

OHIO PUBLIC TRANSIT ASSOCIATION

Bill Information

HB74 ENACT FY22-23 TRANSPORTATION BUDGET *(OELSLAGER S)*

To make appropriations for programs related to transportation and public safety for the biennium beginning July 1, 2021, and ending June 30, 2023, and to provide authorization and conditions for the operation of those programs.

CURRENT STATUS

3/31/2021 - **SIGNED BY GOVERNOR**; eff. immediately

HB110 OPERATING BUDGET *(OELSLAGER S)*

To make operating appropriations for the biennium beginning July 1, 2021, and ending June 30, 2023, to levy taxes, and to provide authorization and conditions for the operation of state programs.

CURRENT STATUS

7/1/2021 - **SIGNED BY GOVERNOR**; effective 7/1/21

HB140 MODIFY ELECTION NOTICES, BALLOT LANGUAGE FOR PROPERTY TAX LEVIES *(MERRIN D)*

To enact the "Ballot Uniformity and Transparency Act" to modify the form of election notices and ballot language for property tax levies.

CURRENT STATUS

9/21/2021 - Senate Ways and Means, (Second Hearing)

HB141 MAKE PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION APPROPRIATIONS *(SKINDELL M, UPCHURCH T)*

To make appropriations related to public transportation.

CURRENT STATUS

2/24/2021 - Referred to Committee House Finance

HB146

REGARDS APPLYING PREVAILING WAGE LAW TO PUBLIC PROJECTS (RIEDEL C, MANCHESTER

S)

To allow political subdivisions, special districts, and state institutions of higher education to elect to apply the Prevailing Wage Law to public improvement projects.

CURRENT STATUS

6/23/2021 - House Commerce and Labor, (Second Hearing)

HB157

MODIFY MUNICIPAL INCOME TAX RULES - COVID WFH (JORDAN K, EDWARDS J)

To amend Section 29 of H.B. 197 of the 133rd General Assembly to modify municipal income tax employer withholding rules for COVID-19-related work-from-home employees.

CURRENT STATUS

6/2/2021 - Referred to Committee Senate Ways and Means

HB267

LIMIT PUBLIC HEALTH ORDERS (JORDAN K)

To limit the duration of public health orders and to allow the General Assembly to act via concurrent resolution in response to a public health emergency if the Governor or Department of Health does not.

CURRENT STATUS

5/4/2021 - Referred to Committee House State and Local Government

HB275

EXPAND POLITICAL SUBDIVISION JOINT PURCHASING AUTHORITY (LAMPTON B)

To expand political subdivision joint purchasing authority to expressly include purchases for construction services.

CURRENT STATUS

5/12/2021 - House Commerce and Labor, (First Hearing)

HB283

EXPAND DISTRACTED DRIVING LAWS (ABRAMS C, LAMPTON B)

To expand the texting while driving prohibition to a general prohibition against using an electronic wireless communications device while driving, with certain exceptions, and to create data collection requirements based on associated violations of the distracted driving laws.

CURRENT STATUS

9/23/2021 - **BILL AMENDED**, House Criminal Justice, (Third Hearing)

HB350 PROHIBIT MANDATORY COVID-19 VACCINE *(CUTRONA A)*

To prohibit mandatory COVID-19 vaccinations, requiring proof of COVID-19 vaccination, and certain other actions relating to an individual's COVID-19 vaccination or health status and to declare an emergency.

CURRENT STATUS

6/22/2021 - House Civil Justice, (First Hearing)

HB388 REGARDING VACCINE REFUSAL *(JORDAN K)*

To prohibit taking certain actions against an individual because the individual refuses to be vaccinated against a disease.

CURRENT STATUS

8/12/2021 - Introduced

HB401 EMPLOYER-MANDATED COVID VACCINATION INJURY *(EDWARDS J)*

To exempt an injury or disability caused by an employer-mandated COVID-19 vaccination from the Workers' Compensation Law and to allow the employee to sue the employer for damages.

CURRENT STATUS

8/24/2021 - Introduced

HB435 VACCINE REQUIREMENTS *(CARFAGNA R, SEITZ B)*

To address COVID-19 vaccine requirements for employees and students; to extend certain timelines for qualified civil immunity and expand immunity to include hearing aid dealers and hearing aid fitters; to authorize emergency medical technicians to administer COVID-19 tests; to expressly cover COVID-19 vaccine injuries under the workers' compensation system; and to repeal sections 3792.05, 3792.06, 3792.07, and 3792.08 of the Revised Code on June 30, 2023.

CURRENT STATUS

10/13/2021 - Bills for Third Consideration; (Pending Committee Report)

HB472 POLITICAL SUBDIVISION LIABILITY *(INGRAM C)*

To eliminate certain defenses to political subdivision liability for an employee's negligent operation of a motor vehicle and to reduce damages recoverable against a political subdivision in such actions by the contributory fault of the plaintiff or other parties.

CURRENT STATUS

11/2/2021 - Referred to Committee House Civil Justice

HB477 EXPULSION, TERMINATION BASED ON VACCINATION STATUS *(RICHARDSON T)*

To prevent expulsion from school and termination from employment based on COVID-19 vaccination status.

CURRENT STATUS

11/1/2021 - Introduced

HB481 COVID VACCINE, PASSPORT PROTECTION ACT *(JORDAN K)*

To enact the COVID-19 Vaccination and Passport Protection Act to prohibit schools, institutions of higher education, employers, and places of public accommodation from requiring COVID-19 vaccines or proof of vaccination.

CURRENT STATUS

11/8/2021 - Introduced

HB489 INALIENABLE RIGHTS OF CONSCIENCE ACT *(CLICK G)*

To enact the Inalienable Rights of Conscience Act regarding students and employees who object to certain vaccines and other treatments based on reasons of conscience, including religious convictions.

