

2023 REVIEW

Florida Legislative Priorities



As the voice of the Lakeland Business Community, the Lakeland Chamber of Commerce continually advocates with elected leaders and policy makers to support pro-business legislation. During the 2023 Florida Legislative Session, Lakeland’s businesses have identified the following priorities for action.

Here’s how the business community fared:

Key Priorities

Full funding for the new 6th District Court of Appeals Courthouse in Lakeland. Funded at \$6 million for site selection and design.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Elimination of Florida’s Business Rent Tax. Reduced from 5.5% to 4.5% (effective 12/23) and then to 2% once unemployment compensation trust fund replenished.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Legislation to stabilize and reduce property insurance rates for Florida homeowners. Passed previously in special session.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Full funding for the Central Polk Parkway (eastern and western corridors). Western corridor (Polk Pkwy to SR60) funded; eastern corridor planning/ROW funded	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Recurring funding of the Heartland Headwaters Protection and Sustainability Act. Partially funded at \$8.5 million.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Advance FDOT funding of improvements to the I-4/SR 33 interchange. Part of Governor’s “Moving Florida Forward” initiative funded fully at \$4 billion.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Address affordable housing need to provide workforce housing options. Passed giving incentives for builders and developers to create affordable housing.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

The Lakeland Chamber supports strengthening our education and workforce systems to close the talent gap and provide Florida with long-term economic prosperity through a highly skilled and educated workforce.

Key Education Priorities

Funding and support for much-needed nursing education programs to recruit highly skilled instructors, build technology-forward facilities and acquire state-of-the-art simulators \$5 million funded for private college and university nursing education program.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Full funding of EASE grants at \$3,500 per student at Independent Colleges and Universities Per student funding set at \$3,500.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Continued funding for VPK programs providing critical early learning and necessary childcare support for working parents Recurring funding levels preserved from 2022.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>



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Economic Development & Tourism

- ✓ Sustained funding for tourism via **Visit Florida** and related agencies
- ? Strengthen Florida's economic development and recruitment through continued funding for **Enterprise Florida** (*Enterprise Florida eliminated; functions rolled into new Department of Commerce. Chamber monitoring.*)
- ? Support **Lakeland Linder International Airport** funding through **DEO's Job Growth Grant Fund** for improvements needed to establish a new **Maintenance, Repair and Overhaul facility** (*Eligible for post-session grant. Chamber monitoring.*)

Healthcare

- ✓ Preserve current **Medicaid reimbursement rates**
- ✓ Fund **Graduate Medical Education at Lakeland Regional Health** to support Polk County's growing population

Transportation, Traffic & Safety

- ✓ **Oppose legislation** that would eliminate the ability to use Rectangular Rapid Flashing beacons at mid-block pedestrian crossings
- ✓ Fund expansion of the **I-4 corridor** including vehicular and multimodal improvements through and adjacent to Polk County
- ✓ Streamline funding for local "**shovel-ready**" projects designed to ease traffic in Florida's fastest-growing communities

During the 2023 Legislative Session, the Chamber supported the following education priorities from Polk County institutions:

Polk County Public Schools

- ✗ Eliminate 1-year moratorium for instructors to **return to the classroom** and still receive FRS benefits.
- ✗ Modify the teacher salary increase allocation by creating a funding component to **address salary compression.**
- ✓ Modify the statute to **extend temporary certificates** to 5 years for all recipients.

Polk State College

- ✓ Support operational funding that will **expand faculty and space** in Winter Haven and/or Haines City
- ✓ Support \$12 million for renovation funds for **Building I on the Lakeland campus** for modernization and a student center, labs, and more classrooms

Florida Polytechnic University

- ✓ \$3.6 million to enhance ongoing efforts to **establish university as an Engineering School of Distinction** that focuses on Florida's workforce.
- ✓ \$13 million for a **Student Achievement Center** to support 1,600+ students.

Webber University

- ✓ Support funding of \$500,000 for construction of a **Health Sciences Building.**

Keiser University

- ✓ Support **Criminal Justice/Cybersecurity** with a grant from the Joint Legislative Budget Commission to purchase a state-of-the-art virtual simulation training system.

Warner University

- ✓ Support \$3.5 million appropriation for **sewer service** that serves Warner and this portion of Polk County.