



## West Orange Chamber of Commerce 2025 Legislative Priorities Position Paper

---

### VISION AND PURPOSE

The West Orange Chamber of Commerce is a collective voice for business leadership and community partnerships that advances a positive eco-system for the West Orange Community, with a purpose of advancing community, collaboration and leadership. The business voice for West Orange County, the West Orange Chamber of Commerce represents over 1150 businesses and with hundreds of thousands of employees and their families.

---

### TOP LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

#### **REPEAL SB 296 — Middle School and High School Start Times**

Signed by the Governor on May 12, 2023 to go into effect for the 2026 school year.

**Mandate:** Every school district in Florida must follow a new schedule for both middle and high schools. Middle schools will not be allowed to start earlier than 8:00 am and high schools will have start times no earlier than 8:30 am.

**Position:** Bill CS/HB 733 is harmful not only for the business community, but also students and their families. Students and families may depend on the extra money earned by working after school, while businesses depend on high school students as part of their workforce. Transportation, families with several children in various grade levels, and kids who work or participate in after-school activities are all negatively impacted by this measure.

#### **OPPOSE Tourist Development Tax Reforms**

Oppose the expansion of the use of Tourist Development Tax (TDT) revenue beyond its intended statutory purpose, and Sunset provisions and proposals that require periodic re-adoption of TDT allocations through referendums.

**Position:** Any changes or reforms to the Tourist Development Tax would be extremely harmful to Florida's tourism industry making it nearly impossible to complete projects, and promote Florida's tourism industry. TDT funds should be sustained and also allocated to support Visit Orlando which is instrumental in promoting and supporting Central Florida's robust tourism industry.

#### **SUPPORT The Continued Incremental Reduction of Taxes Imposed on Rental or License Fees**

These fees are charged for use of commercial real property. Florida is the only state that charges taxes on the lease of commercial property.


**Position:** While this is a major part of the state's tax revenues, we believe the reduction adopted in 2021 should be fully implemented and ultimately, this tax should be repealed to enhance the business-friendly climate in Florida.

---

### ADDITIONAL PRIORITIES

*Chamber Status: Monitor*

#### **Business**

 **SUPPORT** legislation to exclude interchange fees on the sales tax portion of transactions.


#### **Economic**

 **SUPPORT** Legislation to Regulate PACE Loans

PACE Loans operate to provide rehabilitation to homeowners but often residents are left with large repair bills tacked on their property tax bill. If not paid, the resident's home is at risk of foreclosure of a tax lien. Low-income seniors are targeted for these services because they typically own their home outright, but they generally are not understanding of the financial risk of this program.


 **SUPPORT Legislation to Provide Resources to Grandparent Caregivers**


An issue that we have been seeing is that more grandparents are taking over as caregivers for their grandchildren, and at a younger age as well. Currently, many of the resources available for grandparent caregivers defines the age minimum at 55 so grandparents who are younger than that are not able to access these much-needed resources and end up struggling financially, even if they were doing fine before, due to the additional financial burden of being a caregiver. Businesses are not only at risk of losing their workforce but also a consumer base unable to spend due to their new familial responsibilities.

 **OPPOSE Legislation to Change Governance to Florida’s Interest on Trust Accounts (IOTA)**

Florida’s Interest on Trust Accounts (IOTA) program is a fiscally responsible, community-focused initiative that supports Florida’s legal aids without relying on taxpayer dollars by leveraging interest paid on client deposits held in a pooled trust by attorneys. With this funding, in March of 2023, the Florida Supreme Court amended the IOTA program to mandate that lawyers maintain trust accounts in institutions offering competitive, fair interest rates to maximize the impact of the accounts based on lessons learned during the 2008 financial crisis when interest rates were 0%. Last year, there was legislation filed with the support of the bankers that ultimately died in committee but was attempting to modify the interest rate structure and governance. We expect that legislation to be filed again this year.

**Education**

 **SUPPORT Fully Funding Pre-K.** Fully funding Pre-K would immediately result in math and reading scores rising. Statistically, every child in Pre-K does much better for the rest of their lives.