CURRENT STATUS

11/16/2021 - Introduced

HB491 PAID BEREAVEMENT LEAVE FOR DEATH OF CHILD *(BOYD J, RUSSO A)*

To establish family and medical leave insurance benefits and to require employers to provide an employee with paid bereavement leave on a stillbirth or death of a child.

CURRENT STATUS

11/17/2021 - Referred to Committee House Families, Aging and Human Services

HB498 ADULT USE ACT *(CALLENDER J, FERGUSON R)*

To enact the Ohio Adult Use Act and to levy a tax.

CURRENT STATUS

12/7/2021 - Referred to Committee House Finance

HCR30 OPPOSE VACCINE MANDATES *(KOEHLER K)*

To urge the Congress of the United States to oppose any COVID-19 vaccine mandates made by government entities and to prohibit discrimination based on COVID-19 vaccination status.

■ **CURRENT STATUS**

10/26/2021 - Referred to Committee House Government Oversight

SB4 **EXEMPT EMS LINE OPERATORS-PUBLIC RECORDS** (ROEGNER K)

To include emergency service telecommunicators, protective services workers, certain Ohio National Guard members, and certain mental health care providers as individuals whose residential and familial information is exempt from disclosure under the Public Records Law.

■ **CURRENT STATUS**

6/8/2021 - **SIGNED BY GOVERNOR**; eff. 9/7/21

SB15 **FISCAL OFFICERS-LIABILITY** (WILSON S)

To change the circumstances in which certain fiscal officers may be held liable for a loss of public funds.

■ **CURRENT STATUS**

11/17/2021 - House State and Local Government, (First Hearing)

SB18 **INTERNAL REVENUE CODE** (ROEGNER K, SCHAFFER T)

To expressly incorporate changes in the Internal Revenue Code since March 27, 2020, into Ohio law, to exclude certain loan amounts forgiven under federal law from the commercial activity tax, to authorize a commercial activity tax exclusion for Bureau of Workers' Compensation dividends paid to employers, and to declare an emergency.

■ **CURRENT STATUS**

3/31/2021 - **SIGNED BY GOVERNOR**; eff. immediately

SB19 **REGARDING PROPERTY TAXATION** (SCHAFFER T)

To modify the law regarding property taxation and sales and use tax.

■ **CURRENT STATUS**

12/8/2021 - Senate Appoints Managers; L. Blessing, T. Schaffer & N. Antonio Named as Senate Conferees

SB32 **ELECTRIC VEHICLE CHARGING STATION** (RULLI M)

To require the Director of Transportation to establish an electric vehicle charging station grant rebate program and to make an appropriation.

CURRENT STATUS

2/17/2021 - Senate Transportation, (First Hearing)

SB56 INDEMNITY-DESIGN CONTRACTS *(BLESSING III L)*

To regulate the use of indemnity provisions in professional design contracts related to public improvements.

CURRENT STATUS

11/16/2021 - **REPORTED OUT AS AMENDED**, House Civil Justice, (Fourth Hearing)

SB67 STUDY PROGRESS / CHALLENGES OF AFRICAN AMERICANS *(WILLIAMS S)*

To establish a committee to study the progress and challenges of African Americans in Ohio and to make an appropriation.

CURRENT STATUS

3/16/2021 - Senate Finance, (First Hearing)

SB93 REQUIRE VOTE-COUNTY SALES TAX INCREASE *(ANTANI N)*

To require voter approval of any increase in the rate of a county sales tax.

CURRENT STATUS

9/21/2021 - Senate Ways and Means, (First Hearing)

SB97 MUNICIPAL INCOME TAX-WORK FROM HOME *(ROEGNER K)*

To modify municipal income tax employer withholding rules for COVID-19-related work-from-home employees

CURRENT STATUS

5/12/2021 - Senate Ways and Means, (First Hearing)

SB152 FRAUD, WASTE, ABUSE TASK FORCE *(HOAGLAND F)*

To establish the Fraud, Waste, and Abuse Task Force in the office of the Attorney General and to make an appropriation.

CURRENT STATUS

11/9/2021 - Senate Finance, (First Hearing)

SB169 PROHIBIT MANDATORY VACCINATIONS *(BRENNER A)*

To prohibit mandatory vaccinations against the coronavirus, to prohibit requiring proof of vaccinations generally, and to declare an emergency.

CURRENT STATUS

5/26/2021 - **SUBSTITUTE BILL ACCEPTED**, Senate Health, (First Hearing)

SB209 MASK MANDATES (BRENNER A)

With regard to mask mandates and facial covering requirements for public schools, state institutions of higher education, and businesses.

CURRENT STATUS

9/8/2021 - Referred to Committee Senate General Government Budget

SB260 LOCAL PURCHASING AUTHORITY-CONSTRUCTION (LANG G)

To expand political subdivision joint purchasing authority to expressly include purchases for construction services.

CURRENT STATUS

11/10/2021 - Referred to Committee Senate Local Government and Elections

SB261 LAW CHANGES-MEDICAL MARIJUANA (HUFFMAN S)

To amend the law related to medical marijuana.

CURRENT STATUS

12/8/2021 - **REPORTED OUT**, Senate Small Business and Economic Opportunity, (Third Hearing)

 **Week in Review**

ABORTION

The last two abortion providers in Southwest Ohio could be forced to close under legislation passed by the House on Wednesday. The chamber voted 59-33 to pass SB157 (Johnson-S. Huffman) which includes language prohibiting abortion providers from listing on variances any consulting physicians that are affiliated with state institutions of higher education, state hospitals or other public institutions. The bill also expands the current crime of "abortion manslaughter" to include instances where the doctor fails to "take measures to preserve the health of a child born alive after abortion," and creates a new "child survival form" that must be completed by health care facilities. Abortion manslaughter remains a first-degree felony, while failure to comply with the new reporting requirements carries a third-degree felony.

The bill received a technical amendment in the House Families, Aging and Human Services Committee, so the Senate must concur before the legislation goes to Gov. Mike DeWine for his signature.

