Employers working with government to build a stronger, more competitive regional economy.
The Buffalo Niagara Partnership’s long history of effective advocacy on behalf of our members continues with the release of our 2018 Advocacy Agenda. The policy priorities outlined in this document speak directly to how government at the federal, state and local level can best work together with employers to build a more robust and competitive regional economy.

Our Advocacy Agenda is more than just a list of policy priorities. We aim to provide context and explain why these issues are critical to employers and economic development efforts in Buffalo Niagara. This document will drive the Partnership’s advocacy work for the year, guide our discussions with elected officials and decision makers, and focus our programming and events over the next 12 months.

On the back cover, you will find 2018’s Regional Priority Projects. Continuing our collaboration with the cities of Buffalo and Niagara Falls, and the counties of Erie and Niagara, the Partnership is highlighting five regionally significant transportation infrastructure projects for our state and federal representatives to support.

Advocacy is at the heart of what has made the Buffalo Niagara Partnership the premier employer organization in our region. Our commitment to advocate with and on behalf of our members is something we take very seriously. It is a commitment you have come to expect from Buffalo Niagara’s regional chamber of commerce. We look forward to working with our members and the region’s elected officials to accomplish as many of these priorities as possible, and building an even better, stronger Buffalo Niagara in the process.

Sincerely,

Dottie Gallagher-Cohen
President & CEO

Grant Loomis
Vice President, Government Affairs

POLICY PRIORITY KEY:

FEDERAL ▶️
STATE ▶️
LOCAL ▶️
Buffalo Niagara employers operate in one of the most highly taxed and overly regulated economic environments in the country. The regulatory burden, high taxes and escalating labor costs are significant impediments to growth and investment. Without real reform, this reality will continue to significantly stifle the region’s competitiveness despite local economic development progress.

**Taxes & Regulations**

**Tax Relief**
- Make Property Tax Cap Permanent
- Lower Property Taxes
  - Reduce unfunded mandates driving high property taxes
  - Allow commercial property owners to benefit from property tax relief efforts
- Ease Tax Burden on Small Businesses
  - Increase percentage of exemption for small employers who file through personal income tax
  - Lower the rate for small employers who file through corporate tax

**NEW YORK STATE NATIONAL TAX RANKINGS**

2nd Worst Business Tax Climate 49/50

- Individual Income Tax Rank 49/50
- Property Tax Rank 47/50
- Sales Tax Rank 43/50

**Employer Mandates**
New employer mandates emanating from Albany are a burden on Buffalo Niagara employers. However well intentioned, these mandates fail to recognize the negative impact they have on both employers and employees. Proposed On-Call Scheduling regulations released in late 2017 by the NYS Department of Labor are a prime example. Equally troubling is the trend of sweeping policy changes being advanced as executive action without the benefit of the legislative process.

**Paid Family Leave**
New York is home to the most expansive Paid Family Leave mandate in the country, impacting employers’ administrative and productivity costs. State leaders must keep their pledge not to pass the direct cost of Paid Family Leave onto employers and taxpayers. There is growing concern the program’s costs will quickly exceed the employee payroll deductions imposed to fund it.

**Workers’ Compensation Reform**
The Governor and Legislature agreed to significant reforms in 2017, the first such system reforms in a decade. State leaders must ensure the intent of the 2017 reforms is honored and the system lowers employer costs while maintaining fair protections for workers. Additional commonsense reforms should be routinely pursued to drive down costs and improve the system for all.

**Lower Healthcare Costs**
Buffalo Niagara employers are committed to providing their employees with affordable healthcare, but the cost of doing so continues to climb. We support comprehensive access to coverage without imposing new regulations and fines on employers. The medical tort system must also be reformed to discourage defensive medicine, lower medical liability insurance rates and drive down costs for patients and employers.

**RISING COST OF PROVIDING HEALTHCARE COVERAGE**

- 75% of partnership members saw costs increase
- 16-20% increase
- 0-5% increase
- 11-15% increase
- 6-10% increase

**Grant Loomis**
Vice President, Government Affairs

**THEPARTNERSHIP.ORG**
Private sector development continues to reinvigorate downtown Buffalo and commercial corridors throughout the region. Most of these projects would not have been possible without public incentives necessary to counterbalance low rental rates locally and the high cost of construction in New York State. Critical to the economic success of the region are reforms to lower construction costs and strong, focused incentives aimed at encouraging sustainable development.

