



February 4, 2019

The Honorable Gretchen Whitmer
Governor of Michigan
P.O. Box 30013
Lansing, MI 48909

The Honorable Lee Chatfield
Speaker
Michigan House of Representatives
Room 164 Capitol Building.
P.O. Box 30014
Lansing, MI 48909-7514

The Honorable Mike Shirkey
Majority Leader
Michigan Senate
S-106 Capitol Building
Lansing, MI 48933

The Honorable Christine Greig
Democratic Leader
Michigan House of Representatives
Room 167 Capitol Building
P.O. Box 30014
Lansing, MI 48909-7514

The Honorable Jim Ananich
Minority Leader
Michigan Senate
P.O. Box 30036
Lansing, MI 48909

Dear Governor Whitmer and Leaders of the Michigan Legislature:

The Ann Arbor/Ypsilanti (A2Y) Regional Chamber is a 1,000+ member community organization that actively facilitates, educates and advocates on behalf of its members through our services and programs. Our membership is primarily based in Washtenaw County and southeast Michigan, but we have members with global offices and impact. Our members run the gamut from sole proprietors and small businesses to companies and organizations with worldwide operations and impact, and total workforces above 100,000 employees.

We write to communicate the broad agenda items we feel state government should address in 2019 and 2020. Our hope is this letter will give a clear sense of the priorities of our business community along with the rationale for why you should take action on these items. It is challenging to get policy outcomes in divided government, but we are hopeful the outcomes you produce will be bi-partisan, consensus driven solutions, built from legislative coalitions that start in the middle and work out. Beyond the specific issues we highlight, we hope you will broadly pursue and enact policies which foster greater and more productive regionalism within our state, including both governmental cooperation, and cooperation between the governmental, private, and non-profit sectors.

Transportation and Infrastructure: As you are aware, infrastructure played a key role in the 2018 elections. The A2Y Chamber [supported](#) the bipartisan road funding package which passed in the Michigan Senate in late 2014, [Proposal 1 in May of 2015](#), and passage of the [Regional Transit Authority millage in 2016](#). It has also supported several funding measures for local transit. We hope you will take

broad action to properly support both our traditional road networks, along with necessary auxiliary transportation modes, and the needed infrastructure to support them. We need additional revenue for road funding and repair, and the money we spend on these activities should come from dedicated sources devoid of political maneuvering. We need to restructure our funding in a manner that allows us to maintain quality roads, but not at the expense of other budgetary priorities, such as education, transit and public welfare. **Please move forward on legislation which properly resources our broad transportation and infrastructure needs, both current and future, and which provides that revenue in a clearly articulated fashion which is sustainable, politically feasible, and effective.**

Civil Rights: The A2Y Chamber has long supported preserving the Elliott-Larsen Civil Rights Act (ELCRA), and modernizing this Michigan law to include protections against discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity. The Chamber has also opposed so-called “Religious Freedom Restoration Act” (RFRA) bills, which can lead to instances that allow individuals to use their religious beliefs in ways that can be harmful to others. In 2017 we joined many organizations in asking the Michigan Civil Rights Commission [to clarify the language of ELCRA](#) by issuing an interpretive statement to this effect. We support Gov. Whitmer’s action on this issue with [Executive Directive 2019-09](#). **We urge the Michigan Legislature to modernize the ELCRA to codify needed protections for the LGBTQ community to prevent discrimination, which is not only wrong for its abuse of our societal values, but wrong for its detrimental effects on businesses and the business community.**

K-12 Education Funding: If Michigan is serious about ensuring that all our children, regardless of their school district, have an opportunity to get a quality public education, we need to ensure districts have adequate funding. The state currently funds education in a way that allows wealthier districts to succeed at the expense of those neighboring districts that are not as wealthy. This structure was put in place on the premise that competition between school districts would lead to better outcomes for all students. This has inadvertently created winner-take-all competition for funding between districts, and [it is an unsustainable system if we seek to improve student achievement and workforce attraction and development](#). Employees need to be able to live in all parts of our state and still be able to send their children to a local district with the resources needed to provide a world-class education. Failure to ensure this outcome will limit our economic growth, perpetuate detrimental inequities, and most importantly, harm our capacity to fully realize the human capital that comes from a successful educational system that is open to all students. **Broadly speaking, Michigan needs to adequately and explicitly fund K-12 education in more effective ways (e.g. by implementing the recommendations found in the [School Research Finance Collaborative’s comprehensive study](#) on what it costs to educate students to meet Michigan standards) in order to ensure all students have access to an excellent education, while not actively creating zero-sum competition for funding between districts.**

