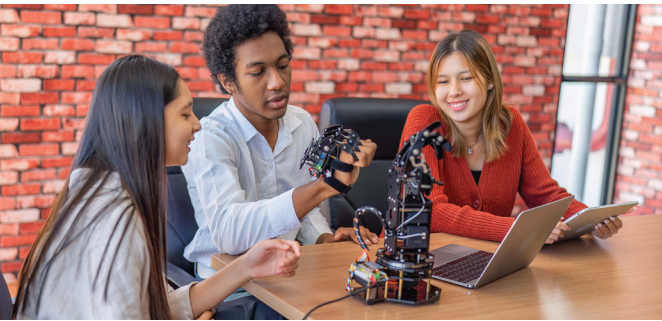




BCW BUSINESS COUNCIL OF WESTCHESTER



2025 LEGISLATIVE AGENDA

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Marsha Gordon
President/CEO

George Lence
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John Ravitz
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The Business Council of Westchester (BCW) is the county’s largest and most prestigious business membership organization, representing more than 1,100 members, including multinational corporations, hospitals, universities, biotech pioneers, not-for-profits, entrepreneurs and companies of all sizes. As the county’s only business membership organization focusing on advocacy and economic development, the BCW’s members enjoy unparalleled access to today’s top thought leaders, diverse business development opportunities and lawmakers at all levels of government.

The BCW’s members represent over 200,000 employees in Westchester County and beyond. Most importantly, the members continue to help drive the county’s economy in creating economic growth and jobs. The BCW is proud of its open, inclusive and collaborative culture, which is fostered through the involvement of its members, and the strong leadership and dedication of its Board of Directors. Many of the BCW’s members conduct business on a regional, statewide, national and international level, which has served to create opportunities for business growth in Westchester and throughout the Hudson Valley.

The BCW is a private not-for-profit corporation funded by annual investments by its members.

BCW President and CEO Marsha Gordon, BCW Board Chair James Schutzer, Hall of Fame Co-Chairs Elizabeth Bracken-Thompson and Jim Giangrande, and the winners of the 2024 BCW Hall of Fame awards.



GOVERNMENT ACTION COUNCIL

Improved business climate

The mission of the BCW's Government Action Council is to provide leadership in public policy and involve our members in helping to advocate for economic opportunity in Westchester County and the Hudson Valley.

To accomplish this, the BCW's Government Action Council will:

- ▶ **Educate and inform** the business community about relevant county, state and federal policy issues.
- ▶ **Review** county, state and federal legislation and regulations to assess potential impacts on the business community.
- ▶ **Influence** public policy outcomes through advocacy when the business community's interest may be affected.
- ▶ **Serve** as a resource for information and a clearinghouse for the business community and governmental leaders.
- ▶ **Leverage** public policy issues and legislation to promote business growth and create a more competitive business environment.
- ▶ **Look** beyond the borders of Westchester County and the Hudson Valley to address issues impacting the business community statewide.

The important role of the BCW's Legislative Agenda

Each year, legislative bills that are passed or not passed in local, state and federal legislatures have a powerful impact on the Westchester business community's ability to serve its stakeholders. Business leaders, whether they represent large, medium or small-sized communities, owe it to themselves, their employees and their shareholders (if they work for a publicly traded company), to offer their opinion and expertise on important policy issues.

In order to address this critical responsibility, the BCW's Government Action Council creates a Legislative Agenda each year. All BCW members are encouraged to contribute their suggestions and expertise in this process. **The BCW also works with local, state and federal elected officials to convert legislative goals into reality.** Included in this overall effort is the BCW's annual Albany Lobby Day, which is held during the state's legislative session. The Government Action Council also meets on a regular basis with local, state and federal elected officials and agency representatives to ensure that positions on legislation and regulatory matters are addressed in a timely manner. Every year, the work of the BCW's Legislative Agenda promotes pro-business recommendations that help Westchester and the Hudson Valley's economy. Every Westchester County elected official, as well as all statewide elected officials, will receive a copy of the BCW's 2025 Legislative Agenda.

Members of the Westchester County Board of Legislators joined BCW President and CEO Marsha Gordon and Executive Vice President/COO John Ravitz and event sponsors for the 2024 BCW's Annual Westchester Board of Legislators Reception.



board of legislators

Current challenges and priorities

In 2025, government at all levels will face critical challenges. The BCW will continue to be a strong voice for the Westchester business community. The BCW will urge our elected officials to adopt sound policies that lead to sustainable economic growth which, in turn, will create much-needed jobs in all business sectors.

The BCW looks forward to continuing meaningful discussions with our county, state and federal elected officials on the many issues presented in this Legislative Agenda, to ensure that the collective voice of the county's business community is heard.

Jonathan Gertman, The NRP Group; Steve Horton, Grandview Consulting Group; Kenneth Plummer, Forward Thinkers Development LLC; BCW Executive Vice President/COO John Ravitz; Christopher Gibaldi, Rose Associates; Andrea Mignone, Rose Associates; Peter O'Keefe, Rose Associates; and Michael Goldrick, PCSB Bank.

state of the economy



2025 Legislative Agenda

Remaining fiscally responsible

Westchester County will continue to face serious fiscal challenges in 2025. The BCW is proud of the strong working relationship it had with former County Executive George Latimer and looks forward to continuing this relationship in his current capacity as the county's newest member of Congress. Looking ahead, the BCW will continue this strong partnership with new County Executive Ken Jenkins, and with the members of the County Board of Legislators, to promote economic development in Westchester County.

In December 2024, the Board of Legislators voted and approved the county's 2025 \$2.5 billion Executive Budget. The BCW applauds the County Executive, as this year's budget maintains the same county tax levy as 2024, marking the sixth consecutive year without a levy increase. Another longtime BCW goal is improving Westchester County's credit rating. Fitch Ratings has given the county a solid "AAA" credit rating. This designation of a stable rating sends a strong message to the business community that Westchester County's fiscal house is in order. The BCW will also advocate against any new,

unnecessary regulations and fees that will cause businesses additional hardships. The economic health of Westchester County is dependent upon our county government making the right decisions to ensure fiscal responsibility for the future.

It is also essential that Westchester's municipal governments do all they can to assist businesses in all sectors. In 2025, the BCW encourages all county municipalities to look to adopt programs that will offer a practical, manageable and viable approach to support its local businesses while preserving the character and scale of their communities. To this end, local governments must continue to engage their citizens to be active and positive participants in this process that will only help Westchester's businesses move forward.

In 2024, the BCW held numerous roundtable discussions with members of the Board of Legislators to discuss concerns about specific pieces of legislation that the Board was proposing to adopt. During these sessions, business owners of all sizes gave concrete examples of what the negative impact would be if certain legislative initiatives were adopted. It is critical that county legislative leaders understand that passing legislation that has unintended consequences could serve as a barrier for future employers' ability to create more jobs in Westchester County.

BCW Valley Bank Leadership Conversation series featured Westchester County's new County Executive Ken Jenkins, BCW Executive Vice President/COO John Ravitz, BCW Board Chair James Shutzer, BCW President and CEO Marsha Gordon, and Joe McCoy, Market President of Commercial Banking for Valley National Bank.



BCW Board Member Karen Erren, President & CEO of Feeding Westchester, led a tour of the newly-renovated Feeding Westchester distribution facility to members of the Westchester State Delegation.



In 2025, the BCW will again remind the county government that Westchester prides itself on having a strong and vibrant workforce. Our employers are committed to their employees and passing legislation that becomes direct mandates and causes unintended consequences to businesses sends a message to employers, that in Westchester County, government will determine how they manage their workforce. In 2025, the BCW will also continue to help make the county's Element 46 Program a success. The program was designed to help startup businesses succeed by providing them with free workspace, training, mentoring and access to pro bono consulting services. This program, and other like-minded programs, will be critical to help the county encourage entrepreneurs to create businesses that will be part of the county's permanent workforce.

The BCW'S Coalition for Westchester Airport

In 2025, the BCW's Coalition for Westchester Airport will advocate for additional and necessary enhancements to make the airport more attractive so that it can continue to play an important role in creating economic development opportunities for the county. The Coalition will remind its political leaders of the following important facts:

- ▶ The airport is a **key element in the county's transportation infrastructure.**
- ▶ The airport is one of the county's **most valuable economic assets.**
- ▶ The airport is **essential to attract and retain businesses in Westchester.**
- ▶ The airport **employs thousands of people in diverse industries.**

The 2024 Rising Stars class was honored by over 500 guests who attended the BCW's Rising Stars Celebration.



- ▶ The airport is a **tool for workforce development and training.**
- ▶ The airport **helps maintain a healthy tax climate.**

Over 120 businesses have joined the BCW's Coalition for Westchester Airport as it continues to advocate for a new partnership between the county and an operator with a proven track record who will improve essential services and address important environmental and quality-of-life issues that the business community, the traveling community and the neighboring community are contending with.

The BCW'S WestchesterWorks program

Five years ago, the BCW created a program called WestchesterWorks, a social-justice program designed to recruit and offer free advanced training to local residents in underrepresented communities to enable them to qualify for skilled jobs in the construction trades in Westchester County. A focus on accountability sets this public-private inclusion initiative apart because program staff will actively monitor the apprentices' attendance, performance, and needs to ensure program success.