**Prevailing Wage**
- Oppose expansion of prevailing wage mandate to private projects

**Scaffold Law Reform**
- Reform the Scaffold Law by replacing absolute liability with a comparative negligence standard, allowing liability to be apportioned based on fault – the standard that exists in every state except New York

**Adaptive Reuse**
- Maintain and strengthen ECIDA’s existing Adaptive Reuse policy

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**The Cost of Scaffold Law:**
Taxpayers - $785M/year
Private Business - $1.49B/year
NY’s general liability insurance costs are highest in the nation

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**Inclusionary Zoning**
- Oppose mandated Inclusionary Zoning on development projects in the City of Buffalo
Buffalo Niagara’s economic growth is being challenged by our inability to place qualified employees in existing job openings and develop a strong pipeline of trained workers for the job opportunities we know are on the horizon. Success depends on our collective ability to invest in and support education and workforce development initiatives to build a qualified workforce with 21st century skills.

**Workforce Development**

**FOCUS ON UPSKILLING UNDEREMPLOYED**

20% of the local workforce is expected to **retire** over next 10 years

In just the target industries of Advanced Business Services, Advanced Manufacturing and Tourism & Hospitality, there will be a total of **6,250 job openings** due to retirements and growth

Without deliberate and sustained focus on **upskilling the region’s underemployed**, we will never fully address our workforce challenges

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**Pell Grant Program**

- Support overdue reauthorization and expand eligibility to cover certificate programs and other job readiness training

**Perkins Career and Technical Education Act**

- Support overdue reauthorization with a focus on aligning programs and funding with the needs of regional, state and local labor markets

**Workforce Investment Board (WIB)**

- Continue to target WIB resources for training programs matching regional priorities and targeted industry sectors, including:
  - Incumbent worker training
  - On the job training
- Encourage city and county leaders to continue to appoint private sector employer representatives to local WIB

**Community Colleges**

- Support the key role community colleges play in workforce development and best position them to be responsive to employers’ needs and the demands of regional labor markets

**Professional Licensing for Immigrants**

- Create a professional licensing program for immigrants and refugees so their skills and training can positively contribute to the regional economy
The safe and efficient movement of goods, services and people is at the core of our economy. Government at all levels must be willing to prioritize critical long-term investments, as well as support private projects producing real economic benefit.

Transportation Funding
- Push for an adequate and dedicated source of funding to support transportation infrastructure projects aimed at fixing and maintaining our nation’s crumbling highways, roads, bridges and transit systems

Natural Gas Transmission System
- Develop New York’s natural gas transmission system to effectively move gas from Pennsylvania through New York and to other markets to improve reliability, keep consumer prices low and spur investment and job creation

Telecommunications Network
- Support policies that encourage investment in network infrastructure to maintain and build upon the level of connectivity necessary to conduct business in today’s economy

Upgrade Power Grid
- Support upgrades to New York’s aging power grid to improve reliability and ensure Buffalo Niagara’s economy benefits from moving locally produced electricity downstate

Cross Border Economy
Buffalo Niagara is at the heart of a dynamic bi-national region. Our economy and many of its opportunities for growth are directly tied to Southern Ontario. Government policies should bind the United States and New York State closer to Canada, not create false barriers to trade, job creation and economic opportunity.

NAFTA
- Strengthen our bi-national economy through the renegotiation of the North American Free Trade Agreement
  - Maximize border efficiency
  - Maintain visas necessary for cross-border business
  - Advance regulatory harmonization

Border Efficiency
- Implement border efficiency measures to better move goods and people across Buffalo Niagara’s international border crossings, including:
  - Mandatory filing of e-manifests for empty trucks
  - Electronic or pre-payment of all fees
  - Sufficient staffing of customs agents in both Canada and the United States during the Peace Bridge Rehabilitation Project

Canada is NYS’ #1 trading partner
- Value of Imports: $17.6B
- Value of Exports: $15B

Canada is NYS’ #1 trading partner
- 517,028 NYS jobs are supported by trade with Canada
Buffalo Niagara’s economy is well positioned to benefit from strategically investing tax dollars into two key sectors driving our economy – higher education (public and private) and tourism. By wisely reinvesting these public dollars, state and local leaders have the opportunity to leverage the largest return for our community in the form of good-paying jobs, additional tax revenue and sustainable economic development.

**Higher Education Impact**

- Increase operational support for the region’s SUNY institutions
- Fully fund the Tuition Assistance Program (TAP) without restrictions that would make it more difficult for students to qualify

### WNY’s SUNY Colleges & Universities

- **$3.7B** in economic impact to NYS
- Directly employ **16,400** people
- Generate **$63M** in state & local taxes

### WNY’s Independent Colleges & Universities

- **$1.4B** in economic impact to NYS
- Directly employ **6,100** people
- Employees pay **$35M** in taxes

**Tourism Funding**

- Significantly increase Hotel Occupancy Tax (Bed Tax) allocation to Visit Buffalo Niagara (VBN) to fully realize the tourism potential of the Buffalo Niagara region

$1 In Tourism Promotion = $38 Of Local Economic Impact

**GROWING GAP**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Gross Bed Tax Collected</th>
<th>VBN’s Bed Tax Allocation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>$5.5M</td>
<td>$32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>$7.8M</td>
<td>$37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>$8.8M</td>
<td>$33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>$10.7M</td>
<td>$31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>$10.5M</td>
<td>$32%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

% of Bed Tax used for VBN Funding

- **53%**
- **33%**
- **37%**
- **33%**
- **34%**

*projected

If VBN received the same percent of Bed Tax as it did in 2004, its budget would be **over $5.7M today**

Other Visiting Bureaus operating at over $5M:

- Bloomington, MN
- Grand Rapids, MI
- Omaha, NE

Please consider getting involved in the Buffalo Niagara Partnership’s advocacy efforts.