ADDICTION/SUBSTANCE ABUSE

The Ohio Narcotics Intelligence Center (ONIC) released a public safety bulletin Friday alerting Ohioans that counterfeit or fake prescription tablets that look like alprazolam, also known as Xanax, and oxycodone, also known as Oxycontin, are being sold in Ohio. These counterfeit drugs contain fentanyl, a powerful drug that can kill, and other contents that could cause death. The number and

letter markings, colors, and scoring lines on the fake pills look identical to the legitimate pills. It is nearly impossible to tell the difference with the naked eye, the ONIC said.

AGING

The DeWine administration is joining the Ohio Conference of AAA Clubs to help keep senior drivers safe this holiday. The administration unveiled the new web page Ohio.gov/olderdrivers in conjunction with the Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT), Ohio Department of Public Safety (DPS), Ohio Department of Aging (ODA) and AAA in the public service campaign "Stay Fit to Drive."

AGRICULTURE

Dennis Summers is now officially serving as the Ohio state veterinarian, Ohio Department of Agriculture (ODAg) Director Dorothy Pelanda announced Tuesday. Summers had been serving as acting/interim state veterinarian since June 2021 while former State Veterinarian Tony Forshey dealt with an illness. Forshey recently passed away.

ARTS, SPORTS AND ENTERTAINMENT

A recent survey of academic economists across Ohio found that only two of the 23 respondents agreed with a commonly held convention that subsidies for the construction of sports stadiums create local economic benefits that outweigh their economic costs.

After leading the University of Cincinnati football team to an undefeated season and a spot in the College Football Playoff (CFP), Bearcats head coach Luke Fickell was named the "Home Depot Coach of the Year" for 2021 on Tuesday.

ATTORNEY GENERAL

Citing the prolonged court battle and potential dissipation of public money to be recovered, the attorney general's office has asked Judge Kimberly Cocroft of Franklin County Common Pleas Court to accelerate the pace of litigation in which the state seeks to recoup funds from Electronic Classroom of Tomorrow (ECOT) founder William Lager because the parties' central arguments were submitted more than a year ago. ECOT closed nearly four years ago in early 2018, running low on funds because the Ohio Department of Education was garnishing its monthly payments to recover overpayments from previous years. The attorney general's office under now-Gov. Mike DeWine filed suit months later to recover money from Lager, arguing he had an illegal interest in contracts between the school and vendors also linked to him.

The firm once operated from prison by convicted felon Martin Shkreli will pay up to \$40 million to Ohio and six other states for inflating the price of life-saving drug Daraprim from \$17.50 to \$750 per pill, costing immuno-compromised patients up to a half million dollars per year. Ohio is among the half dozen states and the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) that sued Swiss-based Phoenixus AG and its Vyera Pharmaceuticals subsidiary last year for Daraprim price-rigging through Rx distributors Cardinal Health of Dublin, Medina-based Drug Mart, Illinois-based Walgreens, and others while simultaneously blocking generics from the market. Attorney General Dave Yost announced Wednesday that the company run by 'Pharma Bro' Shkreli and successor CEO Kevin Mulleady, with whom Shkreli coordinated Vyera operations via a prison contraband smart phone, had agreed to settle antitrust charges.

BALLOT ISSUES

Ohio Attorney General Dave Yost said Thursday that his office had rejected the summary for a proposed statute on "Vaccine and/or Gene Therapy Choice and Anti-Discrimination." A release said the submitted petition did not meet the requirement for the summary to be a fair and truthful representation of the proposed statute, citing three defects detailed in a response letter.

FY22-23 BUDGET

As had been planned, the Senate Finance Committee Tuesday gutted HB169 (Cutrona-Swearingen) of its original content providing federal COVID relief dollars to bars, restaurants and hotels -- provisions which have already passed the General Assembly and been signed into law through SB108 (S. Huffman-Romanchuk) -- for language appropriating a total of \$4.18 billion in federal COVID dollars for a multitude of purposes. Committee Chair Sen. Matt Dolan (R-Chagrin Falls) explained that HB169 would appropriate funds from three federal COVID-relief acts: the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA), the Consolidated Appropriations Act (CAA) and the American Rescue Plan (ARP) Act. He stressed that, as a result, all of the funds in HB169 are federal dollars. "There are no state dollars in this bill." The Senate and House went on to approve the bill, sending it to the governor for his signature by week's end. Appropriations in the bill include the following:

- \$2.47 billion in Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER), Governor's Emergency Education Relief (GEER) and Emergency Assistance to Nonpublic Schools (EANS) appropriations to K-12 school.
- \$639 million in supplemental child care grants is included "to encourage the hiring and retention of staff to ensure working families have access to child care."
- \$1.05 billion for health care employers to incentivize the hiring and retention of staff.
- \$250 million for grants to law enforcement agencies to respond to violent crime or the pandemic.
- \$91.1 million in federal funds for the Ohio Department of Health (ODH) to continue combatting the pandemic and other public health priorities.

Total General Revenue Fund (GRF) tax receipts in November were \$75.8 million (3.4 percent) higher than the budgeted estimate, according to preliminary data from the Ohio Office of Budget and Management (OBM). All tax categories exceeded their estimates, OBM said.

CENSUS

Data released in November by the U.S. Census Bureau shows the Ohio "center of population" in 2020 is in the area of Harmony Township in Morrow County. The 2010 data also listed the center of population in that township, and Google Maps indicated it has moved Southwest by 1.7 miles. In 1920, the Ohio center of population was in Congress Township (Wayne County). The national center of population was identified as Hartville, MO in 2020.

CORONAVIRUS

The Ohio Department of Health (ODH) and Ohio Lottery Friday concluded announcing the winners of the \$10,000 scholarships with the names of the last 30 winners released, as well as the five grand prize \$100,000 scholarships that were announced during the lottery's live broadcast. Those five grand prize winners are Audrey Bird, Brecksville; Rinoa Chech, Canton; Avery Lagory, Cleves; Widnelson Miller, Delphos; and Jacob Peters, Conover.

