

# GARRETT COUNTY CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

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## 2023 Legislative Agenda

### TOP PRIORITIES:

The six items below are the top priorities of the Garrett County Chamber. Details on each issue are included in the full agenda which is comprised of additional issues the chamber believes are important to our community.

1. **Preserve the Maryland Tip Credit (p.1)**
2. **Support Community Colleges (p. 3)**
3. **Allocate Additional Funding to the State Lakes Protection & Restoration Fund (p.3)**
4. **Seek policies to advance affordable/workforce housing (p. 3)**
5. **Advocate for policy actions to prevent invasive species in Maryland's lakes (p.2)**
6. **Seek a remedy to Address the Garrett County Fire Marshall/Sprinkler Issue through legislative or regulatory changes to protect owners from high costs associated with compliance (p. 3)**

### FULL AGENDA:

The issues included in our agenda are those items that the Garrett County Chamber believes could have the biggest impact through legislative action.

#### Business Climate

##### **A. Preserve the Maryland Tip Credit:**

For an employee who regularly receives more than \$30 each month in tips and is informed by the employer about the tip credit provisions, an employer may apply a credit towards the hourly minimum wage due to the employee.

##### **B. Support Small Business Participation in Association Health Plans:**

The Garrett County Chamber supports small business participation in Association Health Plans to lower costs of health insurance and requests that the Legislature amend the Maryland Healthcare Access Act of 2018 to remove language prohibiting small businesses from including their owners, employees, and family as part of the larger pool of employees in an AHP.

##### **C. Support a Pro-Business Environment in MD & Oppose Unnecessary Workplace Regulations:**

The General Assembly should oppose any new unnecessary business regulations that impede business growth and interfere with legitimate business operations.

**D. Amend the Maryland Healthy Working Families Act without Further Expansion: The General Assembly should amend the Maryland Working Families Act to include the following:**

1. Increase the minimum number of hours worked per week to 30 to keep the law consistent with the Affordable Care Act. The 12-hour threshold is extremely low and promotes a poor work ethic. The low threshold eliminates the ability to reward hard work
2. Exclude seasonal employees. It is not necessary to provide sick and safe leave to employees that are in a temporary position. Sick and Safe Leave should be provided to permanent employees only. Again, this promotes a strong work ethic and provides the employer the ability to reward or support those loyal, hardworking employees.
3. Increase mandatory number of days worked from 106 to 120.

## Tourism

### **A. Support Future Funding for Deep Creek Lake Dredging:**

The Legislature must act to protect this very important Maryland recreational asset. The Garrett County Chamber urges the Legislature to continue support future funding after the pilot projects have begun.

### **B. Advocate for policy actions to prevent the introduction of invasive species, such as zebra mussels, in Maryland's lakes.**

Deep Creek Lake and other watersheds in Garrett County must be protected from invasive species. Legislative or regulatory changes that will protect our watersheds from invasive species will protect our natural resources and ensure Garrett County's environmental treasures remain a prime tourist destination.

### **C. Continue County Cooperative Marketing Grant Program:**

As evidenced above, the State should continue to direct \$2,500,000 to the County Cooperative Marketing Match Grant program, with the goal of increasing the amount to \$3 million, to leverage more local funds and better assist local jurisdictions with promotion to recover from the pandemic.

### **D. Maintain Tourism Promotion Funding:**

Based on the return on investment from tourism prior to the pandemic and because the tourism industry is one of the hardest hits by COVID-19, Maryland should continue funding tourism promotion at the same level as FY22 to remain competitive and generate additional revenues for the State.

### **E. Continue Funding for Heritage Areas Program:**

We appreciate the State's commitment to the Heritage Tourism program and request the program continue to be funded at the maximum allowed by law - \$6,000,000 per year – for continued growth of Heritage Tourism investment and revenues.

### **F. Support Mountain Maryland Recreational Trails:**

The Garrett County Chamber supports Garrett Trails request for funding the following projects to work towards completion of the Eastern Continental Divide Loop Trail:

1. Provide funding to Garrett Trails for annual trail maintenance

obligations, as well as new trail development with long term partners including the US Army Corp of Engineers, Maryland Department of Natural Resources and the Garrett County Board of Commissioners.

2. Increase recreation focused staffing for all state parks located within the County, as well as the 55,000-acre Savage River State Forest and the 11,461-acre Potomac-Garrett State Forest.
3. Prioritize well-constructed pedestrian and cyclist walkways through all phases of transportation projects to increase safety and sustainability along State and County owned road sections of the Eastern Continental Divide Loop (ECDL).

## Economic & Community Development

### **A. Support policies to ensure adequate affordable/workforce housing.**

In order to address and bolster the County's workforce needs, additional action must be taken to promote policies that will increase the County's inventory of affordable/workforce housing.

### **B. Address Garrett County Fire Marshall/Sprinkler Issue**

Many property owners may be required to install costly sprinkler and alarm systems. A remedy to the Garrett County situation must be sought through legislative or regulatory changes to protect owners from high costs associated with compliance.

### **C. Allocate Additional Funding to the State Lakes Protection and Restoration Fund:**

The General Assembly must allocate an additional \$2 million annually (\$3 million total) to the State Lakes Protection and Restoration Fund and eliminate the three-year sunset as many of these projects are multi-year projects with multi-phase implementation.

### **D. Incentives for Childcare Facilities & Services**

We support legislation that would give incentives to childcare facilities & services. Being able to expand and create new childcare facilities would give Marylanders the opportunity to get back to work, cutting down on the Workforce Shortages.

## Education

### **A. Support Community Colleges:**

1. **Operating Budget: Community colleges remain the most affordable post-secondary option in Maryland's system of higher education – and that's particularly true of Garrett College, which has the lowest tuition rate in the state for in-county students.**

To support this cost-effective strategy, the Chamber endorses full funding of the Maryland Association of Community College's operating budget request.

**2. Capital Budget Formula: Garrett College is currently disadvantaged by the formula used to determine the state and local shares for capital projects as the current formula does not consider Garrett County's low median household income.**

To address this inequity, support a Maryland Association of Community Colleges-endorsed change to the community college capital funding formula that would permit a county currently receiving only a 50% state share whose median household income falls in the bottom quartile of the state to have its county share reduced to equal the Local Cost-Share of the adjacent county that is less than 50% but closest to 50%. (Note: There is precedent for this request, as similar legislative relief was granted to Garrett County Public Schools and the Garrett County Library in 2020 and 2022, respectively.)

**3. Universal Maryland Promise Proposal: The current Maryland Community College Promise Program's process for awarding aid often happens too late for students to make informed enrollment decisions and leaves thousands of dollars undistributed. This puts an unfair burden on the Garrett County Scholarship Program to fund students who might otherwise qualify for the Maryland Promise Program.**

To address this challenge, support the Maryland Association of Community Colleges in its effort to seek legislation that would allow Maryland students pursuing postsecondary education to have access to attend their local community college through a reimagined Universal Promise Program.

## Healthcare

**A. Support the Growth of Telemedicine in Garrett County:**

Support the continuation and growth of telemedicine services in rural communities by making permanent the ability to bill for telehealth visits and by increasing the number of specialty services able to bill for telehealth visits.

## Infrastructure

**A. Support Funding for Broadband Development:**

The Maryland Legislature needs to continue to invest in broadband development, specifically last-mile fiber, in rural communities and require ISPs to provide actual address-level data to determine where there is a lack of service.