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Economic Development Council of Colorado
2020 Legislative Session

The General Assembly convened on January 8 and worked until mid-March when legislative leadership recessed proceedings due to the novel Coronavirus. Prior to the recess, the legislature was working to address various Democratic priorities. With unfinished business the legislature reconvened on May 26 when it was safe to do so and adjourned June 15. The state budget, school finance act, sunset bills, and COVID-19 issues become the new priorities. An unexpected priority also emerged – law enforcement reform. Of note, the legislature had to address a $3.3 billion shortfall, off a General Fund base of $12 billion. In order to address the budget shortfall, the Joint Budget Committee made a variety of budget reductions across every state department.

It was an active year for the Economic Development Council of Colorado as we supported many bills making significant investments in Colorado businesses and communities while opposing others that put our business-friendly environment at risk.

Tax Credits and Incentives

While we didn't see as many tax credits and incentives bills as in prior years, there were a few that we lobbied – HB 20-1298 would have allowed the Economic Development Commission to allow businesses to treat certain income tax credits as transferable credits and HB 20-1299 would have extended the renewable energy tax credit within the Enterprise Zone. Both of these were OEDIT agenda bills, but once the legislature returned from its recess, these bills did not become priorities. We also supported an effort for the film industry; after their funding was cut by more than half, we supported a tax credit through HB 20-1354.

Rural Economic Development

Rural economic development became a hot issue this session with three bills brought forth aimed at helping rural communities with different approaches. First, HB 20-1003 extended the rural jump-start zone program for an additional five years, relaxes the competition clause so more businesses can qualify, and allows EDOs to be authorizing entities for a new business to apply to the program. Second, SB 20-002 codifies the rural economic development initiative grant program within DOLA and would have granted additional funds to the program, but the fiscal constraints at the end of the session prevented this. And lastly, SB 20-054 would have created a grant program for early stage businesses that are primary employers in a rural area; however, this bill did not pass.

Business-Friendly Bills

One of the biggest priorities for the Democrat-led legislature was the passage of a paid family leave program. After 6 years of failed attempts, a task force met over the interim to develop recommendations on the specific attributes of a recommended program. While the task force made a set of recommendations, legislators and stakeholders were unable to come to an affordable compromise on paid family leave and no bill was ever introduced. We did monitor a bill introduced after the hiatus that created a paid sick leave program (SB 20-205) once the business community was able to negotiate amendments to make the bill workable.

We were happy to support HB 20-1326 creating a program for workers to easily become credentialed in their profession after moving to Colorado. We also opposed two construction defect bills that were pushed at the legislature as consumer friendly bills – SB 20-093 and SB 20-138 – that failed to pass. A significant victory was postponing indefinitely (killing) SB 20-216, which would have created a presumption for a worker who contracts COVID-19.

Transportation

The 2020 session was not a good year for transportation. A bill that had been discussed since the interim and initially drafted as a bill from the bi-partisan Transportation Legislation Review Committee, was introduced prior to the legislature's recess – HB 20-1151. This bill would have allowed a transportation planning organization to operate as a regional transportation authority - that is to finance, construct, operate, or maintain a regional transportation system. After many failed attempts at a statewide solution, this new approach granted regions the control to develop and fund those projects that would be best for their regions. With limited time after the recess, the legislature did not consider this a priority bill and it died on the calendar. In addition, the state had to cut $50 million General Fund from transportation funding to balance the budget.

Fiscal Policy

Once the economy slowed because of Coronavirus, there became more of an urgency to address fiscal issues in the state. Among those issues was repealing the Gallagher Amendment (SCR 20-001). If repealed by the voters, no taxes would increase, but residential property tax payment rates would stabilize for the future. This passed with bipartisan support and greater than two-thirds support in both chambers and will be on the 2020 ballot for consideration. One bill we opposed was introduced very late in session as a budget balancing bill – HB 20-1420 would have eliminated various tax credits for businesses dealing them another blow at a time of economic crisis. Fortunately, after much outcry from the business community and others, the bill was dramatically scaled down.

Overall, it was another successful legislative session for the Economic Development Council of Colorado. Here is a full list of legislation tracked by the EDCC during the session – EDCC Bill Report.