

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

3/25/2021 - Consideration of Senate Amendments; House Does Concur, Vote 86-9

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

3/11/2021 - House Finance, (Seventh Hearing)

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

3/23/2021 - **BILL AMENDED**, House Ways and Means, (Third 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

3/3/2021 - House Commerce and Labor, (First Hearing)

HB157

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

To repeal 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

3/16/2021 - House Ways and Means, (Third Hearing)

SB4

EXEMPT EMS LINE OPERATORS-PUBLIC RECORDS (ROEGNER K)

To include emergency service telecommunicators and certain Ohio National Guard members as individuals whose residential and familial information is exempt from disclosure under the Public Records Law.

CURRENT STATUS

3/23/2021 - **BILL AMENDED**, House Civil Justice, (Second Hearing)

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

3/24/2021 - Referred to Committee House State and Local Government

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

3/24/2021 - Consideration of House Amendments; Senate Does Concur, Vote 33-0, Emergency Clause 33-0

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

3/2/2021 - Senate Judiciary, (First 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

3/3/2021 - Referred to Committee Senate Ways and Means

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

3/3/2021 - Referred to Committee Senate Ways and Means

Week in Review

AGRICULTURE

Leaders of the Ohio State University (OSU) College of Food, Agricultural and Environmental Sciences (CFAES) and the Ohio Corn and Wheat Growers Association (OCWGA) both discussed their work with the Senate Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee during a Tuesday hearing. OSU Dean Cathann Kress said the CFAES college has three campuses -- Columbus, Wooster and "statewide" -- and is engaged in research, teaching and extension missions centered on sustaining life. Those mission areas make the college "uniquely positioned to lead nationally and globally" and its departments support "a breadth of work around food and food systems; a wide range of production; environmental and ecosystem sustainability; policy and economics; and health."

ARTS, SPORTS AND ENTERTAINMENT

The 2021 National Football League (NFL) Draft will take place at several downtown Cleveland locations including FirstEnergy Stadium, the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame and the Great Lakes Science Center, the NFL and the Cleveland Browns announced Monday. The event is scheduled to take place from Thursday, April 29 through Saturday, May 1, according to a news release from the NFL.

AUDITOR OF STATE

The Auditor of State's Office released Thursday the results of the first year of its Star Rating System (StaRS) which grades public entities on their compliance with public records law. Launched in November 2019, StaRS found that of the 2,812 public entities audited, 41 percent were noncompliant with public records law. The release aligned with national Sunshine Week.

BUSINESS/CORPORATE

Secretary of State Frank LaRose announced that paperwork for 16,025 new businesses had been filed with his office's Business Services Division in February. The filings mark a 41 percent increase from February 2020.

CENSUS

The state of Ohio is appealing a U.S. district court's decision dismissing Ohio's lawsuit to compel the Biden administration to complete the decennial census by the date originally set for March 31, 2021. Federal Judge Thomas Rose ruled doubly Wednesday that Attorney General Dave Yost lacked standing and the court lacked jurisdiction to take up the request.

CHILDREN/FAMILIES

Groundwork Ohio, a public policy research and advocacy organization focused on the early learning and healthy development of young children, highlighted its budget priorities with a virtual summit Friday. Gov. Mike DeWine, along with Kristi Burre, director of the governor's Office of Children's Initiatives, made appearances, as did several state lawmakers for the event which drew over 600 viewers. The summit acted as the kick-off event for Groundwork Ohio's "Making the Moment a Movement 5-Day Virtual Advocacy Challenge" in which the organization is calling on individuals to urge state lawmakers to invest in early childhood initiatives in the FY22-23 biennial budget.

With Ohio cities typically among the nation's worst for child poverty rates, the effects could be dramatic from the recent reform and expansion of the federal child tax credit, supporters of the new policy said Monday. Rep. Janine Boyd (D-Cleveland Heights), Columbus City Councilperson Elizabeth Brown, Erin Ryan of the Women's Public Policy Network and Tracy Najera of the Children's Defense Fund-Ohio (CDF-Ohio) hailed the change on a teleconference called in advance of President Joe Biden's Tuesday visit to Columbus. They said an estimated 92 percent of Ohio children would benefit from the credit.