 **SUPPORT Increasing Funding by 5%** for school district staff to assist with the retention of all staff from teachers to bus drivers. Currently, there is a shortage of bus drivers. The issue is there are routes drivers will not take due to the costs and distance of getting to the bus depots. There is a problem with the distance to get to the depots as well as the time to get to and from their homes.

 **SUPPORT Legislation to Fund Law Enforcement Agencies for Providing School Resource Officer Services**

Law enforcement agencies statewide face a funding shortfall in providing School Resource Officer (SRO) services, as their respective school districts do not fully cover the costs. This funding gap imposes a significant financial burden on law enforcement agencies, their governing bodies, and county school boards.

The requirement for SROs stems from the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School Public Safety Act, aimed at enhancing school safety and security. Although well-intentioned, the Act mandates an SRO for every school without corresponding state funding increases. While the Town strongly supports improving school safety, the unfunded mandate poses a substantial financial sustainability risk.

 **SUPPORT Workforce Training Legislation to Expand Funding**

School districts offer career pathways where students earn in-demand credentials in the following industries: Aerospace, Aviation, Advanced Manufacturing, Construction, Cybersecurity, Logistics and Semiconductors. Funding to expand reskilling is needed for education programs developed in conjunction with FLDOE that target K-adult learners. Recruiting the right individuals with the aligned experience will promote mathematics and science education programs, and increase the ability to deliver certification materials. Teachers are needed with expertise in their field of specialty to teach the credentialed materials. Current funding limits the pool of teaching candidates and district capability to add programs to technical and high schools because the experts can make much more within their industry vs teaching.

- 🍌 **SUPPORT Valencia College supports the Florida College System (FCS) request for \$200 million in new recurring dollars distributed through the established funding formula for the Program Fund.** The FCS is similar to Florida’s K-12 system in that each state college must serve every student in its district who wants to enroll, but unlike the K-12 system, there currently is no base student allocation for the FCS. As a result, without additional funding allocated through the formula as proposed, some of the highest-performing and fastest-growing colleges will lose the capacity to meet student demand.

An investment of \$200 million through the funding formula (with \$100 million allocated through each part of the formula), as unanimously approved by the 28 Florida College System presidents, would result in funding increases for all state colleges and would ensure that every college is funded at least at the K-12 base student allocation. This investment would allow the FCS to:

Increase the number of degree and certificate graduates who are prepared to meet Florida’s unmet and growing workforce needs.

Invest in and maintain technology, equipment, and infrastructure for critical workforce areas.

Grow capacity to meet student demand by hiring additional faculty and staff in critical areas.

### **Healthcare**

- 🍌 **SUPPORT** budget policies that seek to reimburse providers as closely as possible to the actual cost of providing inpatient and outpatient care to Medicaid enrollees, and that ensure continuous coverage for eligible families and individuals.
- 🍌 **SUPPORT** continued funding of programs, like Graduate Medical Education and Linking Industry to Nursing Education, which train Florida’s next frontline health care professionals.
- 🍌 **SUPPORT** caps on non-economic damages for medical malpractice claims. Measure would help contain runaway insurance premiums in Florida and increase the supply of young physicians in high-risk specialties.
- 🍌 **SUPPORT** policies that hold payers accountable. Denials are often a delay tactic by insurers. Certain payer policies and administrative practices delay patient care, overburden clinicians, and withhold critical payments from providers.

### **Housing**

- 🍌 **SUPPORT Legislation to Ensure and Protect the Rights of Mobile Home Residents** Mobile home rent has been increasing with all of the rising costs. Residents living in mobile homes, with a large handful of them being seniors, are being priced out due to significant lot rental increases. Many of the seniors live on a fixed income like Social Security. Last year, Rep. Paula Stark passed legislation in order to protect these vulnerable populations from disproportionate rent increases but there is still more work to be done to protect these communities, who often times do not have the same rights that residents do under a more traditional Landlord/Tenant relationship. While this is a step in the right direction, we are still seeing an increase in these cases and hope to see further measures to protect vulnerable communities.