Business groups Tuesday testified in opposition to HB218 (Cutrona), saying they oppose any mandate that comes from the government that interferes with business decisions, whether it comes from the Biden administration or the Ohio Statehouse. Pat Tiberi, the former congressman who now leads the Ohio Business Roundtable, told the Senate General Government Budget Committee that Ohio has been an at-will employment state, and employee and employer have the liberty to decide whom to work for and whom to employ without government interference. He said government interference is why they also oppose a mandate from the Biden administration requiring vaccinations at companies with more than 100 employees, saying there is equal government interference on both sides of the issue.

The United States Public Health Service (USPHS) Commissioned Corps has awarded the "Coronavirus Disease 2019 Pandemic Campaign Medal" (C-19PCM) to more than 100 service members in the State Defense Force of Ohio (OHSDF). The OHSDF is the only state unit of its kind to be awarded this medal.

The USPHS Commissioned Corps is one of the nation's uniformed services -- a branch committed to the service of health. In March 2020, OHSDF personnel were activated for the Ohio National Guard's Operation Steady Resolve, augmenting Ohio Army and Air National Guard in several capacities in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The activation mobilized approximately 150 OHSDF service members in Ohio for 15 months. Service members' duties included working in food banks and nursing homes and providing COVID-19 testing around Ohio. Their service was duly noticed by the federal USPHS, which qualified some OHSDF personnel for the medal.

The number of COVID-infected individuals in the hospital is approaching levels not seen since last winter, Ohio Department of Health (ODH) Director Dr. Bruce Vanderhoff said Thursday. "The current surge in COVID-19 hospitalizations is simply putting a dangerous strain on the state's health care infrastructure. We are, yet again, in a serious situation -- every bit as serious as last December and January," Vanderhoff said during a virtual press conference.

DISABILITIES

Gov. Mike DeWine announced Wednesday that Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities (DODD) Director Jeff Davis will retire effective Dec. 31 and be replaced by current Deputy Director for the Division of Policy and Strategic Direction Kim Hauck beginning Jan. 1, 2022.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

JobsOhio President and CEO J.P. Nauseef highlighted accomplishments of the private economic development entity over the past 10 years since it was created under 129-HB1 (Duffey) in an email to business leaders and stakeholders Thursday. Nauseef said that JobsOhio was unique nationally and perhaps globally, detailing its creation and the acquisition of Ohio's liquor enterprise through 2038 as a funding mechanism. Through 2020, there have been over 2,800 economic development projects, with 210,000 new jobs created and 590,000 jobs retained to bring \$10 billion in new payroll and \$35 billion in retained payroll, with \$1.35 billion in annual state income tax revenue, the organization noted. JobsOhio also attracted 500 companies into the state and helped companies invest \$64 billion in new capital assets.

Gov. Mike DeWine's administration announced Monday the approval of assistance for 10 projects expected to create 946 new jobs and retain 2,485 jobs statewide. During its monthly meeting, the Ohio Tax Credit Authority (TCA) reviewed economic development proposals brought by JobsOhio and its regional partners. The projects are expected to collectively result in more than \$50 million in new payroll and spur more than \$296 million in investments across Ohio.

EDUCATION

Senators answered school district complaints against tax valuation changes in HB126 (Merrin) Tuesday by withdrawing the as-introduced version and substituting even stronger safeguards for property owners. The Senate Ways and Means Committee accepted an omnibus amendment rescinding the original bill and instead requiring school boards not only to adopt a resolution for counter-complaints but also to proffer evidence supporting higher valuations; banning school districts appeals from boards of revision (BOR) to the courts; and barring property owners and opposing school districts from adopting arms-length "private pay

agreements" in which owners pay school officials not to file complaints or to dismiss them once filed.

"The amendment does not prohibit settlement agreements whereby parties agree upon a new valuation of a property and that valuation is reflected on the tax list," the Legislative Services Commission (LSC) said. The new version clarifies that parties, including political subdivisions, could file initial complaints only for property they own and would receive mandatory notice of counter-complaints. Amended HB126, finally, would take effect in tax year 2022 rather than 2021.

Interim Superintendent Stephanie Siddens spoke to the Senate Primary and Secondary Education Committee about her priorities during the leadership transition and how the Ohio Department of Education (ODE) is working to address student learning loss and absenteeism driven by the pandemic. Committee members pressed her on that topic repeatedly, noting the substantial federal relief funding that schools have available to address the issue. The committee also heard about how the Ohio High School Athletic Association (OHSAA) has navigated disruptions caused by the pandemic and worked to enable student athletes' continued participation.

ELECTIONS 2022

Gov. Mike DeWine should take action to reduce Ohioans' energy bills ahead of an expected jump in heating costs this winter, Dayton Mayor and Democratic gubernatorial candidate Nan Whaley said Monday. "As I travel across Ohio heading into the winter months, folks I talk to are worried about paying their utility bills, their rent, and keeping food on the table," Whaley said during a press conference. "With colder months and higher energy prices, we owe it to Ohioans to do everything we can to lower their bills and make utility costs more affordable," Whaley continued. Citing projections from the U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA), Whaley said the nearly 70 percent of Ohioans who use natural gas are likely to see a 45 percent increase in their heating bills this winter.

DeWine spokesperson Dan Tierney told *Hannah News* that most of Whaley's proposals are already being carried out by the DeWine administration and PUCO, saying her comments are "misleading" because they imply these actions aren't being taken.

Sen. Bob Peterson (R-Sabina) announced Monday that he will seek a return to the Ohio House next year and is running for the 91st District seat currently held by Rep. Shane Wilkin (R-Hillsboro). Wilkin is running for Peterson's seat in the Senate.

Shay Hawkins, a former aide to Jim Renacci when he was in Congress, announced this week that he is running for the newly constituted 13th Congressional District, which covers the city of Akron as well as parts of Cuyahoga and Summit counties and all of Medina County. The seat will have no incumbent next year.