To address longtime, local concerns about diversity and the lack of employment opportunities in the construction trades

for members of marginalized communities, the BCW's Smart Development Working Group helped establish WestchesterWorks, a proactive approach to opening career paths. The effort is a collaboration among the BCW's real estate development members, Southern Westchester BOCES, and Westhab, which will leverage its considerable community network to identify apprentices.

This program will be a landmark investment that major real estate development leaders in Westchester are making to address the local hiring issue by providing a no-cost avenue for young adults who are not pursuing college. Apprenticeships greatly enhance skills and establish professional relationships that help to begin and grow in careers in construction. The BCW will continue to urge Westchester County government, as well as other municipalities, to engage in an active partnership to support this program.

Workforce development

The BCW recognizes that having the appropriate talent to fill available jobs in Westchester must continue to be a top priority. Over the past six years, many Westchester residents either voluntarily left the workforce or lost their jobs, and will be looking for new opportunities to rejoin the workforce. In 2025, as a member

of the county's Workforce Investment Board, the BCW will continue to advocate for funding on the federal, state, and county levels for workforce training programs to meet the job needs of our key employers, especially in healthcare, life sciences, hospitality, and IT. The BCW has a special long-standing commitment to employment opportunities for all. Additionally, the BCW's partnerships with Westchester's institutions of higher learning will continue to provide the groundwork for building the workforce of the future.

Parks

Parks and open spaces are critical to the economic, environmental and social health of Westchester County. Quality parks and recreational facilities improve the economic climate and well-being of the community by attracting businesses and tourism. Studies have demonstrated that quality parks and recreational facilities are cited as one of the top three reasons that businesses use to decide the location of their business and for the benefit of their employees.

Severe weather patterns have clearly demonstrated the urgent need for green infrastructure. The county's parks and open spaces not only serve as respites during fair weather, but they also serve as vital refuges during extreme weather events, absorbing and mitigating storm effects. Without our county's vast expanses of open green space, the storm damage would be immeasurably greater. The county must continue to build up the resiliency of these open spaces to help protect countless numbers of private homes and businesses.



annual dinner

At the BCW's 2024 Annual Dinner, BCW Board Chair James Schutzer, BCW President and CEO Marsha Gordon, and BCW Executive Vice President/COO John Ravitz presented County Executive/Congressman-Elect George Lattimer a Gold Record Award for his ongoing accomplishments and commitment to Westchester County.

The iconic Westchester County Center will be 100 years old in 2030. It has served many purposes, and millions of residents and visitors over the decades. The BCW supports the county's effort to reimagine a new County Center for the next 100 years. Businesses and individuals should participate in all public opportunities to voice their ideas about how this unique event venue should be restored and used.

Additionally, continued investment in parks capital projects, particularly infrastructure maintenance and upgrades, continues to be a BCW goal. In addition to keeping parks as safe and affordable as they can be for the ever-increasing numbers of users, these projects inject important commercial activity into Westchester's economy, creating jobs and millions of dollars in local spending. The business community and county parks are important allies to each other. Without private investment, these vital green spaces cannot be preserved at the level that we all need them to be. The advocacy of our business leaders keeps the importance of parks front and center on the county's agenda.



NY State Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins accompanied BCW Executive Vice President/COO John Ravitz on a tour of BCW member Amazon's new distribution center in Hawthorne, NY.



The BCW'S Westchester Innovation Network program

Less than three years after its launch, the BCW's Westchester Innovation Network (WIN) program continues to generate success stories between innovators and their matches.

The BCW launched WIN in December 2021 to drive economic growth and development in Westchester County. By reaching out to cutting-edge companies within Westchester and outside of the region and partnering with them, **WIN's goal is to integrate more innovation into our local businesses and municipalities.**

WIN launched with three components:

- 1 The Innovation Match Program attracts innovators to Westchester and pairs them with leading local companies to test their services in real-world settings. The goals are to help local host companies better understand innovation and to provide feedback to innovators who seek product testing.

BCW Executive Vice President/COO John Ravitz joined municipal leaders from the Village of Port Chester, and faculty and students from Iona University, who participated in the BCW's WIN City Labs Program which focused on the exciting development of Port Chester's riverfront property.

The BCW also recognizes that non-tax investments in parks are vital to their preservation as one of the county's greatest assets. Investing in Westchester County parks is not only good for the community and the people who live, work, and play here, but also provides great value to our businesses. To that end, the BCW supports an update to the Parks Master Plan which was last revised in 2002. This is a vital step to ensure that the needs of the entire Westchester community are considered in the future development of these priceless assets and encourages the county administration and the Board of Legislators to begin this critical study.

win



- 2 The BCW City Labs Program spotlights a host community, and teams with students from Iona University, to identify innovative projects that will deliver immediate economic benefits to the municipality.
- 3 The WIN Implementation Guide recommends policies to better attract and retain innovators, including funding, job training and incentives.

Far exceeding original projections, WIN's initial three years attracted over 60 local, national and international innovators who paired with local businesses to test commercially viable innovations. Among WIN's successes this year are: Immigr8, who partnered with Richmond Community Services to implement its pioneering artificial-intelligence-driven platform that simplifies visa applications for foreign workers; the Canadian firm EarthSuds, who partnered with Cambria Suites in White

Plains to introduce their environmentally-friendly shampoo, conditioner, and body wash tablets designed to minimize plastic waste; and the Australian firm Laronix, who partnered with the Burke Neurological Institute to test and enhance its MIRA Voice device, which uses artificial intelligence to help people with conditions such as spinal cord injuries and cerebral palsy regain clear speech.

The BCW City Labs Program also delivered additional results this past year through the pairing of Iona University with the City of White Plains and the Village of Port Chester to identify projects that deliver immediate economic benefits. Students met with city officials, the community and small business owners in order to successfully bring innovation and technology into each of these cities.

BCW President and CEO Marsha Gordon, BCW Board Chair James Schutzer, Luiz Aragon, coordinator of the BCW's Westchester Innovation Network (WIN) Program, and BCW Board Member April Horton present BCW Board Member Dr. Joseph Ricca, White Plains School District Superintendent, White Plains High School faculty and students, an award of \$2,500 at the BCW's 2024 Showcase.

win



New York State faces many challenges this year, and the Governor and the State Legislature must work together to prioritize programs and policies that will maintain New York State's competitiveness, as well as bring back and create new jobs as a means of bringing in more revenue to enhance the state's economic climate. The state will be tasked with navigating the new policies that will be undertaken on the federal level by the President, his new administration and the shift in Congress. These new policies will impact New Yorkers in essentially every area, from affordable housing and economic development, to crime and public safety, healthcare, education, environment and energy. We will need to continue to be diligent in making sure the voices of our members are heard.

Last year, the BCW's annual Albany Lobby Day at the State Capitol was once again well attended. We met and discussed our priorities with Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins and members of the Westchester legislative delegation, as well as representatives from the Governor's office, including her budget director. Throughout the 2024 legislative session, the BCW was actively engaged. Countless meetings were held

with leadership and members of both the Senate and Assembly, as well as with the Governor's office. Additionally, dozens of Memorandums of Support and Opposition on bills of importance to the BCW business community were issued to the State Legislature.

In the year ahead, the BCW will continue to be proactive. **The BCW will be diligent in monitoring the upcoming budget discussions and legislative session, and evaluating what the potential impacts may bring to the business community.**

The BCW will also continue to remain in constant contact with the Governor, Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins, Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie, and the members of the Westchester legislative delegation to ensure that the Westchester business community's voices continue to be heard. The BCW has enjoyed a long and successful collaborative working relationship with Governor Kathy Hochul, and we look forward to continuing to work with her and her administration. New York State still faces many challenges, and we stand ready to work closely with the governor as she continues to promote economic development, job creation and housing initiatives in Westchester and across the state.

albany lobby day

NY State Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins and members of the Westchester Senate Delegation met with BCW President and CEO Marsha Gordon, BCW Board Chair James Schutzler, George Lence, Chair of the BCW's Government Action Council, and BCW members during the BCW's 2024 Albany Lobby Day.



In 2025, the BCW urges the State Legislature to:

- ▶ **Award** a downstate full gaming license that will allow Empire City Casino by MGM Resorts to achieve its potential as a full-scale commercial casino. This continues to be the BCW's top legislative priority, and the BCW urges the expedited awarding of the available casino licenses to assist the state's recovery and bring much-needed jobs, investment and revenue into the region.
- ▶ **Reject** Antitrust legislation (S.335/A.2015) that would make significant amendments to the General Business Law's provisions regarding illegal monopolies. While it is important for antitrust laws to be enforced against anti-competitive conduct, the resulting vague and broad provisions of this bill would allow enforcement and penalties against business conduct that is clearly pro-competitive, and which results in consumer benefits. The bill would also significantly expand the opportunity to bring cases under antitrust laws, by authorizing private class-action suits for the recovery of damages. This legislation would serve to undermine competition rather than enhance it, by creating and applying new, undefined criteria to regulate market behavior. The BCW will continue its work with a statewide coalition of organizations which was a strong advocate in defeating this legislation in 2022, 2023 and 2024.
- ▶ **Oppose** legislation that would ban all non-compete agreements in New York State. Many of Westchester County's employers rely on non-compete



hotel association

BCW Executive Vice President/COO John Ravitz and Andra Horsch, Vice President of State Government Affairs, welcome the leadership of the Westchester Hotel Association to the NY State Assembly's chamber.

agreements with their senior employees to protect their intellectual property, proprietary information and client relationships for some period during which they are prepared to compensate covered employees. Similarly, parties that are acquiring a business or business interests rely on non-compete provisions as a condition of the transaction. If this legislation becomes law, it will disrupt generations of business practices that are deemed essential to protect the intellectual property and proprietary interests of employers, and to maintain a vibrant and innovative economy in New York. The Governor vetoed this legislation in 2023, and we will be working again this year to prevent its passage.

