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Oakland Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce urges the Oakland City Council to prioritize public safety, police staffing, and business development investments.

Continued investments in public safety and business attraction should be prioritized in mid cycle budget discussions.

Oakland, CA - May 16, 2024 - The Oakland Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce today called for urgent action amidst a concerning mid cycle deficit. Metro Chamber leaders met Wednesday with the Oakland City Administrator, Jestin D. Johnson; Chief of Staff to Mayor Sheng Thao, Leigh Hanson; newly appointed Chief of Police, Floyd Mitchell; and Economic and Workforce Development Director, Ashleigh Kanat, to underscore the necessity for continued public safety investments as tantamount to Oakland's economic recovery. While Oakland grapples with immediate fiscal concerns, business leaders stressed the need for the city to focus on short-term solutions and long-term investments in public safety and economic development.

To catalyze growth, the Chamber is calling upon the city administration to prioritize business attraction and police academies to ensure sufficient staffing. A commitment to prioritizing public safety is essential to keep current momentum made in reducing crime YTD. Public safety is also a linchpin for economic recovery and business attraction.

"Investing in public safety, supporting small businesses, and implementing policy strategies that attract midsize and larger enterprises needs to be paramount," stated Barbara Leslie, Oakland Metro Chamber of Commerce President, and CEO. "These efforts foster significant employment opportunities and drive innovation and economic growth."

In addition to investments in business attraction and public safety, the Chamber advocates establishing targeted land use, tax, and incentive policies tailored to specific industries. These include ensuring that Place-Rooted Professionals (PRPs) feel valued and decide to stay within a city like Oakland.

"By leveraging our local and regional assets, we can create an environment conducive to sustainable economic development," Leslie added.

Amidst these policy discussions, the Chamber prioritizes public safety as the cornerstone of future growth and development initiatives.

"Without a safe and secure environment, businesses cannot thrive," declared Leslie. "Our track record of partnership on public safety issues and with city leadership, exemplified by the establishment of the Downtown Oakland Partnership and the advocacy for the reauthorization of Measure Z, underscores our commitment to ensuring the safety and sustainability of our community."

Economic Insights Highlight Urgent Need for Action

The release of the Chamber's 2024 Economic Report provides valuable insights into Oakland's economic landscape, emphasizing the urgency of government action. Despite significant growth in specific sectors, the city faces persistent challenges that demand immediate attention.

According to the report, total employment in Oakland increased by 0.6% between 2022 and 2023, but the city still lags behind pre-pandemic levels. "Oakland must redouble its efforts to recover lost employment and stimulate job growth," urged Oakland Metro Chamber Chair Ken Maxey.

The report also underscores the importance of revitalizing and investing in key sectors Arts, Entertainment, Green technology, Health Care and Workforce development. These sectors represent vital pillars of Oakland's economy and must be nurtured to ensure sustained growth.

Oakland has many strengths and a few challenges:

- Oakland International Airport is the city's gateway to domestic and global visitors and is an essential hub for commercial and cargo activity.
- Visits to Oakland have been rising since 2020, and Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) ridership has been increasing yearly.
- Regional tourism, whether for work or leisure, can and should play an increasing role in the city's economic development.
- Moreover, in an age of hybrid and work-from-home models, Oakland can be a more affordable option for higher-income earning groups, bolstering local spending and fiscal revenues.
- Oakland's population was estimated to be 419,000 in 2023, a decline of 3.0% from its peak in 2020.

Embracing Opportunity Amidst Challenges

While Oakland faces significant headwinds, the Chamber remains optimistic about the city's potential to emerge as a regional economic powerhouse.

"Oakland's rich cultural history, diverse population, and strategic location position it for success," noted Chair Ken Maxey. "By investing in public safety and strategic planning initiatives, we can attract high-wage, high-skill businesses and foster long-term prosperity."

The Chamber emphasizes the importance of collaboration between government, businesses, and community stakeholders in charting a path forward for Oakland's economic recovery.

Maxey concluded, "Now is the time for collaboration and action. Oakland's business leaders are ready to work hand in hand with our elected and appointed leaders. Together, we can build a brighter future for Oakland."

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About the Oakland Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce:

The Oakland Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce is dedicated to advancing economic growth, fostering business innovation, and advocating for a thriving business community in Oakland. With a diverse membership base representing various industries, the Chamber catalyzes economic development and community engagement in the Oakland metropolitan area.

