

MEMBERSHIP INSIDER

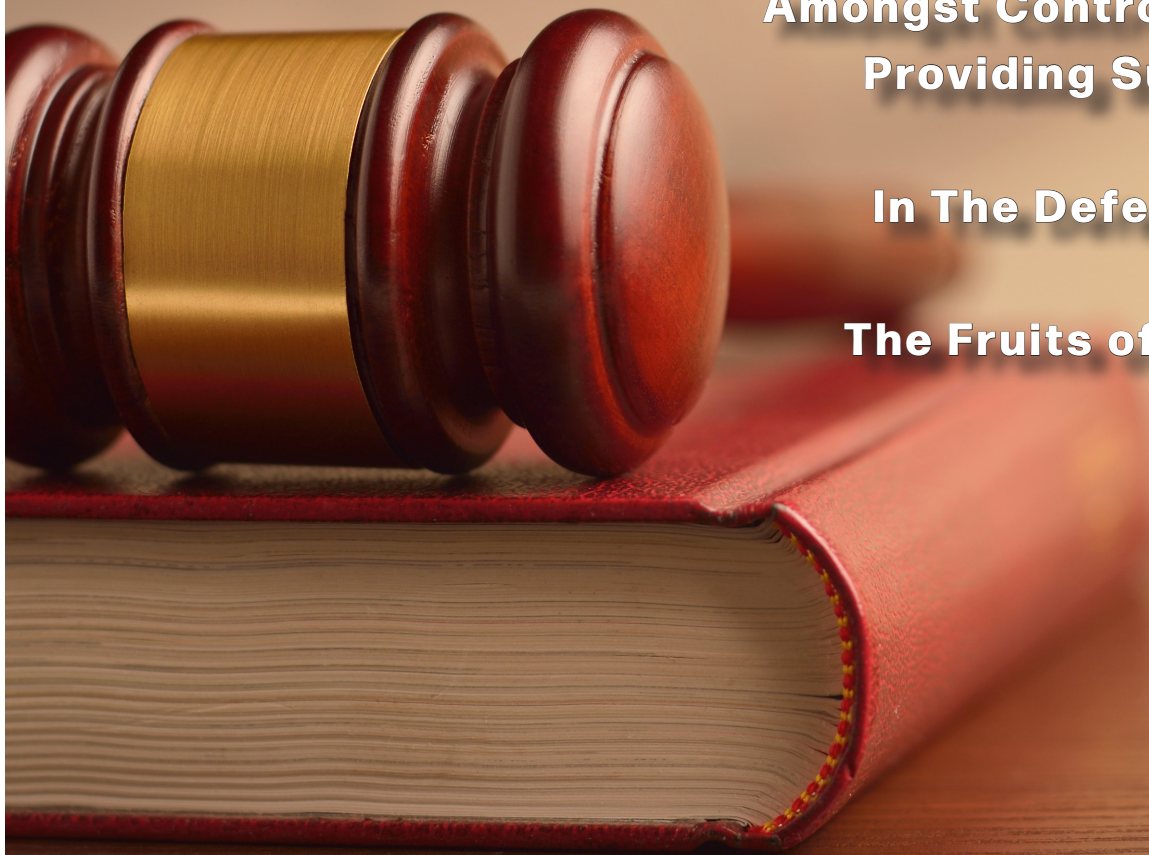
OUR IMPACT IN ADVOCACY

The Words We Use

Pleading the Case

**Amongst Controversy,
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**In The Defense Of
The Fruits of Labor**



The Words We Use

As a “Chamber of Influence”, the Daytona Regional Chamber works unceasingly to advocate for the greater Daytona Beach area’s business community. According to dictionary definitions, an advocate is one who pleads the case of another, or one who supports, or even one who defends. While these terms are well-understood they fail to paint what is truly a vibrant picture of the real work of this Chamber of Commerce. Consider the first day of July which saw the start of two of Florida Governor DeSantis’ key legislation including the Live Local Act and an E-Verify requirement. Live Local is the Governor’s sweeping legislation which aims to spur the availability of affordable housing for Floridians through new land use regulations and tax incentives. E-Verify on the other hand was authorized by the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996 and is a web-based system through which employers electronically confirm the employment eligibility of their employees. While there is no Federal requirement to use E-Verify, the Governor’s new legislation now requires its use by Florida employers. Both had major implications to business.

Pleading the Case

Certainly, housing an area’s workforce is as important as ensuring their access to substantive education and training. As a practical matter, people must live in proximity to their place of employment. So much is the success of commerce tied to the availability of housing that the Daytona Regional Chamber has focused advocacy efforts to ensure sufficient and diverse housing stock for all. Before the Live Local Act, to address this growing crisis, the City of Daytona Beach had examined implementation of an affordable housing master plan that included the potential of linkage fees to help fund more affordable housing. A linkage fee is paid by new businesses who employ workers which, in theory, creates the need for more affordable housing. The Daytona Regional Chamber saw the unintended consequence to economic development efforts trying to recruit new businesses, many of whom might be dissuaded from locating in the city given such a fee to be paid. On behalf of the business community, the Chamber leveraged its regular communications with city officials to ensure all perspectives could be understood before requiring such a fee. To date, the linkage fee has yet to be enacted by the city; rather, the state has now stepped in proactively to curb the affordable housing shortage.