- ▶ **Reject** the Tax the Rich agenda that would increase taxes for many New Yorkers. The agenda includes bills to implement: a new progressive income tax structure for high income payers; a capital gains tax; an heir's tax; a mark-to-market tax; a stock transfer tax; and additional taxes on certain business income included in an individual's taxable income.

- ▶ **Oppose** any new costly mandates on businesses. As we look to recruit and retain businesses in New York State, it is imperative that the Legislature refrain from passing legislation that imposes costly unfunded mandates on businesses that create an unnecessary layer of regulation that will merely serve as a burden to already struggling businesses across the state. Instead, we should be looking for innovative ways to assist businesses of all sizes so they can continue to operate and contribute to New York's economy.
- ▶ **Oppose** workers' compensation bills, including S.172/A.84 that proposes a dramatic increase in short-term disability benefits, that would result in higher costs and premiums for all New York State businesses, especially small businesses, at a time when they are contending with unrelenting economic challenges, including widespread inflation, supply chain issues, extensive labor shortages and excessive unemployment insurance costs.
- ▶ **Oppose** legislation that seeks to create a new class of damages awardable in wrongful death lawsuits. This legislation would have a disastrous impact on businesses in the state, endangering our economy. This bill would radically expand the kinds of damages recoverable in wrongful death actions, driving up liability insurance premiums for public and private entities across the state. Liability insurance premiums are already higher in New York than almost anywhere else in the country. This bill would make it harder to attract new companies, and would discourage local entrepreneurs from pursuing their goals and remaining

in New York. The BCW was pleased that the Governor vetoed this bill in 2022, 2023 and 2024.

- ▶ **Oppose** the Consumer and Small Business Protection Act (S.105) that would greatly expand New York's Deceptive Acts and Practices Law (GBL §349) and expose small and medium-sized businesses to frivolous lawsuits, as the bill falls short of creating a mechanism by which businesses can effectively comply.
- ▶ **Oppose** the Clean Deliveries Act (S.1180) that would mandate significant new construction and operational standards for "heavy distribution warehouses" that would have adverse economic development and environmental consequences. It would effectively prevent further warehouse development in New York, eliminating major local investment projects while shifting new development and jobs out of state. It would also increase drive times and distances for serving New York customers, resulting in increased regional and local air emissions.
- ▶ **Oppose** the New York HEAT Act that would prohibit some uses of natural gas and mandate the discontinued use of portions of the gas distribution system impacting decisions to invest or re-invest in gas-dependent operations.
- ▶ **Oppose** the New York Privacy Act that would apply to all legal entities that conduct business in New York (with no small business exemption), and would require that all use of personal information must be expressly opted into by the individual.

- ▶ **Oppose** legislation (A.1975) that would require certain companies and corporations to report certain data regarding the gender, race, and ethnicity of their employees. The BCW opposes this bill as being unnecessary since it is duplicative of Executive Order 162 and establishes another mandate on businesses by requiring that substantially similar information contained in the Employer Information Report EEO-1 be filed with the New York Secretary of State. This legislation was vetoed by the Governor in 2023 and we will be advocating against its passage again this year.
- ▶ **Oppose** legislation that seeks to regulate the use of electronic monitoring and automated decision tools in employment. While the BCW supports the intent of the legislation to ensure that AI-based tools do not exhibit bias in decision making, this bill makes fundamental changes in how employers operate in New York, and would present an immense administrative burden that would be very costly for employers to implement and extraordinarily difficult for the state to enforce.
- ▶ **Support** increased funding for vital programs that provide much-needed food assistance for hungry New Yorkers. In 2025, the BCW will be working with Feeding Westchester in advocating for \$75 million in funding for both the Nourish New York Program and the Hunger Prevention and Nutrition

Assistance Program (HPNAP); legislation (S.665/A.1318) to raise the SNAP minimum benefit to \$100 per month; and legislation (S.594/A.282) to provide Universal School Meals to children throughout the state. These vital programs support hungry New Yorkers, food relief organizations and New York farmers.

- ▶ **Support** a resolution to address the lack of payment to not-for-profits (NFP) by the state. The BCW is very concerned about many NFPs who have been awarded New York State contracts and have completed the work they were required to do, but have not been paid by the state. The state's continued negligence in timely payments to not-for-profits has created a crisis that threatens the very core of the services these organizations provide. NFPs, often operating on razor-thin margins, are now being asked to shoulder financial burdens they can ill afford. These delays disrupt cash flow and throw budgets into disarray, leaving organizations scrambling to maintain operations while providing essential services to the state's most vulnerable populations. The state's failure to honor its financial commitments creates ripple effects that disrupt lives and weaken the social safety net.

albany
lobby day

- ▶ **Support** legislation (S.2081) to address pay frequency and the harmful impacts of the 2019 Appellate Division, First Department decision in Vega v. CM & Associates Construction Management, LLC. This decision held that payment of wages to “manual” workers other than every week (e.g. semi-monthly payments) is subject to the private right of action and substantial penalties associated with wage theft (Labor Law §198[1-a]), even when such workers are otherwise fully paid the wages owed. The result of this interpretation of the law is that private employers are now subject to significant claims – totaling in the hundreds of millions of dollars – in instances where employees were fully compensated. These are not claims where employees have not been paid their wages; they have received all of their wages. Payroll was simply processed biweekly, instead of weekly. The resulting damaging lawsuits are negatively impacting New York’s employers, businesses, jobs and local economies and this must be addressed in 2025.
- ▶ **Support** bridging the benefits cliff in the FY 2026 State Budget. Underemployed and low-income workers in New York State often remain trapped in a cycle of poverty because the structure of social service benefits discourages economic mobility and career progression. Addressing the benefits cliff would encourage workers to pursue career advancement, and would help employers retain and promote quality employees. It would

also save taxpayer dollars by helping workers grow independent from social service benefits. Policy actions include: enacting a six-month benefit disregard, which will encourage workers to take career leaps; allowing training program enrollment to satisfy benefit program work requirements; updating asset caps for collecting social service benefits; and convening social service experts to study benefit adjustments and eliminate the cliff once and for all.

- ▶ **Support** tax reforms to reduce compliance costs for New York-based employers.
- ▶ **Reform** the Scaffold Law in the FY 2026 State Budget. This continues to be one of the major legislative priorities for the BCW in 2025. The reform of this outdated law would assist the state’s economy and free up millions of dollars in state and municipal budgets, save hundreds of millions in infrastructure costs, and release an estimated two hundred million dollars a year into education budgets across the state.
- ▶ **Pass** a serious regulatory reform package to help reduce the state’s onerous regulatory burden. The BCW encourages

the Legislature to introduce legislation to end New York’s regulatory barrage. New York has approximately 140,000 pages of regulations. Businesses that are looking to relocate or expand in New York need to see that state government is being proactive in removing obstacles and burdens that have a negative impact on their day-to-day operations.

- ▶ **Reform** the state environmental quality review (SEQR) process. The BCW urges the Governor and the Legislature to amend, and in some cases eliminate, the SEQR rules and regulations that cause unnecessary delays for important projects throughout the state. This is especially needed now as we move to building sustainable energy infrastructure. Delays cause local municipalities to at times abandon economic development projects, which then prevents new jobs and revenue from being generated. It is clear that the SEQR process has been used to cause serious delays in getting Westchester projects completed in a timely manner. As the county’s energy landscape changes and Westchester looks to build solid renewable energy infrastructure, communities must not use SEQR to delay these projects. If that should happen, the county will face reliability issues.

program, streamline the application process, enhance opportunities and encourage greater participation.

- ▶ **Pass** yearly on-time budgets in the light of day. The passing of the state budget should not occur in the middle of the night. Debating and voting on the budget should be done in a transparent manner that gives the public the opportunity to have a clear understanding of the state’s spending plan.
- ▶ **Reduce** the cost of construction on public-private projects. The state must reduce the costs of construction by repealing the Wicks Law and reforming the Public Construction Act.
- ▶ **Oppose** legislation that would hold internet service providers subject to the same rules and regulations that power companies must follow. This would lead to less investment, and make New York less competitive to neighboring states.
- ▶ **Oppose** legislation that would expand the application of the state’s False Claims Act to tax issues that would subject individuals and business taxpayers to increased compliance and enforcement uncertainty. The BCW was pleased that the Governor vetoed this bill in 2021, 2022 and 2023.

Leadership conversations



BCW Valley Bank Leadership Conversation series featured NY State Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins being interviewed by BCW President and CEO Marsha Gordon.