Workforce Housing: In Washtenaw County we see firsthand the impacts of a lack of broadly accessible workforce housing. The passage of SB 110 in 2018 was a good first step. This legislation clarified the voluntary incentives local governments can provide developers of housing projects, to encourage the inclusion of below market housing options in new projects in quickly rising market areas. The housing market in the Ann Arbor area is a model housing market for this legislation. Housing is usually talked about in terms of its importance for individuals, or for the social mobility of communities, but workforce housing should also be considered in a business context. Jobs, and the benefits they provide to the employee, their families, the employer, and the community, are being left unfilled because of insufficient accessible workforce housing. **We urge legislative and executive action that empowers communities to use all available tools to address workforce housing shortages, and we ask that you consider this important issue as you go through the budget process.**

Economic Development: Economic development is an important aspect of state government. The Michigan Economic Development Corporation and its predecessors have done important work for our

state, many times in partnership with local and regional organizations, such as Ann Arbor SPARK. Actively connecting job seekers with opportunities is another important function of economic development, and regional entities such as Michigan Works! Southeast provide their communities with valuable services. Small businesses in particular can benefit from sound economic development policies that help them grow and provide new jobs for our workforce. This is very beneficial for the brick and mortar small scale service providers, but it is also vital for the start-up community and other industries. **As you go through the legislative process, please ensure the economic development sector is properly and sufficiently resourced, and able to continue to use partnerships and innovation to accomplish its goals, especially in ways that benefit small businesses.**

Environmental Stewardship: Our Chamber [opposed](#) the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality reforms in Senate Bills 652, 653, and 654 in 2018. It has consistently supported properly funding the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative and [opposed proposed cuts in federal funding](#) in 2017 and 2018. Our Chamber understands that a strong and healthy natural environment is paramount to the economic success of our state and its people. **Michigan needs smart and efficient environmental regulations that both protect our natural resources and the economic benefits they provide, while also allowing businesses to continue to succeed economically.**

Water Quality: Michigan is dealing with broad challenges to the quality of its water. Our Chamber represents a community broadly impacted by Per- and Polyfluoroalkyl Substances (PFAS). We also have communities specifically impacted by a [1,4 dioxane plume](#). As we deal with broad challenges to our water quality and specific challenges from pollutants, we need to ensure our state properly addresses this situation. Michigan has long been able to tout its natural resources and the benefits they bring to our quality of life, and we must work to ensure this remains the case. **Our state must take the necessary actions to ensure we can eliminate or mitigate the negative human and environmental health impacts of past contamination incidents, and put in place needed protections to ensure they do not occur in the future. This requires adequate protections, intelligent regulations and processes, and a broad consideration of the accrued benefits of a clean natural environment.**

In articulating these priorities, we are trying to provide you with both a call to action, and the commitment to help in that endeavor. We are hopeful that you will look to the Ann Arbor/Ypsilanti Regional Chamber as a resource for input and feedback, and a conduit to get these things from our members. Please do not hesitate to contact our Executive President and Director of Government Relations, Andy LaBarre at andy@a2ychamber.org or (734) 214-0101 if we can provide more information. We wish you success in the term ahead.

Sincerely,

Diane Keller



President and CEO
A2Y Regional Chamber

Rich Chang



CEO
New Foundry
A2Y Regional Chamber
2019 Board Chair

Jeremy Albright, Ph.D.



CEO & Senior Data Scientist
Methods Consultants
2019 A2Y Regional Chamber
Public Policy Committee Chair

Cc: Members of the Michigan Legislature from Washtenaw County