Your Chamber’s government affairs work serves an important role supporting and advocating for our business community. This is as valuable as ever as we focus on returning to work safely so Michigan can rebuild.

The Chamber outlined a detailed approach for a responsible reopening based on activity- and geographic-based risk profiles which we believe can take place responsibly and soon. That can be found at: grandrapids.org/blog/news/planning-michigan-restart/

In addition, this following Smart Restart Agenda outlines the member-driven priorities businesses and entrepreneurs will need to recover. The following priorities outline our member-driven approach to mitigate the damage caused by COVID-19 and empower our businesses, team members and entrepreneurs to protect public health, safety, and economic security.

**Property Tax Deferment**
Communities across Michigan, and particularly in West Michigan, rely on bustling sports and entertainment venues, theaters and restaurants to support our local economy. As described above, we urge the state to move quickly to allow businesses severely impacted by COVID-19 orders to defer there summer property taxes until the end of the year to bridge these businesses into 2021. We will work with local partners to limit the impact and ensure smart, targeted tax policy reform like this will support key industries.

**PPE Accessibility**
We are exploring partnerships with the County and other stakeholders to provide small businesses with a “PPE kit” to help them get started when they can return to work as well as guidance on best practices. If successful, this will benefit the business, the employee and the customer, and protect the public health.

**Relaxing MLCC Regulations**
Restaurants and bars are some of the hardest hit businesses and they will likely be impacted much longer than other industries as we return to work. Capacity limits and consumer confidence will make it difficult for them to serve enough customers to earn a profit. With summer approaching, we are exploring enabling local governments to designate “social districts.” This would allow businesses to “extend” their liquor license to outdoor public space, such as a converted park, parking lot or street, and serve customers while allowing social distancing and safe practices to continue.

**Incentivizing new development in improvement districts**
The MLCC recently decided that redevelopment liquor licenses (given to businesses investing in development/redevelopment districts) cannot be granted to new builds. There are already local cases of old, decrepit buildings being replaced with new builds that are being denied these licenses. This is a disincentive to invest in the urban core as standard liquor licenses are significant more expensive and harder to obtain. Removing this obstacle will provide certainty and a boost to local development

**Cash Flow Support**
The inability to generate revenue is the greatest cause of the economic crisis. In addition to our Foundation’s Rapid Response Fund, we are also providing input into how federal, county and local dollars are used to support businesses in need and exploring every idea to allow for greater revenue generation in a safe way.

**Property Tax Deferment**
The state should move quickly to allow businesses severely impacted by COVID-19 orders to defer there summer property taxes interest and penalty free until the end of the year. The Chamber supports House Bill 5761 and calls for its immediate passage by the Legislature and approval by the Governor.

**Employer Liability Protections and Controlling Lawsuit Abuse**
As the economy reopens, businesses need to know that if state and federal guidance on safety protocols is adhered to they will be protected and Michigan should guard against the potential avalanche of lawsuits related to COVID-19 that will harm our recovery.
Advocate for Responsible State Budget Recommendations
With significant budget deficits expected and increasing tax counterproductive to creating a climate for a strong recovery, crafting a practical budget is paramount.

Sales, Use and Withholding Tax Deferment
The state should allow deferment of sales, use and withholding taxes due while business operations are impacted during COVID-19, interest and penalty free, until the end of the year.

Regulatory Flexibility and Common-Sense Compliance
Empower employers and works by supporting flexibility in applying new standards, and suspending now-unnecessary regulations, to address COVID-19 in the unique workplaces that create our economy.

Fix the Unemployment System and Protect Employer Relief
Steps need to be taken to ensure the unemployment system is functioning well enough to address the majority of issues and employers need certainty that benefits paid during the pandemic will not be counted against their unemployment taxes per the Governor’s Executive Order.

Talent Continuity and Outcomes | A-F Letter Grading
Michigan has failed to implement the A-F letter grade legislation that was signed into law in December 2018. We will continue to advocate and hold our Michigan Department of Education accountable to implement this law in its entirety.

Reconnect & Connecting Displaced Workers with Jobs
Michigan Reconnect was a program developed by a broad coalition of stakeholders. The program, aimed at workers over 25 years-old, was developed as a last dollar, tuition-free pathway to obtain a college degree or technical certificate. The funding and successful implementation of this program will help connect displaced workers with employment. There will be a great need for employees to re-skill after COVID-19 as employment options shift and this program will be critical in fill our talent gap.

Going Pro
The Going Pro Talent Fund has proven itself as a successful program since its implementation in 2014. Going forward, advocating for increased funds in this program will be a top priority. Competitive grants allow businesses to meet real-time demand, by providing dollars to go towards training for their employees that end in an industry-recognized credential or certificate. This unique program allows businesses to be nimble and upskill their existing workforce. Funding has traditionally been around 30 million annually, and the business demand before COVID-19 was closer to 50-60 million. Continued advocacy to match dollars to our businesses’ demand is necessary as we deal with a smaller state budget.

Childcare - Tri-Share
Child care has been a long time priority of the Chamber. Our established statewide child care coalition has made tremendous progress toward a tri-share model- splitting the cost of child care between family, state/federal government, and business. The Chamber is actively pursuing a pilot program to be included in the 2021 FY budget. COVID-19 has placed an emphasis on the need for accessible, affordable, reliable child care statewide. There is no better time to get the tri-share pilot program implemented to meet the needs of business as we restart.

Testing
Statewide assessments have been waived as our educational system has transitioned to distanced learning. Assessments and data are critical during this time as it can help our education system get a clear understanding of where our students are, how COVID-19 has effected learning, and better inform future efforts. We will continue to advocate for statewide assessments to provide data and promote evidence-based practices.
A Smart Restart Agenda
Strong Infrastructure | A Talented Michigan | Vibrant Business Climate

Adequate Resources for Economic Recovery
The Chamber supports policies that will help businesses stay open and reduce the potential of future layoffs. We supported the CARES Act and urges the Congress to pass legislation to help businesses stay open and pay their employees, reduce the potential of future layoffs, and ensure more hardworking Americans have access to their paychecks.

Business Interruption Insurance
Similar to the Terrorism Risk Insurance Act, Congress should explore a program that provides for shared public and private compensation for business interruption losses resulting from a pandemic. Insurers that participate in the program will be charged an annual premium for reinsurance coverage and in return for a federal backstop on pandemic losses, insurers would agree to make available business interruption insurance coverage for insured losses.

Monitor & Discuss
Tax Increases | Paid Sick Leave and Minimum Wage Defense | Economic Development Incentives
Elections: Ballot Signatures | Voting by Mail

Conclusion
We know the economic impact of the COVID-19 crisis will have long-term consequences. We call on our policymakers to embrace these ideas to support businesses in their efforts to provide safe spaces for their employees and customers as we embark on a smart restart.