



# Chamber Survey Translates into Legislative Priorities

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IN DECEMBER the State Chamber conducted its annual membership survey asking members to prioritize issues facing their businesses, taking their temperature on their view of Delaware's economy, and, among other things, if they have plans to expand their workforce in 2018.

The results weren't terribly surprising, and echo much of what the Chamber has focused on in Dover over the last few years. The answers do show that businesses remain optimistic about their operations, but are facing real hurdles that need to be addressed at both the state and national level.

First, the highlights:

- 67% of the respondents work in a business with less than 100 employees
- The top four policy priorities for respondents are: economic development; cost of healthcare; government spending; education reform (K-12)

Over the past year, 40% of respondents are more optimistic about the outlook for their company, and 40% remain neutral, 37% of respondents believe they will grow staff size in 2018 and 60% expect their company revenue to grow. Most companies are aware of the threat of cyber security and have a plan in place to deter, or respond to, a cyber attack.

As for the "lowlights":

- 67% of respondents view Delaware's economy as "needing improvement"
- The top four obstacles to the growth of business: cost of employee health care; lack of qualified applicants; concerns about crime/safety; concerns about local schools; permitting and regulation compliance

Views of Delaware's education system remain overall negative, with the majority rating it as not effective, coupled with a mixed response on the skills sets of recent college grads.

Members of the General Assembly will have opportunities this legislative session to continue their work on addressing economic development issues they began last year by passing legislation to modernize the Coastal Zone Act and creating the Delaware Prosperity Partnership to help better market Delaware for outside investment. As the survey responses show, however, there remains much to be done to help better the overall environment for business to succeed.

So where does the Chamber go from here? First, we will continue to oppose legislation that adds cumbersome regulations or frivolous increased costs onto businesses. Second, we will continue to advocate for structural changes to be made to Delaware's budget that allow for pro-growth policies for Delaware businesses and will put the state's long-term economic future on the right track. Third, we will continue to support policies and legislation that will help Delaware's small business community thrive, such as increasing access to venture capital, creating networks for startups and searching for ways to decrease government related costs that hinder growth.

To be successful, the Chamber will need help from its members. Meeting with your elected officials to educate them on your business, your successes, and your needs, testifying at committee hearings on legislation that will impact your business, as well as reaching out to Chamber staff to provide feedback on legislative and regulatory actions, are all part of a strategy to help Delaware, and its business community, flourish. It will be an exciting and productive year, and I look forward to working with you to achieve these goals.