



# GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

## 2026 Legislative Priorities

In 2026, the Bay County Chamber of Commerce has identified the following as legislative priorities. Key: *Local (L), State (S), Federal (F)*

### **BUSINESS AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

#### **Support VISIT FLORIDA (S)**

The Bay County Chamber of Commerce supports continued and increased funding for VISIT FLORIDA. Tourism generated 143 million visitors in 2024, contributed \$130+ billion to Florida's economy, supported 2.2+ million jobs, and generated \$17+ billion in state and local taxes. Every \$1 invested returns ~\$3.30 in state tax revenue. For FY 2025–2026, VISIT FLORIDA received \$80 million in recurring funding; continued investment is critical as competing states increase tourism marketing.

#### **Protect Home Rule / Local Control (S)**

The Chamber strongly supports Home Rule authority and opposes efforts to preempt or erode local government decision-making. Preserving local control allows communities to respond to economic development, land use, public safety, and infrastructure needs in a timely and accountable manner.

#### **Oppose Elimination of Local Property Taxes Without Replacement (S)**

The Chamber opposes proposals to eliminate or phase out local property taxes without a stable replacement funding source. Property taxes fund schools, public safety, roads, and emergency services. The Chamber urges rejection of proposals such as HJR 201 and HJR 203, protection of local fiscal control, and a full fiscal impact analysis before advancing any repeal measures.

### **WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT AND EDUCATION**

#### **Higher Education & Engineering Expansion (S)**

The Chamber supports program growth at Florida State University Panama City and enhanced funding for the FAMU-FSU College of Engineering to meet regional workforce and industry demand.

#### **PIPELINE & LINE Healthcare Workforce Funding (S)**

The Chamber supports continued funding for PIPELINE and LINE programs at Gulf Coast State College to address Florida's projected 60,000-nurse shortfall by 2035 and meet Bay County's growing healthcare needs.

### **K-12 Business Engagement & Mentoring (L | S)**

The Chamber encourages business participation in mentoring, Partnership Bay, and other school-business partnerships to address absenteeism, improve student outcomes, and strengthen workforce readiness.

### **Child Care & School Readiness Stability (S)**

The Chamber supports reforms to stabilize School Readiness funding, including a compression factor, retention of revert-and-reappropriate language, and streamlined reobligation timelines to prevent service disruptions for working families.

### **Affordable Workforce Housing (S)**

The Chamber supports full funding of the Sadowski Housing Trust Funds, preservation of anti-sweep protections, and continued investment through the Live Local Act. Affordable workforce housing is essential to business growth and talent retention.

## **MILITARY AND DEFENSE**

### **Naval Support Activity Panama City (F)**

The Chamber supports continued Congressional and DoD funding for:

- Dive School Pier Repairs
- Barracks Replacement
- Child Development Center
- Turning Basin Construction

NSA Panama City employs 4,000+ personnel, generates \$600+ million annually for Bay County, and is vital to national defense readiness.

### **Protect the Joint Gulf Range Complex (S | F)**

The Chamber opposes offshore oil, gas, and wind energy development within or east of the Military Mission Line and supports extending or permanently codifying the current Eastern Gulf moratorium beyond 2032 to protect military testing and training.

### **Maritime Industrial Base & Shipbuilding Leadership (S | F)**

The Chamber urges Florida to lead in advancing America's Maritime Dominance by establishing a state Office of Shipbuilding, maritime financial incentives, bonding support mechanisms, and maritime prosperity zones. Bay County's existing shipyards, ports, and workforce position the region to attract federal and private investment.

### **Preserve and Strengthen the Jones Act (F)**

The Chamber supports continued enforcement of the Jones Act to protect domestic shipbuilding demand, national security, and workforce pipelines such as Eastern Shipbuilding Group's apprenticeship programs.

The Chamber supports reforms to stabilize School Readiness funding, including a compression factor, retention of revert-and-reappropriate language, and streamlined reobligation timelines to prevent service disruptions for working families.

## **TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE**

### **Bay County Transportation Priorities (S)**

The Chamber requests prioritization and full funding for:

- East Avenue (SR 389): Port Entrance to Sherman Avenue
- Philip Griffiths Sr. Parkway Extension: Nautilus Street to Chip Seal Parkway
- SR 22 (Wewa Highway): widen to four lanes
- Star Avenue: widen to four lanes

These corridors support economic growth, freight movement, hurricane evacuation, and public safety.

### **Northwest Florida Beaches International Airport (ECP) Capital Projects (S | F)**

The Chamber supports development of the ECP Aviation Center of Excellence, terminal expansion, and general aviation improvements. ECP's 10,000-foot runway positions Bay County to attract aerospace, MRO, and high-wage industries. A \$20 million state investment will help advance the planned \$75 million North Terminal Expansion.

## **GULF, BAY AND FISHERIES**

### **RESTORE Act & Gulf Restoration Funding (L | S | F)**

The Chamber supports securing and deploying RESTORE Act, NRDA, and Gulf Environmental Benefit Fund resources for water quality, habitat restoration, and economic resilience projects in Bay County.

### **East Pass Reopening – Feasibility & EIS (S | F)**

The Chamber supports completion of feasibility, design, and environmental studies for reopening East Pass and future funding for construction if deemed viable. The project has the potential to improve water quality, fisheries habitat, and coastal resilience across 4,000+ acres of St. Andrew Bay.