With Rep. Brigid Kelly (D-Cincinnati) running for county auditor next year, the *Cincinnati Enquirer* said at least four Democrats will run for the party's nomination for the 31st House District in 2022. The newspaper said Colleen Reynolds, a lobbyist with DSD Advisors, has received the endorsement of Kelly. Gavi Begtrup and Antonio Sanders Jr. have also launched campaigns, and the newspaper said Dani Isaacson is expected to launch a campaign next week.

The following endorsements were made over the week:

- The gubernatorial campaign of John Cranley announced the endorsement Dayton Fire Fighters Local 136.
- Giffords PAC endorsed Tim Ryan for U.S. Senate.

EMPLOYMENT/UNEMPLOYMENT

The nation added 210,000 nonfarm payroll jobs in November and the unemployment rate dropped by 0.4 percent to 4.2 percent, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) said Friday, with job gains in professional and business services, transportation and warehousing, construction and manufacturing. Jobs fell in retail trade. According to BLS, the number of unemployed persons fell by 542,000 to 6.9 million. Both measures are down considerably from their highs at the end of the February-April 2020 recession. However, they remain above pre-pandemic levels of 3.5 percent and 5.7 million, respectively, in February 2020.

For the week ending Dec. 4, the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS) reported 9,302 initial traditional unemployment claims to the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL). That number is higher than last week, when the state reported 7,519 traditional jobless claims.

ENERGY

A Statehouse advocate of nuclear energy said Wednesday that the Senate rather than the House is standing in the way of advanced molten salt reactors (MSR) and the creation of an Ohio Nuclear Development Authority (ONDA). Colleagues told legislators the General Assembly is forsaking a commercial groundswell beginning with thousands of tons of unused nuclear fuel and depleted uranium in economically challenged Southern Ohio. Proponents of nuclear energy's future addressed the House Energy and Natural Resources Committee on HB434's (Stein) renewed push for ONDA after the lower chamber passed its predecessor, 133-HB104 (Stein), 88-11 and the Senate allowed it to die in lame duck last December after sitting on the bill for half a year.

FEDERAL

Newly elected Ohio Congressman Mike Carey (R-Hilliard) announced Thursday his appointment to the U.S. House Budget and the Science, Space and Technology committees for the 117th Congress. Carey noted he will be the only Ohio member on the U.S. House Budget Committee.

GAMING/GAMBLING

The General Assembly is finally sending a sports gambling legalization bill to the governor. After months of negotiations and numerous delays, the HB29 (Wiggam-A. Miller) Conference Committee met Wednesday afternoon and unanimously approved a report on the bill after accepting an omnibus amendment that House Majority Floor Leader Bill Seitz (R-Cincinnati) said included language from around 50 separate amendments. Shortly afterward, the Senate voted 31-1 to approve the report, while the House voted 72-12 to approve it. Gov. Mike DeWine has indicated that he will sign the bill. The Ohio Casino Control Commission (OCCC) is required to designate a universal start date no later than Jan. 1, 2023.

GENERAL ASSEMBLY/STATEHOUSE

Southeast Ohio residents concerned about contamination of their drinking water aired concerns Monday about new Ohio Department of Natural Resources rules on disposal of waste from oil and gas production. The Joint Committee on Agency Rule Review considered the regulations but did not take any action to impede them, meaning they can take effect. Meanwhile, committee Democrats failed in an attempt to recommend invalidation of Ohio Department of Health rules on disposal of fetal remains. Planned Parenthood argued the rules were insufficiently clear and weren't accompanied by an accurate summary of compliance costs, as required by law. In addition, pathologists objected to rules addressing surprise medical billing, saying the authorizing statute was not meant to apply to out-of-network lab services ordered by an in-network provider for non-facility based services. But the committee also did not take any action to prevent the rules from taking effect.

House Minority Leader Emilia Sykes (D-Akron) announced Wednesday that she plans to step down from her caucus position at the end of the year, ending what the caucus called a "historic three-year tenure which saw unprecedented bipartisan success for Ohio Democrats and an increase in transparency of the legislative process for Ohio citizens." Sykes said she is considering "any and all options" to continue serving after her time as minority leader is over, "whether that's in elected office or as a private citizen," and will continue to represent the 34th district. Any decisions will be shared "in the near future," she added.

A child care study group formed out of late-stage budget negotiations over the Step Up to Quality (SUTQ) rating program met for the first time Wednesday, with hopes to move quickly on formulating recommendations -- though not quickly enough to meet the year-end reporting deadline set out in the law. The Study Committee on Ohio's Publicly Funded Child Care and the Step Up to Quality Program is co-chaired by Rep. Andrea White (R-Kettering) and Sen. Jerry Cirino (R-Kirtland). The conference committee on the budget bill, HB110 (Oelslager), created the study committee after, earlier in budget deliberations, the Senate had proposed repealing mandates that all publicly funded child care providers be rated in SUTQ, and that providers meet at least a 3-star rating by 2025.

HouseTaco opened this week on the ground floor of the Ohio Statehouse in the space formally occupied by Milo's Capitol Cafe. The restaurant offers a number of "build your own" and pre-built taco options and encourages customers to pre-order at www.toasttab.com/house-taco.

Aside from voting to approve a large federal spending bill, the House on Thursday approved HB458 (Hall), legislation to eliminate August special elections; HCR13 (Koehler-Creech), urging Congress to make daylight savings time permanent; HB186 (Swearingen-Wilkin), regarding first-time homebuyers; HB233 (Hillyer), regarding sales tax and bad credit card debt; HB243 (Cutrona), to preempt local knife laws; HB321 (Kick-B. Young), regarding auction laws; HB348 (Merrin), regarding unclaimed funds; HB440 (Swearingen-White), to expand the Agriculture Linked Deposit Program; SB166 (Reineke), regarding career-technical education; and agreed to Senate amendments HB122 (Fraizer-Holmes), regarding telehealth.