- ▶ Continue to **create** enhanced tax credits for small businesses and adopt new small business tax reform policies to assist small businesses, which are vital to the health and well-being of our communities.
- ▶ Continue to **pass** amendments to the state’s Minority and Women’s Business Enterprises program to bolster the

Economic development

Economic development programs and policies will continue to play a major role in the fiscal condition of Westchester and the rest of the state. They should work to retain jobs, create new ones and create a competitive environment for businesses to thrive. **The BCW will continue to advocate that the most effective economic**

development program is the creation of a more competitive business environment, which can only occur when New York State acts to lower state-imposed taxes, fees, assessments and employer mandates.

▶ The BCW **supports** the Governor’s Regional Economic Development Councils (REDC) that catalyze job creation and economic development in the state. The BCW was pleased that the Governor’s FY 2026 Executive Budget included \$750 million for economic development including \$225 million for a new round of REDC awards. The BCW is optimistic that this program will receive funding in the final budget and make its way to communities in Westchester County. Most recently, and among others, the Community Center of Northern Westchester (CCNW) was awarded \$100,000 to improve accessibility and ensure ADA compliance at its Katonah facility; and the Westchester Institute for Human Development (WIHD) was awarded \$100,000 to facilitate the renovation of their new location in Elmsford to create a secure area for WIHD’s Child Welfare Services (CWS) program and Children’s Advocacy Center.

▶ The BCW **supports** the reauthorization of \$200 million for the Downtown Revitalization Initiative (DRI) and the NY Forward Programs. Many municipalities in Westchester County have already benefited from receiving DRI funding, and we hope that more municipalities will be able to access this program that transforms downtown neighborhoods into vibrant centers. Likewise with the NY Forward Program, this program will help assist developers as we look towards more development in the County.

▶ The BCW **emphatically supports** legislation to lower Unemployment Insurance (UI) taxes and to allocate state and federal funds to restore the UI system, and was disappointed this was not addressed in the Governor’s FY 2026 Executive Budget. The private sector shed more than 1.7 million jobs in March 2020, driving unemployment from 4.4% to 16.2%. Extraordinary amounts of money flowed out of the New York UI Trust Fund to satisfy claims, and the state needed to borrow more than \$11 billion from the federal government. In July 2023, businesses were once again notified that they would continue to take on the state’s interest debt payment. Replenishing the UI Trust Fund should not and cannot solely fall on the backs of New York

employers for actions mandated by state government which have already suffered immense financial harm.

▶ The BCW continues to **oppose** prevailing wage legislation. Seven years ago, the BCW formed its Smart Development Working Group, that is comprised of Westchester’s most prominent developers, in response to legislation to require the payment of prevailing wages on private construction projects receiving any form of state funding support. While this legislation ultimately passed, we need to be mindful of additional prevailing wage legislation, including a bill that could further increase the cost of private construction projects that bring new residents, new jobs and new opportunities to Westchester County. This legislation which the Governor vetoed last year, would specifically make both overall eligibility for the state’s brownfield program and eligibility for the program’s redevelopment credit for tangible property investments contingent on a project sponsor paying public works prevailing wage for all remedial project-related construction work. This, in turn, would impose higher project costs on brownfield cleanup projects, thereby acting simply as a deterrent to undertaking these types of projects.

▶ The BCW, along with its Smart Development Working Group, appreciated the 2022 extension and strengthening of the Brownfield Cleanup Program that incentivizes private-sector redevelopment of contaminated brownfield sites across the state. However, the BCW **urges** the Governor and State Legislature to make additional

amendments to the program so that more sites can be developed, including extending the time that projects can draw down the qualified tax credits as many larger projects take a longer time to be developed.

▶ The BCW **supports** the reauthorization of \$100 million for the Fast New York Program that was formally launched in December 2022 to facilitate the development of shovel-ready sites across the state. This advance work creates a site where construction can begin rapidly once a prospective business decides to develop a facility there. By reducing the time it takes a company to begin construction of a new facility, the state and its local partners will be able to provide valuable savings to the business, as well as job opportunities for local residents.

▶ The BCW **supports** Industrial Development Agencies (IDAs) and opposes any legislation that seeks to hinder their effectiveness at promoting and assisting the growth of New York State’s economy. This includes supporting IDA sales tax exemptions and pilot programs with local towns to incentivize in-state investments and job creation; supporting legislation to authorize IDAs to utilize their funds generated from fees to issue loans and grants to small businesses; opposing legislation (S.1410) to increase the oversight powers of the Authorities Budget Office that would grant it the authority to shut down public authorities or IDAs it deems non-compliant; opposing legislation (S.132) that would prevent IDAs from offering a PILOT on school taxes which would lead

BCW President and CEO Marsha Gordon and BCW Executive Vice President/COO John Ravitz hosted a meeting with members of the NYS Westchester Delegation and the BCW’s Smart Development Working Group.



to IDAs losing projects and ultimately less jobs, less economic activity and less revenue generated for not only school districts, but local municipalities as well; and opposing legislation that was vetoed in 2024 to require that the membership of each industrial development agency (IDA) include at least a representative of a local labor organization, and either a representative of a school board or a superintendent of a school district. These last three bills would adversely impact economic development efforts across New York State.

- ▶ The BCW continues to **oppose** the Securing Wages Earned Against Theft (SWEAT) bill (S.2131/A.166) that would allow employees to place a lien on an employer's personal property based on a claim of wage and hour violations. This legislation would be an unjustifiable burden to Westchester employers as it allows employees to secure a lien before an allegation is proven. This could potentially affect the credit lines of small businesses and put businesses at risk without any misconduct ever being proven.
- ▶ The BCW joins the Ellis Island Initiative in **supporting** their Ready to Work advocacy campaign for the inclusion of \$100 million in the State Budget for Workforce Development Funding for a comprehensive initiative focusing on integrating marginalized workers (including recent immigrants) into the economy, by supporting job readiness programs, occupational skills training, language skills and support for employers and service providers.
- ▶ The BCW **supports** the expansion of high-quality and affordable broadband access for all New York State residents. Over the past decade, we have seen every sector of our economy benefit from the pace of change in the technology ecosystem, with broadband connectivity being the foundation of this digital economy. Broadband will continue to evolve and usher in new and unparalleled experiences for businesses and consumers. The BCW asks that the state work cooperatively with the private sector to streamline coordination and eliminate incongruous policies that make fiber-optic deployments cost prohibitive; to roll back onerous regulatory requirements, like the use and occupancy fee for state-owned rights-of-way, that disincentivize infrastructure needed to expand connectivity; resist the urge to add duplicative layers of punitive regulations on the telecommunications industry; and support and facilitate the development of 5G small designs that allow multiple carriers to expedite deployment and foster competition.
- ▶ Film is big business in Westchester County. Despite industry-wide challenges over the past few years, film production generated \$2 billion in economic activity, 6,796 jobs, and \$656 million in wages in 2022 and 2023. The BCW **supports** incentives to continue this momentum including proposals presented in the Governor's FY 2026 Executive Budget to support this industry via changes to the state's Film Tax Credit Program. This includes, among other items, removing the tiered payout structure for new applicants when paying tax credits; creating the "Empire State

Independent Production Program" with an additional \$100 million in credits targeted for independent productions with an accelerated payout schedule; and extending the original program by 2 years, from 2034 to 2036.

- ▶ The BCW also continues to **support** the hospitality and tourism industry. Westchester visitor spending reached \$2.2 billion in 2023, a 8.6% year-over-year growth, reflecting a 43% increase in all spending across New York's Hudson Valley region. The county produced the most tourism-related jobs in the Hudson Valley, creating 21,101 job opportunities. It is imperative that New York State continues to support this industry that has proven to generate revenue to municipalities and, in many cases, has served as an incubator for workforce development. In 2025, the BCW will be working with the Westchester Hotel Association to:
 - ▶ **Support** Americans with Disabilities Act website legislation to address the lawsuits that have plagued the hospitality industry in recent years, as there is no federal regulation that specifies what qualifies a website or mobile application to be compliant. The vague nature of the existing guidance leaves an entire industry vulnerable to these lawsuits. This legislation would provide businesses with an opportunity to correct any alleged violation prior to the commencement of an action.
 - ▶ **Support** adequate funding for Tourism Promotion Matching Funds to provide much-needed support for tourism promotion agencies.
- ▶ **Oppose** legislation that would mandate lodging facilities to set their air conditioners to specific temperatures. The BCW opposes this bill that seeks to micromanage the operations of lodging facilities across New York State. While the intent of this legislation to conserve energy is admirable, it sets a dangerous precedent and restricts a lodging facility's ability to operate its business as it sees fit.
- ▶ **Oppose** legislation to require employers of retail, food service or cleaning employees to give them 7-day notice of their work schedule, and a month's notice of the minimum hours of work they will be assigned. This is not practical in the hospitality industry which is constantly evolving on a day-to-day basis and is subject to circumstances of which they have no control.
- ▶ **Oppose** legislation that states that an employer may not schedule or require an employee to work during rest periods defined as the first ten hours following the end of the previous calendar day's work shift or on-call shift, or the first ten hours following the end of a work shift or on-call shift that spanned two calendar

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BCW member Wendy Wollner, BCW Board Member Susan Fox, Assemblymember Amy Paulin and BCW President and CEO Marsha Gordon at the 2024 BCW Albany Lobby Day.

days. This bill would effectively tie the hands of the hotel industry where many employees prefer the convenience of back-to-back shifts.

