

Alabama Insights Review

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Executive Summary

From October to December 2020, we spoke with 30 state and local policymakers in Alabama to understand how the government and private sector responded to the COVID-19 pandemic and what policymakers want to see from advocates during this time.

In our conversations, Alabama policymakers reflected on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on their communities in 2020 and imagined the road forward in 2021. As 2020 drew to a close, Alabama policymakers' top policy priorities included public health and healthcare, support for businesses, and the state's economic recovery.

Policymakers emphasized the ways that businesses have stepped up and worked with the government during the pandemic, particularly around PPE and public health guidelines.

Moving forward, policymakers hope to continue fostering mutually beneficial relationships between government, businesses, and local communities in Alabama.

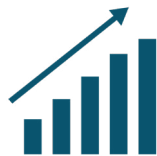


This Review Examines Three Policy Priorities



Private Sector Response to COVID-19

Policymakers appreciate businesses' contributions to the state's public health response such as donating PPE and enforcing public health protocols in their establishments.



Economic Recovery

Ensuring the survival of businesses is a statewide priority, and policymakers emphasize the need to help businesses adapt their protocols and systems in order to operate safely.



Corporate Citizenship

Policymakers highlight the importance of corporate citizenship. Businesses can be good corporate citizens by caring for employees, building relationships with state and local policymakers, and giving back to their communities.

**Private Sector
Response to COVID-19**

Private Sector Response to COVID-19

The private sector played an important role in Alabama’s COVID-19 response in 2020. Policymakers praised businesses for **(1) donating PPE** and **(2) enforcing the state’s public health guidelines within their establishments.**



Donating PPE

“At the beginning, the state struggled to find a credible vendor for PPE. We were still working off donations, and we still had major shortfalls in gowns and face shields and gloves. We started making calls to companies in our area to ask for PPE donations. Most of these companies are massive international companies, but they’re still in Alabama. That’s what we call the state working with private companies.”

-Section Chief, Executive Branch



Public Health Guidelines

“Large businesses have been great at enforcing the mask mandate. They have been on the front line, saying, ‘We’re going to follow the rules and regulations.’ They went above and beyond as far as safety goes. A lot of people assume the Governor and Department of Health’s policies are anti-business. But I don’t think they are, and having businesses speak up and say, ‘Hey, we’re complying. This is what we’re doing,’ is positive.”

-State Senator, R

In the News

BROOKINGS

A public-private partnership for helping small businesses and empowering workers in Birmingham, Alabama



Alabama companies pivot to produce supplies for health care workers



Coronavirus Supplies: Apple donates 63,000 N-95 masks to Alabama

Private Sector Response to COVID-19

Policymakers also highlighted the role that the **manufacturing industry** played during the pandemic of **(1) producing PPE for their communities** and **(2) creating safe work environments for their employees.**

Producing Personal Protective Equipment



Converting Operations

"A number of companies have converted to making protective gear, either clothing, masks, or sanitizers. Numerous microbreweries went into making hand sanitizers. We have a company near here that converted to making lightweight gear, like protective suits."

-State Representative, R



Responding Quickly

*"Some manufacturers retooled operations quickly and started making respirators. **If this manufacturing shift had not happened so fast, we would be as on top of the virus as we are right now.**"*

-State Representative, R



Prioritizing Local Needs

*"We had difficulty in the beginning getting PPE locally because many of the companies we use have federal contracts. A local industry shifted from making bed linens to masks. **I worked with this company to prioritize PPE for our first responders and healthcare workers.**"*

-Municipal Director, I

Manufacturers Have Been Proactive in Creating Safe Work Environments for Their Employees

"3M has taken a very proactive approach to this pandemic and implemented a lot of safety measures for their employees. They've shifted work to not have as many people on the floor at the same time. They've tried to safeguard their employees and not take any unnecessary risks."

-State Representative, R

Economic Recovery

Economic Recovery

During COVID-19, the people and businesses of Alabama have come together to support each other and fight the pandemic and its economic effects.



Rallying the Community

“The pandemic brought our communities closer together. People are rallying around businesses, and businesses are bringing the community together. When it comes to restaurants, specifically local ones, people are trying to get back in [at limited capacity], do take-out orders, and other things of that nature to support these local businesses. It rallied our area back to how I picture a town’s supposed to be.”

-State Representative, R

Moving Forward: Supporting Businesses

Moving forward, policymakers believe it is important to help businesses adapt to operating safely during the pandemic so that the state can keep businesses open and stimulate the economy as part of its COVID-19 recovery.



Assisting Small Businesses...

“It is important to help small businesses with their technological infrastructure so they can develop a company that is COVID-proof. Meaning that if I’m a restaurant, I have the technology for online ordering and things that improve efficiency. That way, despite being under 50% dining capacity, restaurants can keep people on board but transfer some of those jobs to other opportunities.”

-State Representative, D



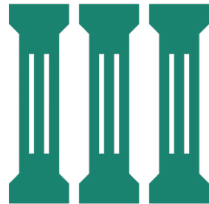
...Through Innovative Solutions

“Other states are laying people off because COVID has crushed their economy, but Alabama’s not in a bad spot. We’re managing the economy and reimagining how you deliver services under COVID-19 through creative and innovative solutions as opposed to a binary response of shutting down or opening it wide. Alabama has existed in the middle, not perfectly, but in a good spot compared to other states.”

