORMS

Why We Are Monitoring: Assessment requirements stemming from 2022 legislation have led to rapidly escalating costs for condominium and HOA owners, affecting housing affordability and property values.

Chamber Position: We support revisions to the 2022 Condominium and HOA legislation to protect owners from unsustainable and rapidly increasing assessment costs.

Greater Ocean City Chamber of Commerce Legislative Updates
<https://oceancity.org/legislative-updates/>



CONTACT INFORMATION

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