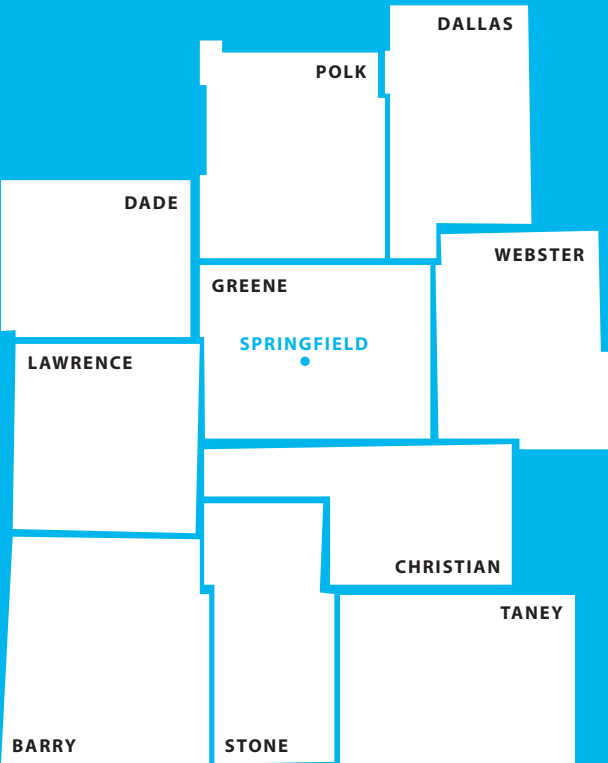


# 2026 OZARKS REGIONAL LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES



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A coalition of regional organizations has identified ten key legislative priorities for the 2026 State Legislative Session, united by a shared commitment of strengthening the economy, expanding workforce development, and supporting the local business community. These priorities address critical issues such as infrastructure investment, workforce training, childcare barriers, local funding and control, and policies that position the region and state as a top destination for jobs and talent.

All ten priorities are vital to the region’s long-term success. For 2026, the coalition will place additional focus on two areas that present shared opportunities to drive growth and partnership across the region:

- Investing in Strategic Infrastructure
- Protecting Local Control & Revenue Streams

By advocating for these opportunities, we aim to strengthen public-private partnerships, enhance the region’s competitive edge, and drive lasting growth and prosperity across Southwest Missouri.

## Invest in Strategic Infrastructure

Southwest Missouri’s strategic location is an asset, making the region a key logistics hub. We support significant investments in roads, bridges, highways, broadband, utilities, and water infrastructure to enhance our regional logistics capabilities.

We support funding for infrastructure studies and shovel-ready projects, including immediate enhancements to Highway MM in Republic, projects included in the Springfield-Branson National Airport Master Plan, and continued infrastructure investment in Stone and Taney Counties to prepare for future travel and commerce growth.

Population <sup>1</sup>	
650,600	737,910
7.2% GROWTH IN THE PAST 10 YEARS	PROJECTED POPULATION IN 2036, 13.4% GROWTH

## Labor Shed Patterns<sup>2</sup>

326,618
LABOR FORCE
11,530
PEOPLE COMMUTED FOR WORK FROM ADJACENT COUNTIES IN 2024

## Protect Local Control and Revenue Streams

Local leaders are best positioned to address the needs of their communities. We encourage the legislature to prioritize local control when evaluating proposals and to protect revenue sources such as property, income and sales taxes that fund essential services.

We also urge careful consideration of the unintended consequences that continued revenue cuts may have on Missouri citizens without an identified replacement revenue stream.

Sources: JobsEQ (2023) <sup>1</sup>, JobsEQ (2025) <sup>2</sup>



## Support Workforce Development and Address Childcare Barriers

Programs like Fast Track, MoExcels, and the Upskilling Training Fund are essential for addressing Missouri's skills gap. We support stable funding and targeted enhancements to these programs, including raising the income threshold for Fast Track eligibility.

Addressing the shortage of affordable, quality childcare is also critical to workforce participation. We support initiatives that expand access to affordable childcare and strengthen efforts to recruit and retain qualified childcare professionals.

## Increase Community Growth Opportunities Through State Support

Access to state-level resources is essential for local communities to invest in infrastructure and drive growth. We support continued and expanded access to state funding, particularly for rural communities, as well as additional resources for project planning.

We encourage the development of innovative, state-funded matching options that allow communities of all sizes to leverage grant funds, such as the Governor's Transportation Cost-Share Program. We also support efforts to streamline grant application and regulatory processes so that every Missouri community has fair and timely access to available opportunities.

## Strengthen Missouri's Competitiveness for Jobs and Talent

To maintain Missouri's competitive edge in attracting jobs, talent and business investment, we support continued funding for economic development incentives and competitive tax credits, along with the creation of new tools to enhance attraction opportunities.

We also advocate for greater support for rural communities through targeted programs, funding for shovel-ready sites, and resources that expand statewide competitiveness and protect the economic vitality of existing communities.

## Ensure Stable and Robust Funding for Higher Education

Higher education institutions in Southwest Missouri are central to economic growth, workforce development, and community vitality. We support predictable, sustained funding to ensure these institutions can continue driving innovation, talent development, and long-term prosperity for the state and region.

## Boost Tourism Funding to Drive Economic Growth

Tourism is a cornerstone of Southwest Missouri's economy, generating significant revenue for the state and supporting jobs, economic development, and community vitality. We support increased funding for regional tourism capital assets and a robust, predictable funding stream to help local communities market their attractions and economic opportunities.

We also encourage investment in infrastructure improvements that enhance access to high-demand destinations and corridors.

## Fully Fund K-12 Education and Support Teacher Recruitment

Strong public schools are essential to preparing Missouri's future workforce and sustaining the state's competitiveness. We support robust, predictable funding of K-12 education to ensure every student receives the education needed to succeed.

We also advocate for innovative initiatives to recruit and retain high-quality teachers across the region and state.

## Support Entrepreneurial Efforts and the Show-Me Network

We support initiatives that foster innovation and strengthen Missouri's small business, entrepreneurial, and technology ecosystem. We recognize the impact of the Missouri Technology Corporation and the Show-Me Network in empowering community-based organizations that serve as champions for entrepreneurs and innovators.

As this technology evolves, we also support evidence-based policies on artificial intelligence (AI) that prioritize responsible development, protect employers and employees, and mitigate risk while encouraging innovation.

## Support Access to Comprehensive Healthcare and Strengthen the Healthcare Workforce

With major healthcare employers serving Southwest Missouri, it is critical to maintain a robust, skilled healthcare workforce capable of delivering comprehensive care. We support targeted initiatives to train, recruit and retain healthcare professionals across the region.

We also strongly emphasize strengthening rural healthcare systems to preserve access, improve quality of care, and meet the needs of underserved populations.

## Top Industries<sup>3</sup>

1. HEALTHCARE & SOCIAL ASSISTANCE: 53,695
2. RETAIL TRADE: 37,227
3. ACCOMMODATION & FOOD SERVICES: 32,090

4. MANUFACTURING: 26,309
5. EDUCATIONAL SERVICES: 21,687

## ORGANIZATIONS IN SUPPORT



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