A new anti-corruption legislative package from Reps. Jeff Crossman (D-Parma) and Paula Hicks-Hudson (D-Toledo) announced Thursday would expand whistleblower protections and strengthen the debarment statute, requiring a ban of vendors caught committing fraud in their dealings with the state. The package includes the "Ohio False Claims Act" and "Debarment of State Vendors" legislation.

In other action, the House Agriculture and Conservation Committee reported out SB83 (Williams-Rulli), which deals with brownfields; the House State and Local Government Committee reported out HB449 (Carfagna-Lanese), which designates "Italian Heritage Day"; the House Transportation and Public Safety Committee reported out highway naming bill HB473 (White) and license plate bill HB394 (Carruthers); the Senate Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee reported out HB229 (Wilkin-Swearingen), which addresses qualified immunity for camp operators; Senate Finance Committee reported out SB148 (Sykes), which establishes the New African Immigrants Grant and Gift Fund; the Senate Financial Institutions and Technology Committee reported out SB184 (Lang-Rulli), regarding large volume online sellers; the Senate General Government Budget Committee reported out SR204 (Hoagland), which addresses military vaccinations; the Senate Ways and Means Committee reported out HB126 (Merrin), which deals with contesting property values; the House Armed Services and Veterans Affairs Committee reported out HCR27 (Troy), which recognizes victims of Agent Orange; and HCR32 (Lightbody-Lampton), which seeks to honor Col. William Cavanaugh; the Senate Small Business and Economic Opportunity Committee reported out SB261 (S. Huffman), which revises the state's medical marijuana law; and House Behavioral Health and Recovery Supports Committee reported out HB428 (Pavliga-Edwards), to established a study commission on adverse childhood experiences;

GOVERNOR

Gov. Mike DeWine ordered flags be flown at half-staff on all public buildings and grounds throughout Ohio for several days during the week in honor of former U.S. Sen. Bob Dole, a former U.S. senator and the 1996 Republican presidential nominee, and for Pearl Harbor Remembrance Day.

Judicial appointments made during the week include the following:

- **Cornelius J. O'Sullivan**, of Lakewood, will assume office on Wednesday, Dec. 15, 2021 on the Eighth District Court of Appeals. He will be filling the vacancy left by Judge Larry Jones, who died. O'Sullivan must run for election in November 2022 to complete the unexpired term ending Feb. 9, 2027.

- **Kenneth R. Callahan**, of University Heights, was appointed to a seat on the Cuyahoga County Court of Common Pleas, replacing Judge Nancy McDonnell, who died. The appointment is effective Wednesday, Dec. 15, 2021. He must run for election in November 2022 to complete the unexpired term ending Jan. 3, 2027.

- **Wanda C. Jones**, of Solon, will assume a seat on the Cuyahoga County Court of Common Pleas on Monday, Dec. 20, 2021. She will be taking the seat formerly held by Judge Joseph D. Russo, who died. Jones must run for election in November 2022 to complete the unexpired term ending Dec. 31, 2024.

- **Mark R. Majer**, of Gates Mills, will assume office on Jan. 3, 2021 on the Cuyahoga County Court of Common Pleas, replacing Judge Dick Ambrose, who is retiring at the end of the year. Majer must run for election in November 2022 to retain the seat.

- **Sergio I. DiGeronimo**, of Brecksville, will assume office on Monday, Dec. 20, 2021 on the Garfield Heights Municipal Court. He replaces Judge Jennifer Weiler, who retired. DiGeronimo must run for election in November 2023 to retain the seat.

GREAT LAKES

Cleveland Metroparks will receive nearly \$2 million to help transform the Lake Erie shorelines on Cleveland's East Side, the Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR) has announced. ODNR is one of six project partners contributing nearly \$1 million to advance the Cleveland Harbor Eastern Embayment Resilience Study (CHEERS), the department said in a news release. The partners are matching the \$985,000 awarded to Cleveland Metroparks from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) National Coastal Resilience Fund (NCRF).

HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

Gov. Mike DeWine announced Friday that the Ohio Department of Health (ODH), in partnership with the Governor's Children Initiative, has awarded \$5 million to 44 community- and faith-based organizations with the goal of improving infant and maternal health outcomes. DeWine said the funds are meant to help strengthen the unique work of community- and faith-based organizations, adding that funded organizations will reduce barriers to wellness for participants by providing resources and services that address gaps in existing maternal and infant systems and support pregnant women and newly parenting families, meaning those up to 12-months postpartum.

Some home- and community-based services (HCBS) providers told the Joint Medicaid Oversight Committee Thursday of the pressure they're facing amid the pandemic and their disappointment at a state plan to spend federal money in this area. Ohio Department of Medicaid Director Maureen Corcoran, however, said the plan is "not carved in stone" but also is following guidance from lawmakers themselves.

HIGHER EDUCATION

Gov. Mike DeWine recently sent a letter to Ohio's college and university presidents, asking them to take steps to create a safe environment on campus for Jewish students, particularly during the Hanukkah season, which ended the evening of Monday, Dec. 6. "No student should be afraid on a college or university campus -- especially because of their race or religion," DeWine said. "Sadly, for too many of our Jewish students today, that is not the case. Cases of anti-Semitic and anti-Israel sentiments have been reported on our campuses here in Ohio and nationally. Hillel International, the Jewish student campus services organization, reports that these incidents are increasing. It's not only students who are at risk of facing hate and harassment, but it is also faculty and staff."

Rep. Jon Cross (R-Kenton) was joined by Ohio Chamber of Commerce President and CEO Steve Stivers and higher education leaders Monday in announcing new legislation meant to improve Ohio's ability to bring more out-of-state students to Ohio colleges and keep them in the workforce after graduation. The "Graduate and Retain Ohio's Workforce (GROW) Act" would create the following incentives: a 100 percent refundable state income tax credit for college graduates who remain in Ohio for up to three years; 100 scholarships worth \$25,000 over four years to certain out-of-state students; a refundable credit to employers worth 30 percent of wages paid to students in internships, apprenticeships and co-ops; and an additional Ohio College Opportunity Grant (OCOG) for associate's degree graduates who wish to pursue a bachelor's degree.

