

# 2021 LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES



## **Liability Protection**

The threat of legal liability for claims related to COVID-19 looms large over businesses struggling to survive. This threat is not speculative and must be addressed with certainty. We support the adoption of legislation that clearly outlines how liability claims related to COVID-19 should be addressed. This legislation should include:

- a shortened statute of limitations so that COVID-19 related claims will be filed and addressed expeditiously, and businesses and employers will not have to fear future litigation;
- a heightened culpability standard requiring a defendant to have acted with gross negligence or intentional misconduct in order to establish liability;
- a heightened evidentiary standard requiring liability to be established by clear and convincing evidence; and
- a complete exemption from liability for essential businesses.

## **Vacation Rentals**

Vacation Rentals have become an increasingly popular option for Florida's visitors. It's important for the public to be assured that all lodging establishments operate on a level playing field, providing a consistent high-quality experience for all guests. Proper licensing, safety and sanitation, and collection of taxes is critical for all who provide lodging for Florida's visitors. Appropriate regulation of vacation rental properties and hosting platforms will ensure that basic requirements are met and appropriate taxes are collected and paid. The coronavirus pandemic has underscored like never before the need for consistent safety and sanitation standards in all of Florida's lodging facilities.

## **ALCOHOL REGULATIONS**

- **Codify “Alcohol-To-Go”**

During the pandemic, the Governor permitted through Executive Order what is colloquially known as “alcohol-to-go.” This regulatory change allowed many Florida restaurants to supplement their revenue through increased sale of alcoholic beverages to accompany take-out food orders. Not only was this a lifeline for struggling businesses, but it had the practical impact of demonstrating that some of the existing regulations surrounding alcohol service are antiquated and no longer necessary.

The relaxing of these regulations during the pandemic demonstrated that the sale of alcohol in this manner can be practically and safely accomplished. Allowing this process to continue will directly benefit restaurants that continue to struggle financially.

- **Increase Licensure Opportunities for Hospitality Businesses**

The state has a vested interest in encouraging the financial success of food and lodging establishments. Currently, hotels must have a certain number of rooms to receive a particular type of liquor license. Restaurants must also adhere to certain square footage and seating requirements to qualify for a special restaurant liquor license. We support reducing these requirements, which will encourage the development of new businesses and increase the operational flexibility and financial success of existing businesses.

- **Cooperative Advertising**

We support alcohol manufacturers and certain licensed vendors being permitted to cooperate to advertise special events. The marketing and promotion of notable events at some of Florida’s most popular destinations will increase tourism and spending in Florida. Such agreements will not compromise the independent decision-making capacity of the businesses who are parties to these agreement, and it will result in positive economic impacts to the state.

## **TOURISM MARKETING**

- **Protect Tourism Development Tax (TDT) Dollars**

Voters in each Florida county approved collection of the TDT for the sole and specific purpose of funding the promotion and marketing of Florida tourism. Other authorized uses have been added over the years that have plundered these dedicated funds and diverted them to uses only tangentially related to tourism. Using these funds as they were originally intended, for the promotion and marketing of tourism, has never been more crucial as Florida continues to recover from the pandemic. New authorized uses, no matter how well-intentioned, must be rejected.

- **Increase Funding for VISIT FLORIDA to \$75 Million**

The tourism industry is the backbone of Florida's economy. As Florida seeks to recover from the economic destruction of COVID-19, the marketing and promotion of Florida has never been more important. While our ask of \$75 million is not nearly enough, we understand that the present crisis has strained every aspect of Florida's budget. But the data clearly shows that investing in tourism marketing is an investment in economic growth for the whole state. Increased funding is necessary to increase tourism and facilitate recovery from the pandemic's devastating impacts to this industry.

## **TAXATION**

- **Property Tax Relief**

Tourism-dependent businesses will struggle to pay their property taxes because of the financial impact of the pandemic. State policies can be enacted to reduce this struggle. We support offering meaningful payment deferrals and installment payment plans. We also support the waiving of penalties for payments that are late or incomplete due to the pandemic's impact on a business.

- **Tax Credits**

Tax credits can provide much-needed relief and support for Florida's struggling businesses. Tax credits for the purchase of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) can help offset the increased expense businesses have incurred in purchasing this necessary equipment. Tax credits for the hiring of new personnel can provide financial incentives and support to make more job opportunities available for Floridians.

## **Florida Main Street Funding**

Florida Main Street needs increased investment to support recovery and increased economic development in Florida's historic downtown commercial corridors. We support the appropriation of nonrecurring funds to The Florida Department of State Division of Historical Resources to expand the Florida Main Street Program and help these important centers of community and commerce to grow and thrive.