

# Rural prosperity focus of Northern Michigan Chamber Alliance legislation agenda

## FROM STAFF REPORTS

**BENZIE COUNTY**— The Northern Michigan Chamber Alliance is daring to go where very few in the public policy arena have - developing a legislative agenda aimed at advancing rural Michigan communities.

Called the "Four Pillars of Rural Prosperity," the Chamber Alliance's statewide legislative agenda for 2019-20 seeks to increase economic development tools that will address the major barriers to sustainable economic growth such as, housing, talent attraction and access to child care.

"For businesses and communities to thrive in Northern Michigan, we need to establish a basic foundation for success with right-sized programs and incentives that can work for our region," said Kent Wood, director of government relations for the Northern Michigan Chamber Alliance. "The Chamber Alliance's 'Four Pillars of Rural Prosperity' approach will create additional tools for Northern

Michigan businesses and communities to help achieve sustainable economic growth and improve the quality of life for our residents."

Specifics of the Alliance's state legislative agenda for the two year term include:

### Rural Business Development

- Seeking parity for state business incentives to help rural areas compete with larger population centers.
- Research and development tax credit programs specific to rural areas.
- Rural tax credits that incentivize new jobs and investments in emerging industries.

• Addressing rural infrastructure needs including high-speed internet.

### Talent Attraction to Rural Areas

- Rural relocation incentives to draw in talent from other states/overseas.
- Creating tools to attract top professional and skilled employees including internal and apprentice tax credits.
- Improving rural health care services as a quality of life indicator and recruiting tool, especially for younger families.

### Rural and Small City Housing Development

- Creating incentives for rural employers to offset housing costs through new development, building rehabilitation, vouchers or down payment programs.

• Creating PILOT (payment in lieu of taxes) programs allowing rural areas and small cities to work directly with developers to incentivize workforce housing.

### Access to Quality Child Care

- Advocate for ways to make opening and maintain child care centers more achievable.

• Increasing technical assistance to new child care providers and creating an ombudsman role to assess compliance and regulatory inconsistencies across the state.

- Incentivize options for employers to provide on-site child care or through multi-employer cooperatives.

"The value and importance of our Chamber's working together on these items is immeasurable," said Mary Carroll, president of the Benzie County

Chamber of Commerce "Our experience representing and working for rural northern Michigan businesses provides us with a wealth of information in communicating our message to our elected officials."

Wood noted that while progress on these issues will require working through complex policy challenges with state lawmakers and regulators, the Alliance will offer common sense solutions to these challenges that will be effective not only in Northern Michigan, but in rural areas and small cities throughout Michigan.

"The challenge for our region is using growth in traditional industries like tourism and agriculture to springboard and bolster emerging industries like health care, technology, advanced manufacturing and environmental research," Wood said.

Business interests and members of the public can follow the Alliance's progress on its legislative agenda by following the Northern Michigan Business Blog at <https://nmichiganbusiness.com/> or follow their Chamber's legislative updates.