Edison State Community College announced Monday that it was launching a "25&UP FINISH FAST" tuition waiver for adults ages 25 and older, helping provide Ohioans with accelerated degrees, certificates, and short-term technical certificates as a workforce solution. The waiver can account for 100 percent of tuition cost and can put students on an accelerated path to earning a credential in as little as one semester. It includes fees for instruction, technology, activities and career services, while students are responsible for lab fees for individual courses, security fees, books and other additional fees. It lasts up to four semesters or until a program is completed, whichever occurs first.

In another marathon meeting on Sen. Jerry Cirino's (R-Kirtland) higher education reform bill, SB135, members of the House Higher Education and Career Readiness Committee signaled some skepticism over portions of the legislation. SB135 is a wide-ranging bill that deals with a number of issues on college campuses, including free speech, and it also has provisions that deal with K-12 education. While Cirino spoke to the free-speech portion of the bill, witnesses discussed changes the bill would make to privately

funded endowments at state institutions of higher education. Among the provisions in the bill, SB135 requires that colleges and universities, as well as schools, have processes for submitting complaints about alleged violations to students' or faculty members' free speech rights, and it is meant to complement 133-SB40 (Brenner-McColley) which also dealt with free speech on college campuses, Cirino said.

The Ohio Attorney General's Office announced the University of Dayton School of Law as winner of its ninth annual Public Service Mock Trial Competition. Held last month at the Franklin County Court of Common Pleas, the competition featured 10 teams of students from seven Ohio law schools.

JUDICIAL

The Ohio Supreme Court Monday dismissed a lawsuit filed at the Ohio Supreme Court earlier this year by the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) of Ohio against the Ohio House of Representatives over the release of public records. The dismissal was requested by the ACLU and comes after the parties announced a settlement in September.

The Ohio Supreme Court has awarded Hamilton and Delaware county juvenile courts individual grants of \$75,000 over three years to hire a safe harbor coordinator for human trafficking. The coordinator will develop programs for human trafficking victims who are minors and will increase the number of justice-involved juveniles screened for human trafficking.

The Ohio Supreme Court unveiled a special app to help veterans' treatment courts (VTC), ex-military members, their mentors and families remain connected. The OH VTC Statewide app is available through Apple or Google. The Supreme Court's Office of Court Services (OCS) created the app to improve collaboration among veterans, treatment courts and peer mentors and to make other courts desiring their own specialized dockets aware of veterans' services.

MARIJUANA/HEMP

The Ohio Board of Pharmacy (OBP) voted 7-0 on Tuesday to increase the 90-day supply of plant material allowed under the Ohio Medical Marijuana Control Program (MMCP). Starting Monday, Jan. 3, patients will be allowed to buy nine ounces of plant material, regardless of the THC level. OBP Medical Marijuana Operations Director Sharon Maerten-Moore said terminally-ill patients will continue to be permitted to purchase 10 ounces of plant material at a time.

There are now 224,681 patients registered in the Ohio Medical Marijuana Control Program, including 15,067 military veterans, 16,662 "indigent" individuals and 938 terminally ill individuals. There are 133,196 patients with an active registration and an active recommendation. There are 25,933 caregivers registered in the program, and 639 physicians have a certificate to recommend medical marijuana in Ohio. A total of 205,832 unique patients have purchased medical marijuana since the beginning of the program.

Legislation making changes to the state's medical marijuana program, SB261 (S. Huffman), was reported out by the Senate Small Business and Economic Opportunity Committee Wednesday, after receiving in-person testimony from proponents and interested parties. The bill was reported unanimously by those present.

NATURAL RESOURCES

The Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR) has announced more than \$8.3 million in funding to transform hazardous land into safe areas for recreation and tourism. The three projects, which have received preliminary approval from the federal Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement (OSMRE), will be funded through the Abandoned Mine Land Economic Revitalization (AMLER) Program, ODNR said in a news release. Projects include the following:

- The Richard Downing Airport AMLER Project in Coshocton County will receive \$2 million.
- The Tecumseh Theater AMLER Project in Perry County will receive \$4 million to revitalize the historic theater in Shawnee.
- The Buckeye Trail AMLER Project in Perry and Athens counties will receive \$2.36 million to construct nearly 20 miles of trail through Wayne National Forest.

PEOPLE

New officers were installed at the Ohio Clerk of Courts Association (OCCA) during the organization's recent annual winter conference. Butler County Clerk of Courts Mary Swain was elected as 2022 president of the OCCA. Also installed were Fulton County Clerk of Courts Tracy Zuver as first vice president, Mercer County Clerk of Courts Calvin Freeman as second vice president, Ashland County Clerk of Courts Deborah Myers as third vice president, Holmes County Clerk of Courts Ronda Steimel as corresponding secretary, Delaware County Clerk of Courts Natalie Fravel as recording secretary and Wyandot County Clerk of Courts Ann Dunbar as treasurer. The immediate past president is Clinton County Clerk of Courts Cindy Bailey.

POLITICS

A raucous meeting of the Ohio Republican Party State Central Committee (SCC) was adjourned abruptly Friday after public skeptics of Chairman Bob Paduchik's committee reassignments and alleged diversion of funds to the governor and other incumbents repeatedly thwarted voice votes and heckled Executive Committee members. The committee had roped off a small section for party activists who served as a peanut gallery of sorts for everything Paduchik said, including committee vote calls that elicited groans and boos. The meeting followed a lawsuit filed this week by five SCC members against the Ohio Republican Party (ORP), Paduchik and Johnson over the same allegations.