In response to a report conducted by the Columbus Foundation that had been commissioned by the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS), the agency announced that it has undertaken an initiative to address racial inequities in the state's children services system. This initiative includes "a new approach to recruiting, retaining, and racial equity training for children services caseworkers via virtual reality headsets to help them be mindful of possible implicit racial bias in their decisions affecting children," ODJFS said in a release.

CORONAVIRUS

Gov. Mike DeWine Monday announced some Ohio residents as young as age 16 may be able to receive vaccines in certain areas where providers still have appointments available, calling it an "exception" rather than a change in policy. All Ohio adults age 16 and older will be eligible to receive the vaccine starting Monday, March 29, but DeWine said speaking to health departments and vaccine providers, he was told some places in the state have more slots than demand. He said this week, his administration is telling providers that if they have slots available and they feel it is necessary to fill those slots, then those providers have permission to open up vaccinations to everyone.

Auditor of State Keith Faber Tuesday released a performance audit of the Ohio Department of Health's (ODH) management of COVID-19 data, with the audit finding minimal errors and the information presented to Ohioans to be generally correct during the pandemic, but suggesting seven recommendations to improve data collection and reporting in the future. Faber's office said the audit was part of a multi-state effort to determine the quality of various approaches to COVID-19 data collection, reporting, and monitoring across the country.

Orders formalizing new long-term care facility visitation and COVID testing policies outlined Monday by Gov. Mike DeWine have been signed by Ohio Department of Health (ODH) Director Stephanie McCloud, the administration announced. DeWine announced the loosening of visitation restrictions at his Monday COVID briefing. The four orders signed by McCloud cover access to nursing homes, access to residential care facilities, and testing of staff and residents at such facilities.

Gov. Mike DeWine on Tuesday vetoed SB22 (McColley-Johnson), legislation that curtails emergency powers he's used during the pandemic, but lawmakers successfully mustered the three-fifths majority vote needed in both chambers to override him Wednesday. DeWine had made one last attempt at convincing lawmakers to back down, sending them a five-page letter Monday that outlined his concerns the legislation would blunt the ability to handle future crises involving Ebola, food-borne illness and other threats. House Clerk Brad Young announced that the bill was officially filed with the Ohio Secretary of State's Office on Wednesday, meaning the bill becomes effective in 90 days. Asked whether the administration would take legal action to block SB22's implementation, DeWine spokesman Dan Tierney said, "Too early to tell if there will be legal action yet. The governor will review with legal counsel."

Gov. Mike DeWine shared more details Thursday about upcoming mass vaccination clinics in several Ohio cities and said once eligibility opens to everyone Monday, the state will become "more aggressive" in altering vaccine distribution based on local demand. The state will open vaccine eligibility to all Ohioans age 16 and up starting Monday, March 29, after months of gradually adding new age ranges, qualifying health conditions and occupational criteria for access.

CORRECTIONS

The state's top jurist is urging the Correctional Institution Inspection Commission (CIIC) to investigate multiple allegations of egregious staff abuses at Madison Correctional Institution (MACI). Ohio Supreme Court Chief Justice Maureen O'Connor has issued a letter to newly appointed CIIC Chairman Sen. Nathan Manning (R-North Ridgeville) with attached complaints from two MACI inmates who describe severe beatings, racial slurs, vandalized personal property, and non-compliance with grievance procedures by correction officers and failure to follow up by higher-ups. "I hesitate to even send this referral for fear that the inmates will be exposing themselves to retaliation by virtue of their contact with the Court," O'Connor told Manning on March 11.

CRIME AND PUNISHMENT

A number of groups pushing for the state to change its criminal justice and pretrial systems released results of a poll they said shows Ohio voter support for bail reform policies. The poll was conducted by the Tarrance Group from Dec. 13-18, 2020, and included online interviews of 800 registered voters in Ohio. Three-quarters of the respondents in the poll believe that Ohio's criminal justice needs reform, and 67 percent favor reforming Ohio's bail system "so that release decisions are based on individuals' circumstances and cases and not how much money someone has."