Empire City Casino by MGM Resorts

We need to make sure that 2025 is finally the year that New York State allows Empire City Casino to achieve its economic development potential by awarding Empire City a full casino license. The Governor and Legislature are focused on ensuring New York State remains affordable and economically vital. A strong commitment to job creation, economic development and leveraging private investment in our communities is central to this task.

Westchester County is home to one of the most prominent gaming and entertainment destinations in the tristate area: Empire City Casino by MGM Resorts. As one of the largest private employers in New York's third largest city, boasting an annual payroll of nearly \$100 million and more than 1,000 employees prior to the pandemic, Empire City – acquired by MGM Resorts in January 2019 – is integral to the economic growth of the county, region and state.

Over 70 small businesses, not-for-profit organizations, and labor groups from across Westchester and the Bronx, stand firmly united in the belief that Empire City, backed by MGM Resorts' global expertise, is uniquely positioned to generate thousands of family-sustaining union jobs and stimulate vital economic activity, all while prioritizing equity and inclusion.

Empire City Casino generates over \$300 million in tax revenue each year to fund state education, and millions more for state

and local government coffers. As of January 2025, the casino has generated over \$5 billion for state education, with more than \$1.3 billion contributed in the past five years alone.

After years of advocacy efforts, the Executive and State Legislature adopted a state budget in 2021 that included authorization for the Gaming Commission to conduct a competitive process to award the three remaining full-gaming casino licenses. Now, after years of delay, they are expected to begin awarding the licenses by the end of 2025. The process is intended to ensure that the strongest applicants, with the most community support and economic impact, receive the licenses. Over the course of this year, the process is expected to be as follows:

- ▶ The State solicits proposals from casino applicants (likely due this summer).
- ▶ Local review boards, called Community Advisory Committees (CACs), are appointed by local elected officials and the Governor to evaluate the casino applications in a particular jurisdiction. A casino application will not move forward in the process unless the CAC votes in favor of it.
- ▶ The Governor-appointed Gaming Facility Location Board (GFLB) will recommend up to three sites based on a number of factors, including the financial strength of the applicants, the proposed location of the casinos, and the impact the casinos would have on the surrounding communities.
- ▶ The NYS Gaming Commission will award the licenses by the end of this year.



While other developers and gaming companies will submit applications for consideration during this competitive process, MGM Resorts is considered one of the strongest contenders, given its unmatched experience, thoughtful development plans and essential role as an important economic engine for our region. But it will be imperative that the communities surrounding Empire City rally to show public support for the project, given the economic impact the project will have for Westchester County.

The development outlined by MGM Resorts seamlessly aligns with the economic development goals of Westchester County. It includes a 5,000-capacity entertainment venue that will significantly increase the cultural and entertainment offerings available to residents, while attracting new visitors. This state-of-the-art venue, the first of its kind in our area, will bolster tourism and catalyze urgently-needed economic activity. This would result in thousands of jobs for Westchester and the Bronx, including Empire City directly hiring 2,000 new employees and providing over \$200 million in additional wages. Should Empire City obtain a downstate license, it is projected to generate more than \$1 billion in economic activity and nearly \$2 billion in private capital investment for the region.

A full-scale casino license at Empire City will be a lifeline for so many families and

small businesses, generate significant and immediate new revenue for the state through license fees and bring investment to help communities like Yonkers, Mount Vernon and the Bronx.

MGM Resorts has already invested \$1 billion in Empire City Casino and is prepared to triple that investment. This project is shovel-ready to become a full-scale casino, swapping out electronic video lottery terminals for Vegas-style slot machines, live-dealer table games, retail sports betting, entertainment venue and exciting dining amenities. As a commercial casino, Empire City will recapture the gaming and entertainment revenues currently flowing from New York to neighboring states like New Jersey, Pennsylvania and Connecticut.

Failing to select Empire City for one of the downstate licenses would be devastating to our communities and the thousands of families who rely on the family-sustaining union jobs at Empire City. Simply put, Empire City cannot survive as a VLT-only facility in a region where it is at a competitive disadvantage to nearby commercial casinos.

Given all the delays, the available casino licenses must be awarded on an expedited basis in order to unlock the jobs and economic impact that the region and state desperately need. New York can't afford to wait any longer before awarding the casino

licenses that will jumpstart the economic engines of our communities. Empire City enjoys overwhelming community and local political support, making it best positioned to recapture the entertainment dollars and jobs New York continues to lose to neighboring states.

Housing

The need to address the state-wide housing shortage and create programs to increase affordability continues to be a top priority in 2025. The BCW will continue to play a leadership role through its Smart Development Working Group, and we are happy to once again provide the Governor and the Legislature with the expertise of our members who have a proven track record of getting things done in the housing arena.

In 2025, the BCW will:

- ▶ Continue to **advocate** that the creation of more housing will not move forward if additional requirements and burdens are placed upon projects. Market conditions have changed, and the world of today is vastly different than the world of 2019. The development of new market rate housing is now incredibly challenging due to inflation and elevated interest rates. Recognizing the urgent need to create more housing supply to ensure affordability and maintain the competitiveness of Westchester County, the BCW worked with its Smart Development Working Group and shared a report with the Legislature that compared the development costs of a multifamily project in 2019 to the development costs of today. We will again utilize this report to urge State and

County government to lessen mandates and burdens in order to create more desperately-needed housing.

- ▶ **Advocate** for legislation (S.256) to formally authorize industrial development agencies (IDAs) to support the state's housing goals. Over the past five years, IDAs have supported over 400 projects with a residential component, creating over 36,000 new units and more than 9,000 affordable housing units. While IDAs have the authority to support commercial housing projects based on court precedent and a 2015 Office of the State Comptroller opinion, many IDAs are still hesitant to support housing projects because the current database does not track housing starts, and only quantifies jobs created/retained vs. tax dollars abated. To help solve the state's housing crisis, the state must formally clarify the authority of IDAs to engage in the development of housing projects. In addition to short-term construction jobs, new multifamily housing creates permanent service-sector jobs and increased economic activity.
- ▶ **Support** the establishment of the Housing Access Voucher Program (S.72/A.1704) which would provide rental assistance in the form of vouchers to individuals who face an imminent risk of losing their homes. These vouchers would be a critical safety net for tenants who need them the most. It would shore



up at-risk tenants who are suffering financial hardship and income, and those who meet the definition of rent burdened, as defined by the Department of Housing and Urban Development. The voucher would be paid directly to the property owner and make up the difference between what the tenant or family could reasonably pay—30% of their income. This is truly a win-win policy. It directly helps those at risk, without requiring the property owner to assume all the costs or force these costs to be absorbed by other market-rate tenants within the building.

- ▶ **Support** legislation to require each city, town and village to develop a Housing Action Plan for Everyone that is specific to its local needs by taking into account its unique conditions and characteristics. These factors should include, but are not limited to, infrastructure, available land for development, buildings that can be repurposed, and an assessment of community needs. The legislation would require each locale to generate a statement that sets out its priorities for how it intends to be part of the solution in addressing the housing shortage, including promoting affordability by reducing barriers to new housing supply. Localities would benefit from knowing their housing needs, and planning for the construction and preservation of the housing types that must be created to meet those needs. While the legislation does not mandate a Housing Action Plan be enacted, it does mandate it be completed in good faith.
- ▶ **Oppose** any legislation that would increase state or local mortgage recording taxes or real estate transfer taxes.

Increasing real estate transaction taxes simply robs equity from homebuyers who could better use such funds towards a down payment. New York State already has some of the highest closing costs and real estate taxes in the country, and individuals and businesses are choosing to leave the state due to over-taxation. In order to reverse this trend, New York should be advancing policies that make home buying more affordable.

Energy

Last year, the BCW formed the Clean Energy Action Coalition (CEAC) to accelerate clean energy adoption across Westchester County. The CEAC includes more than 80 BCW members who are leaders in the renewal energy sectors, as well as local government leaders, professional planners, engineers and landscape architects, land use attorneys, not-for-profits, and other businesses.

The CEAC is engaging decision-makers on the state, county and municipal levels throughout 2025 and beyond, prioritizing outreach and education, creating uniform standards that can expedite clean energy development, and building a central resource that can help stakeholders review and pursue the financial incentives that are already available.

Westchester is in critical need of additional energy sources due to the elimination of 2,000 megawatts (MW) of electricity from the Indian Point Nuclear Power Plant; the increased electricity demand from economic growth, data centers and AI; as well as the move to electric vehicles and heat pumps.

Therefore, the CEAC advocates that Westchester:

- 1 Dramatically **increase** solar photovoltaics installations everywhere feasible, as soon as possible;
- 2 **Expedite** the siting of safe, proven battery storage systems; and
- 3 **Use** renewable biofuels to immediately reduce particulate and carbon emissions, while systematically transitioning to electric heat pumps and vehicles.