PUBLIC SAFETY

The Ohio Department of Public Safety's (DPS) Office of Criminal Justice Services (OCJS) announced a request for proposals (RFP) Thursday to solicit applications for 2022 Ohio Drug Law Enforcement Fund grants supporting the state's five-year-old Drug Interdiction, Disruption and Reduction Plan. The fund allows multi-jurisdictional drug task forces to expend dollars where needed, while the plan seeks to integrate those efforts into a statewide drug interception/prevention framework for greater collaboration among law enforcement and treatment providers.

Gov. Mike DeWine and Lt. Gov. Jon Husted joined Republican lawmakers at the Statehouse Monday to propose the awarding of \$250 million from the Biden administration's American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) to state and local first responders to address violent crime, staffing shortages and officer wellness impacts from COVID-19. This funding was included in HB169 (Cutrona-Swearingen) which cleared the General Assembly this week. Of the total, \$175 million would help prevent and solve crimes in communities struggling with increased violent crime or strategies to control through multi-jurisdictional collaboration, focused-deterrence policing and gunshot detection technology. Funds also would provide quicker access to ballistics technology and help eliminate crime laboratories and coroner offices' evidence backlogs. Another \$75 million would support the emotional resilience and recovery of first responders experiencing new challenges and stresses from COVID-19. The proposal would fund localized wellness programs and suicide prevention training for mental health concerns unique to first responders. It also would buoy staff recruitment and retention to help restore pre-pandemic workforce levels, including basic training tuition assistance, "explorer" programs for high school and college students interested in first responder careers, and community-police relations to strengthen relationships between law enforcement and the public.

The House Transportation and Public Safety Committee heard interested party testimony on a bill making changes to 911 services and training Tuesday, as local government officials said they supported much of the bill but had concerns over provisions on funding mechanisms and their effect on political subdivisions.

Some of the witnesses to HB445 (Carfagna-K. Smith) were listed as opponents, but clarified that they were interested parties in response to questions from Vice Chair Riordan McClain (R-Upper Sandusky).

REDISTRICTING/REAPPORTIONMENT

The Ohio Supreme Court Wednesday heard oral arguments on three cases challenging the new General Assembly maps passed along partisan lines by the Ohio Redistricting Commission, with justices questioning attorneys about proportionality in the new maps and possible remedies should the maps be struck down by the Court. The case will likely come down to how the justices interpret Article XI, Section 6 of the Ohio Constitution, which includes a provision that any map that is adopted by the commission must reflect the political preferences of Ohio voters. Plaintiffs have argued that the maps violate the section because they give Republicans supermajorities in both the Ohio House and Senate while voters have supported Republican candidates statewide by a 54 percent to 46 percent margin. Attorneys for the commission, in addition to arguing that the provision is aspirational, said the maps that were adopted

were the most constitutionally compliant of any offered, and that they are closer to the voter preferences than other plans. They also argued that because the other sections of the Ohio Constitution were strictly complied with, Section 6 does not need to be considered by the Court.

STATE GOVERNMENT

Gov. Mike DeWine and Lt. Gov. Jon Husted announced the third round of grants in the Ohio Broadband, Utilities and Infrastructure for Local Development Success (Ohio BUILDS) water infrastructure program Tuesday, saying more than \$109 million will go to projects in all 88 counties. In total, the program will provide approximately \$250 million to 183 projects. "Clean drinking water is part of the foundation for a good quality of life, yet too many communities in Ohio can't reliably provide residents with this basic necessity due to crumbling infrastructure [that] has been too expensive to fix," DeWine said. "My administration is committed to helping our communities address these important water issues, and we look forward to additional conversations with the Ohio General Assembly about the potential of expanding this program with additional funds."

TECHNOLOGY/AEROSPACE

Rep. Adam Holmes (R-Nashport), chair of the Ohio Aerospace and Aviation Technology Committee (OAATC), offered sponsor testimony Tuesday on legislation that would update state permitting laws in regard to navigable airspace and future airport expansion. He told the House Transportation and Public Safety Committee that HB490 is one of "a series" of bills to establish a state regulatory framework for advanced air mobility (AAM) technology that will soon be in use, saying the national aerospace industry "is on the edge of a transformational leap." The bill would update permitting laws for tall structures to protect navigable airspace.

Entrepreneurs from universities across the state discussed their new technologies during a special event with Lt. Gov. Jon Husted on Tuesday. "PITCH X: From Lab to Market" is a series of videos featuring researchers discussing their technologies, which are headed toward commercialization. The ultimate goal of the initiative is to connect university research with private sector investment as Ohio grows its innovation economy, according to Husted's office. "In labs across Ohio, our university faculty are discovering breakthroughs, many of which could be transformative in solving some of the world's biggest challenges," said Husted, who also serves as director of InnovateOhio. "PITCH X provides a platform for showcasing Ohio's IP talent and promoting a culture of innovation throughout Ohio." PITCH X is a component of the Ohio IP Promise, an initiative that was launched by Husted as an extension of InnovateOhio in 2019 to

make Ohio universities more attractive to innovators and entrepreneurs.

Will HB376 (Carfagna-Hall) as currently written balance regulatory reform with the state and public's right to protect consumers from unwanted commercialization and disclosure of their private affairs by Silicon Valley? That was the question before the House members Thursday as trial lawyers, commercial interests, and advocates for consumers and industry debated the Ohio Personal Privacy Act's (OPPA) outcome should it become law

UTILITIES

AEP Ohio announced that its philanthropic arm, the AEP Foundation, has awarded a \$100,000 grant to Catholic Social Services in Columbus. The gift is part of the foundation's "Delivering on the Dream: Social and Racial Justice Grant Program," which is a five-year, \$5 million commitment to fund organizations with programs dedicated to advancing social and racial justice in communities American Electric Power serves.

WORKFORCE

Results for the October round of TechCred applications were announced Wednesday, with Lt. Gov. Jon Husted saying 252 Ohio employers were approved for funding that will provide 2,997 tech-focused credentials. The 11th round saw 93 new employers approved for the first time, according to a release.

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