Our message is stronger when employers join us to discuss these important issues with elected officials and demonstrate how the public sector can best work with the private sector for the benefit of all Buffalo Niagara.

Please visit [thepartnership.org/advocacy](http://thepartnership.org/advocacy) to learn more about our Advocacy Agenda or to participate in our events and programs.

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**CITATIONS**

1 “2018 State Business Tax Climate Index;” Walczak, Drenkard & Bishop-Henchman; Tax Foundation; October 17, 2017
2 Buffalo Niagara Partnership Advocacy & Member Survey; September 2017
3 “Prevailing Waste: New York’s Costly Public Works Pay Mandate;” McMahon & Gardner; Empire Center for Public Policy; 2017
4 Port Authority of New York & New Jersey
5, 6 “The Costs of Labor Law 240 on New York’s Economy and Public Infrastructure;” Hattery, Geddes & Kay; Rockefeller Institute; 2013
7 “Memo: Labor Law 240 and Loss Costs;” Richard Geddes, Cornell University, 2014
8 “Erie County Industrial Development Agency: Adaptive Reuse Program 2008-2016;” Redevelopment Resources; May 2017
9 “Buffalo Niagara Labor Market Assessment 2017;” Report prepared for Invest Buffalo Niagara by UB Regional Institute; 2017
11, 12 “State Imports for New York & State Exports from New York;” United States Census Bureau
13 “Opening Markets, Creating Jobs: Estimated U.S. Employment Effects of Trade with FTA Partners;” U.S. Chamber of Commerce; May 14, 2010; Date from 2008
14 “Economic Impacts of State University of New York;” The Nelson A. Rockefeller Institute of Government of the University at Albany & UB Regional Institute; June 2011
15 The Commission on Independent Colleges & Universities in New York
16 Visit Buffalo Niagara
2018 Regional Priority Projects

The Buffalo Niagara Partnership continues its collaboration with the cities of Buffalo and Niagara Falls, and the counties of Erie and Niagara to identify regionally significant projects for our state and federal representatives to support. For 2018, the Regional Priority Projects list focuses on critical transportation infrastructure projects with both direct and sustainable economic development impact.

Agriculture Industrial Park with Complete Streets & Intermodal Connectivity
ERIE COUNTY
This project will utilize existing Class 1 rail infrastructure and be constructed with a complete streets design element to better connect Angola’s village center with the nearby industrial corridor job hub. In addition, the construction of the park will boost local agriculture - an industry extremely important to the regional economy.

Cars Sharing Main Street Completion
CITY OF BUFFALO
Funding is necessary to rapidly complete the Cars Sharing Main Street initiative to expedite the economic development benefits of returning two-way vehicular traffic to Main Street in downtown Buffalo. Securing the necessary funding incrementally will lead to years of construction and delay efforts to improve the quality of life in downtown Buffalo.

Lower Mountain Road/Bond Lake Park Access Improvements
NIAGARA COUNTY
A partial-depth reconstruction of 2.7 miles of Lower Mountain Road in Lewiston between Ridge and Townline roads will be designed to improve visibility of, and access to, Bond Lake Park. The area bordering this project is a part of the Regional Bikeway Network, the Niagara Wine Trail and a designated NYS trail in the Niagara River Greenway Plan.

Metro Rail Extension
BUFFALO NIAGARA PARTNERSHIP
Extending the NFTA Metro Rail to the north and south will better connect people to jobs and stimulate new redevelopment opportunities. A federal TIGER grant is needed to match existing state allocations for the southern extension and redevelopment of the former DL&W Terminal, as well as state funding to meet federal capital investment grant requirements for the northern extension.

Niagara Scenic Parkway – Riverway Phase 2 & Hyde Park Roundabout
CITY OF NIAGARA FALLS
This project removes all expressway features of the Niagara Scenic Parkway and replaces them with a two-lane extension of the ‘Riverway’ eastward to a new Hyde Park roundabout. Once complete, this project will provide multimodal waterfront access, reclaim hundreds of acres for park use and reroute 20,000 daily trips into the city’s street network spurring redevelopment opportunities throughout Niagara Falls.