-Director, Executive Branch, I

Corporate Citizenship

The fight against COVID-19 has drawn businesses, communities, and state and local governments in Alabama into closer collaboration and has underscored the value of corporate citizenship. Having a strong community presence and building relationships with state and local policymakers allows for a mutually beneficial partnership between the public and private sectors.



Three Pillars of Good Corporate Citizenship



Take Care of Employees

*"We give businesses quite a bit when it comes to incentives and economic reasons to be here. **If businesses owe anything to the people of Alabama, it would be high paying jobs with benefits** so that they can afford to pay rent, to purchase food, and to do those kinds of things. To live."*

-State Representative, D



Build Relationships with Policymakers

*"This company keeps me well-informed, and there are not many companies that will do the same. **I appreciate having a good relationship with the plant managers and CEOs of organizations that are major employers of citizens in my district.**"*

-State Representative, R



Give Back to the Community

*"Businesses owe everything to their communities. **If you have a business making money in a community and you see a need there, do your best to address it.** It creates loyal customers; they see that you care about them when there's a need and no one else is there."*

-Legislative Staff, I

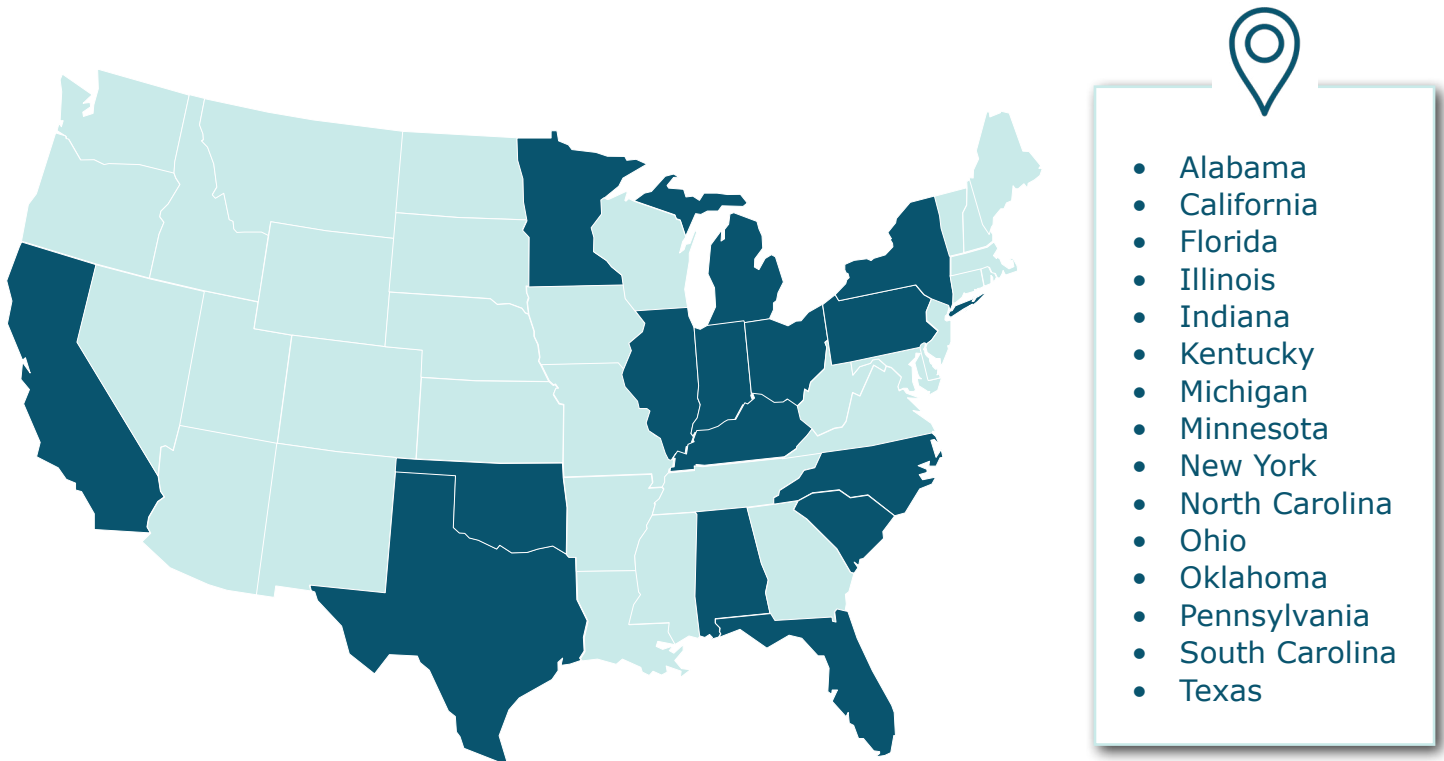
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States Insights Review**

States Insights Review

Ballast Research provides direct feedback from senior policymakers to government relations professionals, helping advocates make better use of policymakers' time and provide the resources most useful to those in government.



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