More information on legislation here:

<https://www.wcjb.com/2024/06/07/manufactured-home-owners-get-more-rights-under-new-florida-law/>

## Municipalities

### Town of Oakland

#### **SUPPORT South Lake Apopka Initiative - NW Wastewater Extension (\$1,500,000)**

The Town of Oakland is planning for the next phase of the South Lake Apopka Initiative. This wastewater system extension project known as "NW Wastewater Extension" is the next step in removing existing septic systems from the south shore of Lake Apopka in our town. The Oakland portion of this plan is to design and construct 15 manholes and approximately 5000 feet of gravity sewer in older parts of the town. The project will also include abandonment of approximately 45 existing septic systems, some relief from wastewater impact fees, and connection to the central sewer. This network will connect to approximately 4500 feet of DEVELOPER FUNDED gravity sewer already under construction that serves 53 new residences, and will also utilize an existing lift station in the effort to minimize costs. Additional extensions to the east and south, adjacent to Lake Apopka, will assist with water quality restoration efforts in the area.

### City of Ocoee

#### **SUPPORT Ocoee Fire Station 38 Funding (\$2,000,000)**

The project is estimated at \$5.4 million. The request for funds will help to fund the design and construct a permanent 7,000 sq. ft. fire station to replace a temporary facility in the north service area of the City. The permanent station will improve response times, increase public safety, support growing community health needs, and enhance firefighter readiness and capacity in Ocoee and adjacent unincorporated Orange County & Winter Garden, via mutual aid agreements. The design includes living quarters for 6 personnel and apparatus bay/storage areas for 3 vehicles.

#### **SUPPORT Ocoee Drinking Water Resiliency Project (\$800,000)**

The project is estimated at \$5.4 million. The city does not have an emergency water interconnect and recently completed an engineering study on drinking water system resiliency that shows the need for an additional well and upsizing of a portion of the water transmission main at the Forest Oaks Water Plant to provide drinking water system redundancies and ensure uninterrupted water service during emergencies or extreme storm events.

### Town of Windermere

#### **SUPPORT Chase/Main intersection and stormwater improvement (\$3,575,000)** **Main/6th roundabout improvement (\$3,850,000)**

The ongoing expansion to the southwest of Windermere has led to a significant increase in cut-through traffic, with approximately 75% originating from neighboring communities. This influx of traffic has resulted in heightened congestion along major roadways, including 6th Avenue, Main Street, and Chase Road.

The subsequent traffic congestion has become a persistent issue for motorists, particularly during peak hours. In response, this project aims to alleviate cut-through traffic on local roads, thereby reducing congestion not only within Town but also throughout West Orange County.

#### **SUPPORT South Phase Potable Water System (\$4,231,920)** **North Phase Potable Water System (\$5,272,080)**

This project is driven by three core objectives:

Enhanced Safety: This project will improve the safety of Town's water supply by providing a monitored and secure drinking water system. Additionally, it will upgrade fire protection capabilities, reducing the risk of damage to property and life.

Environmental Stewardship: By reducing the number of wells near Outstanding Florida Water Bodies, this project will help protect the Town's natural resources and preserve the integrity of its waterways.


Improved Reliability: The project will provide a pressurized water system, eliminating the need for electricity to operate residential well pumps. This will ensure a consistent and reliable water supply for residents.

#### **City of Winter Garden**

##### **SUPPORT Crest Avenue Wastewater Treatment Facility Capacity Expansion and Process Optimization (\$1,750,000)**

This project is for capacity expansion and process optimization of the City's Wastewater Plant to improve effluent water quality to meet FDEP advanced wastewater treatment (AWT) limits and increase reclaimed water production. The goal is to provide increased water quality benefits to Lake Apopka by reducing key nutrients, such as nitrogen and phosphorus as well as lessening the need of potable water from the Floridian Aquifer for irrigation and providing source water protections.

#### **Tourism**

-  **SUPPORT** advocating for the sustained allocation of state funds to VISIT FLORIDA to maintain Florida's status as a premier vacation destination, ensuring it remains top of mind for travelers worldwide.