Over 100,000 Westchester buildings heat with oil, and tens of thousands of diesel trucks and buses create massive amounts of harmful emissions and carbon. Renewable diesel is a liquid fuel produced from non-petroleum renewable sources – specifically, vegetable oils and animal fats. The chemical and structural properties of renewable diesel are similar to petroleum-derived (conventional) diesel, and renewable diesel meets the federal registration requirements for fuels and fuel additives, and the ASTM D975-21 Standard Specification for Diesel Fuel. Therefore, renewable diesel can be used as a direct substitute for conventional diesel (up to 100% or R100). Blends of renewable diesel and conventional diesel are labelled with an "R" followed by the percentage (by volume) of the renewable diesel content.

In 2024, the BCW encouraged "...all county municipalities to look to adopt programs that will offer a practical, manageable and viable approach to revitalize its local businesses while preserving the character and scale of their communities." In 2025, the CEAC urges all county municipalities to plan, expedite, and implement clean energy transformations that increase clean distributed electricity generation, efficient heating and cooling systems, and low carbon transportation.

The CEAC supports:

- ▶ **Increased** incentives for distributed solar and battery storage, both on-site and in the community. Incentives should include grants, expedited permit approvals, and tax reductions, with clear, increasing amounts for projects that meet higher levels of on-site and community-based clean energy generation.
- ▶ **Incentivizing** innovative solutions that reduce the amount of energy required to heat, cool, and provide hot water for our homes, schools and workplaces. These solutions include additional geothermal incentives and support for hybrid renewable biofuel-electric HVAC heat pumps and hot water systems – along with integrated, programmable utility-program demand reduction controls.

Incentives should include grants, expedited approvals, and tax reductions – with simple and clear determinations of goals and increased incentive amounts for attaining higher percentages of emission reductions.

- ▶ **Moving** to renewable biofuels as direct "drop-in" replacements for the 100,000 Westchester buildings that heat with oil, and as a substitute for diesel in our transportation systems. Renewable diesel is a liquid biofuel that's chemically identical to petroleum diesel. It can be used as a substitute for – or blended with - petroleum diesel. Renewable diesel is made from fats and oils, such as soybean or canola oil. It can be produced at existing petroleum refineries that are retrofitted to make biofuels.

Development of Battery Electric Storage Systems

The BCW supports the vital development of Battery Electric Storage Systems in Westchester County. As we move to a power system that is more reliant on renewable energy sources, new battery investments are necessary to maintain grid reliability and to ensure the ability to meet the demand for power at all times.

Develop and Construct New Electric Car Infrastructure

Of the total greenhouse gas emissions in New York City, 24% comes from vehicles – yet of 10.8 million registered vehicles in our state, only about 45,000 run on alternative fuels. New York State needs to provide more electric car infrastructure – such as more charging stations along major highways and at transportation hubs – to encourage more drivers to purchase electric vehicles.

Additionally, the CEAC urges Westchester County and municipalities to quickly adopt reasonable, responsible GHG reduction plans that identify preferred locations and streamline the development of solar, battery storage, geothermal HVAC, electric vehicle Level 2, and direct current fast-charging stations.

The CEAC is working to create a model municipal law with uniform standards for new, retrofit, and existing buildings that aim to provide "open door" expedited approvals via "form-based" codes, as well as educational programs for developers/investors.

Since the transition from liquid fuels for heating and transportation will take time under any scenario, the BCW urges the county and municipal governments to purchase and mandate renewable liquid fuels for heating oil & diesel transportation, while providing increased incentives for projects as they increase the percentage of zero emission energy. One incentive would be for the IDAs to expand new construction/redevelopment incentives for projects that incorporate clean energy systems.

Since there will always be a need for more energy than can be generated by local distributed sources, the BCW also urges the county and all local municipalities to support the construction of new transmission lines from upstate renewable energy sources.



energy conference

Mike Richter, President, Brightcore Energy; BCW President and CEO Marsha Gordon; Raghu Sudhakara, Vice President, Con Edison; Daniella Piper, Executive VP & CIO, NY Power Authority; Dan Singer, President & CEO, Robison Oil; BCW Board Member Christina Armentano, COO & Executive VP, Paraco; and BCW Executive Vice President/COO John Ravitz at the BCW's 2024 Energy Conference.

Renewable Diesel. The BCW supports legislation (S.2411) relating to bioheating fuel requirements that allows B100 or B99 biofuel and R100 or R99 renewable fuel to be used to blend with, or replace, fossil heating oil to create bioheating fuel. This legislation should be passed to correct the current blending law, which fails to include renewable diesel.

Clean Fuel Standard. The BCW supports legislation (S.1343/A.472) to establish the clean fuel standard of 2025 to reduce carbon intensity from the on-road transportation sector by 20% by 2032.

Fuel Switching II. The BCW supports the "bucks for boilers act" which creates a program to transition housing units from oil and propane, to electric heat pumps and other high energy efficiency upgrades. The BCW also advocates for the inclusion of a switch to biofuels.

The New York State Renewable Reclamation Projects Program. The BCW supports legislation (S.1554) to establish the New York State Renewable Reclamation Projects Program for the development of renewable electric generation projects, as New York State's goal to generate 50% of its electricity from renewables by 2030 requires a momentous effort.

Support for Renewable Energy Generating Projects. The BCW supports legislation (S.270) to allow certain renewable energy generating projects that are located above real property currently used for vehicle parking to bypass the parkland alienation process. This bill will assist the county in implementing innovative energy projects to help meet the ambitious goals of the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act (CLCPA).

Reform the All-Electric Building Act. The state enacted a prohibition on the use of fossil fuel equipment and systems in new building construction that will commence on 12/31/25 for buildings seven stories in height or less, and will start on 1/31/28 for all remaining new construction. The BCW is most concerned about reliability issues and costs. The CLCPA continues to move forward and has set ambitious targets for the state to achieve net zero emissions by 2050. However, since we do not yet have the renewable energy infrastructure in place to meet reliability concerns, we are urging a more flexible and development-friendly approach.

The NYS Department of State is engaged in a rulemaking related to the new construction ban. **The BCW urges the DOS to recognize the use of B100 and R100 certified heating appliances as being permissible under the law.** Since the equipment enables the burning of non-fossil fuels, they should be permitted to be installed in new construction. By allowing renewable biofuels to be used, electric capacity will be freed up for other electric HVAC and transportation transformations.

Reform the State Environmental Quality Review (SEQR) process. The BCW urges the Governor and the Legislature to amend – and in some cases eliminate – the SEQR rules and regulations that cause unnecessary delays with important projects throughout the state. This is especially needed now as we move to building sustainable energy infrastructure. Delays cause local municipalities to, at times, abandon economic development projects, which then prevent new jobs and revenue from being generated. It is clear that the SEQR process has been used to cause

serious delays in getting Westchester projects completed in a timely manner. As the county's energy landscape changes and Westchester looks to build solid renewable energy infrastructure, communities must not use SEQR to delay these projects. If that happens, the county will face reliability issues.

Environment

The BCW supports the Governor's proposed \$1 billion to accelerate the state's climate investment towards achieving a more sustainable future, and looks forward to collaborating with the Governor, the Legislature and local governments via the BCW's Clean Energy Action Coalition.

Additionally, in 2025:

- ▶ The BCW **supports** the Governor's budget proposal to allocate \$400 million for the Environmental Protection Fund that provides funding for critical environmental programs such as land acquisition, farmland protection, invasive species prevention and eradication, enhanced recreational access, water quality improvement and an aggressive environmental justice agenda.
- ▶ The BCW, as a member of the statewide Clean Water Jobs Creation Coalition, **supports** the Governor's proposal for an additional \$500 million for clean water infrastructure funding that will ensure access to clean drinking water and allow municipalities to invest in efficient and effective wastewater treatment strategies.
- ▶ The BCW **supports** legislation (S.1343/A.472) creating a Low Carbon Fuel Standard in New York State that

would promote innovative technologies to lower greenhouse emissions and reduce pollution from mobile transportation sources.

- ▶ The BCW **opposes** legislation that seeks to expand the bottle deposit law by expanding the types of beverages that would be included; by increasing the bottle deposit amount to ten cents per-container; and the per-container handling fee paid by a deposit initiator to a deposit redeemer from 3.5 to 6 cents per-container. The BCW is concerned that the increase in the volume of redemptions will significantly increase the compliance burden placed on the retail sector.
- ▶ The BCW **opposes** the Packaging Reduction and Recycling Infrastructure Act (S.1464/A.1749) that would restrict the sale of plastic packaging and one-use products, and require source reductions of all packaging types. The bill disregards practical considerations and will adversely impact consumer choices and increase costs.



Transportation

The BCW advocates that the state needs to prioritize where critical and limited transportation funds go, as a modern and well-maintained transportation network is vital to the state's economy. **It is especially important that Westchester County has a strong, fiscally sound transportation network** to serve as an important economic development tool for recruiting and retaining businesses in the county. This is

essential in efforts to relieve congestion, improve road, bridge and transit conditions, boost safety and support long-term economic growth in New York.

On the mass transit front, the BCW strongly supports a new five-year Capital Plan and major investments in transit



infrastructure, and looks forward to working with Albany lawmakers as they negotiate intelligent funding options.