Panelists at July 27 Live Local event included Phillip Smith, President of Framework Group; Clay Ervin, Director, Growth and Resource Management at Volusia County; Jessica Gow, Attorney of Land Use & Zoning at Cobb Cole; Mark Watts, Attorney of Real Estate, Land Use & Zoning at Cobb Cole

To ensure the business community understood the full implication of Live Local, the Daytona Regional Chamber partnered with the Volusia County Association for Responsible Development (VCARD) to host a panel of experts to discuss this legislation on July 27. Like our ongoing commitment to address affordable housing, the Daytona Regional Chamber will continue to monitor the impact of this legislation and leverage existing rapport with our state delegation. Impacful pieces of legislation should be applauded whereas aspects that need modification should be communicated back to policy makers who can amend and improve these regulations. Taking the time and making an effort to provide meaningful feedback to city officials and state legislators is key to a prosperous economy, a role filled by the Daytona Regional Chamber.

Amongst Controversy, Providing Support

Although immigration issues remain controversial in the United States, the Florida legislature passed the E-Verify bill during their 2023 Legislative Session. Supporters of the new law cheered this step towards cracking down on illegal immigration, though critics have expressed concern that labor shortages will only be exacerbated by the regulation. Those in the construction industry have been feeling the shortage of workers for some time both locally and across the nation, as reported by the National Association of Home Builders. For many, the E-Verify law feels more of a nuisance than a solution. But the bill had initially proposed that in addition to requiring the use of E-Verify, businesses could have faced criminal penalties and the loss of a business license for non-compliance. By the time the final E-Verify bill was passed into legislation, it fortunately had several modifications.

This included an exemption for small businesses that employ less than 25 people. The smallest of small businesses are not mandated to use E-Verify. Additionally, the final bill allows companies to cure a violation before penalties are assessed, and the final bill had also removed language about criminal penalties.

Knowing this reality now exists for employers of 25 or more workers, the Daytona Regional Chamber brought in first-rate resources to support the transition to E-Verify compliance. This included a workshop on August 8 at Embry-Riddle's MicaPlex which featured Samuel Vilchez Santiago, the State Director at the American Business Immigration Coalition. Mr. Vilchez Santiago holds a Bachelors degree from Princeton University and a Master of Public Policy from the University of Oxford. He is a past recipient of President Obama's Volunteer Service Award and the Congressional Youth Award.

At the Daytona Regional Chamber, advocacy is a cornerstone of the organization. The organization is politically non-partisan, and the work of the Chamber does not shy away from supporting the cause of the Greater Daytona Beach area business community. The Chamber remains constantly prepared to side with business and commerce by providing the resources necessary for success.



Governor Ron DeSantis signs historic legislation

In The Defense Of

Perhaps most revealing of how the Daytona Regional Chamber's advocacy work impacts this community was the historic legislation on tort reform signed by Governor DeSantis in March 2023. House Bill 837 marks the first significant change in this area of tort law in 50 years, cutting down on frivolous lawsuits by limiting injury and insurance litigation and attorney fees. Considering the cost to Florida families was over \$5,000 annually because of past lawsuit abuse, the legislation was desperately needed.

The Daytona Regional Chamber aligned with the Florida Chamber in addressing this issue which included changing legal standards. For instance, a person who brings forth a personal injury lawsuit can only recover damages if they are less than 50% at-fault. Prior to this legislation, a person could unfairly sue for damages even if they were 99% at fault for causing their own injury. The



Christos

statute of limitations was also decreased from four years to two years. Christos Mavronas, the owner of Steve's Famous Diner expressed the importance to small businesses, who do not have the profit margins to enable sufficient protections in preventing frivolous lawsuits. According to Mavronas, "I have seen multiple frivolous lawsuits directed at my restaurant which impact my bottom line and increase the cost of doing business".

Hearing from other small businesses of the need for tort reform, it was imperative to stand in their defense and inform state lawmakers. With swiftness and directness, the Daytona Regional Chamber crafted a call to action proclaiming this reform was critical to our Chamber and our local businesses. All of the Volusia Delegation voted in favor of this historic legislation.

The Fruits of Labor

Like any scenario that could result in more than one outcome, the results of advocacy efforts look different and range from resounding successes to sometimes unfortunate disappointments. Of course, both stimulate learning to grow from. And no matter the outcome, the Daytona Regional Chamber remains committed to advocacy on behalf of the business community. What matters is that the constant monitoring of regulations happens. What matters is the right resources are brought to bear considering legal realities. It matters that there is an organization, the Daytona Regional Chamber, dedicated to communicating to policymakers how proposed laws help or hinder the local economy. Like the words we use to describe advocacy, the impact is not always visible. But the Daytona Beach business community can certainly be sure it is always occurring.



ADVOCACY ISSUE I

ABOUT

Membership Insider is a publication of the Daytona Regional Chamber of Commerce. Featured articles tell the story of how your membership investment has an even greater return for you and all the business community in our region.



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