The BCW also joins the Associated General Contractors

of New York State and other infrastructure coalition partners, including 40 organizations from the construction industry, business, organized labor, local governments, and minority and women-owned businesses, in supporting the Governor's FY 2026 Executive Budget proposal to allocate an additional \$800 million for "core" SDOT projects. This funding will sustain programmed projects outlined in the Capital Plan's Memorandum of Understanding, aimed to slow and reverse the decline in the condition of SDOT road and bridge assets and restore the purchasing power assumed when the plan was developed. Without an infusion of additional resources, much-needed projects will fall out of the SDOT Capital Plan because of the significant and cumulative impact of inflation and cost escalation. This will accelerate the already precipitous decline in the condition of New York's roads and bridges.

In fact, key findings from the most recent Annual Highway Pavement and Bridge

Conditions Report note that overall investments in bridge safety assurance declined nearly 20 percent year-over-year; overall investments in pavement renewal have decreased by more than 31 percent year-over-year; and total SDOT Capital Plan spending declined by nearly \$200 million year-over-year.

These findings underscore the urgent need for increased investment in transportation infrastructure. The decline of New York's transportation infrastructure poses a serious risk to public safety and the state's economic competitiveness. Without adequate funding in the upcoming budget, these challenges will only escalate, leading to more costly repairs and diminished quality of life for New Yorkers.

Child care

Working with the Child Care Council of Westchester, **the BCW has been a constant proponent of ensuring that child care is a priority on all levels of government.**

Working parents, particularly women, depend on the availability of affordable, quality child care in order to work. In 2025, the BCW will continue to strive for universal access to affordable, high-quality child care so every child can achieve their dreams and potential, every parent can work and advance in their careers, and our community can sustain a skilled and productive workforce. Unfortunately, we are currently inching closer to another child care crisis that will have significant consequences on our workforce and economy if it is not addressed expeditiously.

In 2024, federal increases in child care funding fell short of meeting the urgent

needs of families and providers. However, New York State took important steps by expanding income eligibility for the Child Care Assistance Program to 85% of the state median income and increasing reimbursement for absences, easing the burden on child care businesses. Locally, Westchester County has remained a leader in child care investment. The Westchester Works Child Care Scholarship Program now supports families earning up to 500% of the Federal Poverty Level. By renewing this critical program in 2025, the county recognized its essential role in driving a robust and enduring economic recovery.

Action is required by government to ensure that every child has the best start in life, working families can access child care to support their economic stability, and child care educators receive fair wages and benefits to sustain their work. At the local level, the BCW calls on Westchester County to expand access for child care educators to receive assistance through the Child Care Assistance Program and the Westchester Works Child Care Program.

At the state level, the BCW urges New York to enact the Universal Child Care Act with dedicated funding, and establish a sustained Child Care Workforce Compensation Fund to achieve wage parity with comparable roles in the K-12 public education system.



The BCW also supports the Governor's proposal to expand New York's child tax credit that would give 1.6 million New York families an annual tax credit of up to \$1,000 per child under age four, and up to \$500 per child from four through sixteen. This proposal would drive significant assistance to families with the youngest children, and help families across the income spectrum. The average credit given out to families will double from \$472 to \$943 and be instrumental in helping to address child poverty in New York State, and will also deliver relief to many middle-class families whose incomes are currently too high to qualify for the credit.

Healthcare

Healthcare workforce shortages continue to grow in virtually every county in New York State. The nursing shortage in New York State and across the country is well documented and we continue to see an exodus of healthcare professionals leaving their respective fields due to retirement, burnout or the pursuit of other careers. The shortage is expected to intensify as baby boomers age and the need for healthcare grows. According to a report by the American Association of Colleges of Nursing, U.S. nursing schools turned away 65,766 qualified applications from baccalaureate and graduate nursing programs in 2023 due to an insufficient number of clinical preceptors, as well as insufficient faculty and clinical sites.

The BCW has advocated for the Clinical Preceptor Tax Credit Act since 2017. This bill would establish a personal income tax credit for community-based healthcare professionals such as nurses and physician

assistants, among others, who serve as preceptors, providing New York State-required clinical training for students studying to enter various healthcare professions. Currently, schools need to cap their incoming classes as they only have a limited number of slots based on the number of preceptors they have available. Thus, many prospective students are not able to enter into healthcare programs. In effect, this bill seeks to incentivize community-based healthcare professionals to serve as preceptors so that students can complete their state-mandated clinical training. Five states have enacted similar legislation, and five other states have proposed similar legislation. While the bill passed the Senate last year, it failed to pass the Assembly. Now is the time for New York State to pass this much-needed legislation.

Additionally, in 2025 the BCW will:

- ▶ Work to **protect** our healthcare system in light of potential negative impacts proposed by the new federal administration. Specifically, assuring the implementation of science-based public health policies related to vaccines and other public health measures, as well as strong protections for women’s health issues.
- ▶ Continue to adamantly **oppose** any attempt to create a single-payer health insurance system in New York State, including the New York Health Program (S.3425/A.1466). The cost to implement this program has already been well documented, and New York simply cannot afford this. The increase to future New York State budgets would be catastrophic.



New York cannot afford, and should not tear down, its existing healthcare system that has already enrolled over 4.9 million New Yorkers in the past few years. Due to the implementation of the New York Health Exchange, New York currently covers 95% of its residents under a combination of private and public health plans. The New York Health Program would result in the largest state tax increase in U.S. history. Instead, the Legislature and Governor should work to improve the New York Health Exchange so that those New Yorkers who have not yet enrolled in the program have the opportunity to identify and select a healthcare plan that will work for themselves and their families.

- ▶ **Support** legislation to recognize the vital role Emergency Medical Services (EMS) provides to ensure the health and well-being of communities across New York. This legislation deems general ambulance service to be an "essential service" that must be provided in every area of the state.
- ▶ Continue to **educate** the business community on all aspects of the New York Health Exchange, including what tax credits are available for employers who offer health insurance to their employees.

- ▶ Continue to **advocate** for the adoption of strong transparency regulations for the Department of Financial Services that sets the rates for the health insurance plans under the Health Exchange.
- ▶ **Support** the enactment of Medical Liability Tort Reform to rein in the costs of medical malpractice insurance.
- ▶ **Support** legislation that effectively addresses the rising costs of prescription drugs without price controls.

Mental health

The BCW supports the Governor’s FY 2026 Executive Budget proposal for: \$53 million in new funding to **support minimum wage increases for mental health care providers, disability service providers and addiction services providers**; \$27.8 million to support individuals with serious mental illness through improving Assisted Outpatient Treatment, and expanding Safe Options Support teams; and new legislation to strengthen New York’s involuntary commitment laws and Kendra’s Law.

Additionally, the BCW joins Greater Mental Health of New York in advocating for the following priorities in 2025:

- ▶ **Require** all insurers to adhere to the January 1, 2025 effective date of the new commercial rate mandate. Insurers have had seven months to prepare for this date of implementation for Part AA – the new commercial rate mandate in the Article VII Health/Mental Hygiene section of the FY 2025 enacted budget. A delay of even one day will negatively impact New Yorkers who need access to life-saving mental health care.

- ▶ Provide a 7.8% increase for community-based not-for-profit human services rates and contracts in the FY 2026 State Budget. The 7.8% represents the total of the current inflationary increase of 2.9% (CPI July, 2024) and the difference between the human services cost of living adjustments (COLA) over the past three years (12.2%) and the CPI increases (17.1%).
- ▶ **Strengthen** network adequacy and compliance with parity laws by adopting the pending regulations that would require insurers and health plans to ensure individuals can secure appointments within 10 days for outpatient providers, or 7 days following discharge from a hospital or emergency room. If an insurer or health plan cannot meet this standard, individuals would be permitted to go out-of-network. In addition, New York must strengthen compliance and enforcement of the mental health and substance use disorder parity laws.
- ▶ **Expand** alternatives to incarceration and mental health courts through the utilization of funding in the FY 2025 state budget. Currently, mental health courts operate in 40 of 62 counties in New York. These courts, as well as court-based mental health/integrated care navigators, should be available statewide.





Education

Preparing New York State’s students to acquire the skills needed to attend college and/or to prepare them to enter the workforce continues to be a top priority for the BCW. We must never lose sight of what the ultimate goals are which include: better graduation rates, college matriculation and completion rates, career placement, family-sustaining wages, and greater civic engagement.

In 2025, the BCW joins the Lower Hudson Education Coalition in advocating for:

- ▶ **Student Mental Health & School Safety:** Create an expense-based aid for student mental health services or contractual services provided in a school setting; support community behavioral health providers to meet the growing demand of students and families; and ensure additional flexible resources for school safety, including funding for staffing, security upgrades, and training, as well as waiving the allowable salary cap for retired police officers who work as school officers or school security.
- ▶ **Mandate Relief and Transparency:** A thorough review of existing mandates and increased transparency prior to the enactment of new mandates would assist school districts in managing the significant cost burdens of compliance.

In the current inflationary environment, reducing requirements on school districts will assist with cost control when prices are expected to continue to rise; require a complete fiscal note, prepared by a New York State actuary, in each education-related bill prior to its passage; and lastly, establish an Education Mandate Relief Redesign Team.

- ▶ **Boards of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES):** Increase the salary cap for career and technical education (CTE) teachers; permit a two-week window in the timing of component district BOCES budget votes; permit BOCES to hold funds in reserve, similar to other school districts, to help with long-term planning, and revisit the District Superintendent salary cap.
- ▶ **Free Universal School Meals:** Provide free breakfast and lunch to over 2.7 million New York students. This program will help save parents money, address food insecurity among kids, and create more opportunities for students to succeed. This initiative has bipartisan support, and we look forward to seeing how the state will fund this important new initiative.
- ▶ **Climate Resiliency:** Provide enhanced funding to support capital projects improving climate resiliency or energy efficiency of schools; create a coordination process for EV bus implementation to actively collect data on the process, timing and availability of vehicles, infrastructure and electricity. Make all costs incurred with the installation of electric vehicle charging stations an allowable transportation expense; and provide enhanced

transportation aid for school districts to offset the increased costs of leasing and purchasing zero-emission buses.

- ▶ **Employee Retention and Recruitment:** Reform civil service testing and hiring procedures to allow for prompt hiring of staff into key positions; and focus on improving ease of certification and flexibility in certification areas to improve teacher shortages.

Higher education

The BCW is proud that all the colleges in Westchester County are members of our organization, and we support them as they educate and train our future employees. **An educated workforce is critical to Westchester County’s economic vitality** and the BCW believes that higher education should be accessible and affordable in order to meet the needs of the many companies that call the Lower Hudson Valley home.

The BCW urges the Legislature to improve the state’s successful Tuition Assistance Program (TAP), which is in its 51st year, by streamlining its processing for better access and user experience by permitting graduate students to participate in TAP, increasing the number of semesters for TAP eligibility and making the program available in the summer and winter sessions. The BCW also urges the Legislature to eliminate the disparity in access to TAP awards by standardizing dependent and independent student TAP award schedules.

The BCW also supports the creation of a new College High School Program to support dual enrollment models, making

higher education more accessible and affordable.

The Legislature must also modify the Enhanced Tuition Awards Program to attract additional participants by removing government-imposed caps on tuition charges, and residency and employment requirements. The Legislature must also restore the FY 2025 cut to the Bundy Aid Program, a successful program that helps make college more affordable, and the Higher Education Capital Matching Grant Program, which creates jobs while simultaneously helping schools to modernize and enhance their facilities.

Additionally, the BCW urges the Legislature to extend the proposed New York Opportunity Promise Scholarship to students (ages 25-55) attending not-for-profit colleges who pursue degrees in high-demand fields. These students would be eligible for the same level of scholarship funding that they would have received had they elected to attend community college.

Lastly, the BCW supports the inclusion of all degree-granting colleges and universities in Early College High School and P-TECH Programs, including the proprietary sector; and opposes legislation (S.1419/A.898) that would allow for the repeal or alteration of real property exemptions for not-for-profit colleges, as this sets a very dangerous precedent that colleges cannot afford.



FEDERAL

The BCW thanks Senate Minority Leader Charles Schumer, Senator Kirsten Gillibrand and the members of the Westchester Congressional Delegation who continue to work tirelessly to ensure that New York State receives the necessary federal dollars needed to fund countless programs and projects that are important to Westchester County and the rest of the state. As these monies are allocated, **it is critical that the New York delegation works to ensure that New York gets its fair share to grow its economy, create new jobs, recruit and retain businesses and residents.**

With new Congressional leadership and a new administration in the White House, the BCW is also hopeful that members of the United States Senate and House of Representatives will recognize that there is still much work to be done and come together to enact bipartisan legislation that will positively impact Westchester residents and businesses.

Last year, the BCW visited Washington, DC for a two-day trip to meet with members of the Westchester Congressional delegation and to receive a briefing from the leadership at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce.

In 2025, the BCW will advocate for work to be done in the following areas:

- ▶ The BCW has consistently **urged** Congress to adopt common-sense tax reform to simplify the process and lower rates for businesses and individuals. The federal government must look at ways to alleviate tax and regulatory burdens that have been placed on the backs of businesses of all sizes.



- ▶ The BCW **urges** Congress to reintroduce and pass the Tax Relief for American Families and Workers Act. This act from the Chairs of the House Ways & Means and Senate Finance Committees restores critical pro-growth tax provisions supporting domestic R&D, interest deductibility and full expensing through 2025. It is crucial that Congress pass these pro-growth tax provisions that have enabled U.S. businesses to innovate, create good-paying jobs, protect our national security and remain at the cutting edge of the global economy.
- ▶ The BCW continues to **support** the reauthorization of the Perkins Career and Technical Education Act, which provides an increased focus on the academic achievement of career and technical education students, and strengthens the connections between secondary and postsecondary education.
- ▶ Westchester County is home to more than a dozen colleges and universities who admit students who take advantage of financial aid provided by New York State and the federal government that, along with generous institutional aid, makes earning a degree more accessible. The BCW **applauds** the United States Senate and House of Representatives on historic and record-setting investments made to the Pell Grant program in the 118th Congress, and urges members of Westchester's Congressional delegation to continue prioritizing the Pell Grant program, raising the maximum individual

award to \$13,000 to ensure that America's college students continue to have access to a college education that will drive their successful futures, and keep our country innovative, competitive and economically thriving.

- ▶ The Inflation Reduction Act extended tax credits and depreciation for solar and geothermal heat pumps. These incentives are critically important to making the numbers work for clean energy projects, while supporting the creation of high-tech U.S. clean energy manufacturing jobs and moving our communities and nation to full energy independence. The BCW strongly **supports** the continuation of these incentives.
- ▶ The BCW **supports** federal legislation to continue telehealth through Medicare that was implemented during the public health emergency. This bill is currently only in the introduction stage in Congress, but if the public health emergency provisions are not extended before the end of the year, Medicare will no longer pay for telehealth in 2025 (except in rural areas).
- ▶ The BCW joins Feeding Westchester in **supporting** the nation's charitable food system by increasing funding for The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) in response to the unprecedented demand for hunger relief. Additionally, Feeding Westchester advocates for the strengthening of federal nutrition programs, including enhancing the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) to allow SNAP participants to purchase hot foods and prepared meals with their benefits, increasing SNAP benefits and eliminating

existing barriers to participation in SNAP for seniors, college students, adults without children, immigrants, and individuals with prior convictions. Additionally, invest in the health and well-being of our communities by guaranteeing school breakfast, lunch, after-school and summer meals for all children nationwide and provide adequate funding to ensure all eligible households can participate in the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC).

- ▶ The BCW **urges** for substantial increases in investments in child care, Pre-K and Head Start that is much needed to build and sustain a professional workforce and provide high-quality early learning opportunities for all children. The U.S. must create a child care system comparable to those in virtually every other developed nation. These reforms will ensure families can access the child care they need, employers can avoid workforce disruptions, and states can sustain and build upon recent improvements.
- ▶ The federal government remains uniquely positioned to provide additional resources to address mental health disparities in Westchester County that would benefit our workplaces, schools and the greater community. The BCW **supports** any initiative that focuses on supporting the mental health, well-being and efficacy of employees in our workplaces, students in our schools, members of the larger community, and initiatives to support and expand the behavioral health workforce.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

- ▶ The debate over comprehensive immigration reform is ongoing. The BCW advocates for politics to not get in the way of common sense policy and **urges** the federal government to focus on reforms that protect our country's security while not losing sight of the important role that immigrants have had, and continue to have, in creating economic prosperity for our country.
- ▶ The BCW **supports** investing in federal R&D programs that help businesses develop new technologies that then create new private sector jobs. Many of Westchester's colleges and universities engage in federally funded research. It is essential that Congress continue to appropriate funds that would enable institutions of higher education to engage in basic and applied research, which spurs innovation and stimulates the economy.
- ▶ The BCW **supports** a federal framework for Artificial Intelligence (AI) that provides uniform guidance, encourages innovation and ensures that all residents are protected. Consistent with that framework, the BCW supports efforts to responsibly harness the opportunities from AI for state government use. The BCW also supports state efforts to establish public-private partnerships that promote upskilling and investing in AI-related workforce programs and efforts to enhance AI research and educational developments.
- ▶ In 2024, the BCW **created** the AI Alliance 360 year-long series which included high-level programs which focused on how AI is being implemented in different business sectors. This included:

- AI Unveiled: Understanding and Navigating the Future of Intelligent Systems
- AI in Professional Services: Innovation and Integration
- FutureEd: Harnessing the Power of AI in Academic Innovation
- Securing Tomorrow: AI in Cybersecurity and Technology
- Healing Horizons: Navigating AI in Healthcare's Transformative Technologies
- AI Unleashed: Smart Insights and Innovations to Transforming Marketing Strategies

In 2025, we are excited to announce the following AI Alliance 360 programs:

- Emerging Technologies and AI Innovations Conference
- Minds and Machines: The Ethical Frontier of Artificial Intelligence
- Governing the Future: AI Regulations and Policy Frameworks
- The Evolution of Intelligence: AI Then, Now and Tomorrow

This series will help give our members the most updated information regarding this evolving technology.

dc flyover

BCW President and CEO Marsha Gordon and BCW Executive Vice President/COO John Ravitz attended a tour of the United States Capitol in Washington, DC led by Congressman Mike Lawler during the BCW's 2024 DC "Fly Over" event.



Executive Committee

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