DISASTERS

Gov. Mike DeWine and Ohio Department of Insurance (ODI) Director Judith French are encouraging Ohioans during the state's Severe Weather Awareness Week, March 21-27, to evaluate if they have adequate property and personal belongings insurance, including for flooding.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The Ohio Development Services Agency (DSA) announced Friday that it will distribute grants totaling more than \$5 million to support 11 projects under the Community Development Critical Infrastructure Program. Funding will go to improvements in flood and drainage, water and sewer facilities as well as a bridge replacement.

EDUCATION

Ohio Office of Budget and Management (OBM) Director Kimberly Murnieks announced Friday that the Ohio Public Facilities Commission (OPFC) in partnership with OBM's Capital Markets Team completed the sale of \$597 million of Common Schools and Higher Education bonds. The sale supports capital projects at K-12 schools, colleges and universities around Ohio. The transaction included a \$148 million refinancing of debt issued in 2011 and 2013 and will produce \$46 million of cash flow savings between FY21 and FY33, OBM noted in a release.

State academic testing for the spring kicked off Monday just days after state leaders finalized the details for how testing will proceed this spring given the pandemic and the federal government's refusal to bless a blanket testing cancellation like the one granted last year. Gov. Mike DeWine signed HB67 (Koehler-Bird) on Saturday after last week's votes in the House and Senate.

The Senate unanimously voted Wednesday to pass legislation providing hundreds of millions of dollars in federal coronavirus relief funds to schools. The bill, SB111 (Blessing-Brenner), appropriates \$857.1 million in FY21 to the Ohio Department of Education (ODE) for distribution to public and non-public schools in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. It also provides \$27 million in FY22 and \$28 million in FY23 to ODE for pandemic relief.

ELECTIONS 2021

Voting for military and overseas voters began Friday, March 19 for the upcoming primary election on Tuesday, May 4.

ELECTIONS 2022

The following endorsements were made over the week:

- The Ohio College Republican Federation endorsed Gov. Mike DeWine for re-election in 2022.

EMPLOYMENT/UNEMPLOYMENT

Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS) Interim Director Matt Damschroder offered the latest update on the agency's

efforts to better handle unemployment claims and fraud issues during the Unemployment Compensation Modernization and Improvement Council's Thursday meeting. The council also heard comments from Michael Buckley of ODJFS and Bill Badurina of Cincinnati Bell Technology Solutions (CBTS) regarding the department's call center.

For the week ending March 20, the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS) reported 69,368 initial unemployment claims to the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL). That number is significantly lower than last week's, when the department reported 115,174 jobless claims. ODJFS said potentially fraudulent claims are likely inflating the totals from this week and recent weeks.

According to the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS), if the January employment rebound after the initial COVID-19 disruptions continue throughout 2021 in a similar magnitude, total employment is predicted to increase at an annual rate of 0.23 percent for the next six months in Ohio.

ENERGY/UTILITIES

Gov. Mike DeWine appointed former Franklin County Common Pleas Judge Jenifer French as a new member and chair of the Public Utilities Commission of Ohio. Her term will run through April 10, 2024 if confirmed by the Senate.

The Office of the Ohio Consumers' Counsel (OCC) and Ohio Manufacturers' Association (OMA) say Ohio's largest electric utility apparently is violating state standards that require the Ohio Valley Electric Corporation's (OVEC) mid-century coal plants to "run in a manner consistent with competition." They are asking the Public Utilities Commission of Ohio (PUCO) to force American Electric Power (AEP) of Ohio to comply with the commission's standard for full disclosure and provide depositions on its OVEC operations. OCC and OMA filed a joint motion with PUCO last week tallying OVEC subsidies at \$159 million between 2017 and 2019 under pre-133-HB6 (Callender-Wilkin) customer charges and an even higher rate of \$700 million by 2030. The filing reminds commissioners what their previously ordered AEP audit uncovered.

The former chairman of the Public Utilities Commission of Ohio (PUCO), Vice President Asim Haque of State and Member Services for PJM Interconnection, assured the Legislature Tuesday that the 13-state regional transmission organization (RTO) encompassing Ohio enjoys a diverse energy portfolio dominated by incoming solar projects as well as plenty of reserves to handle severe weather like the recent Texas winter, a cataclysm he did not attribute to an overreliance on renewable generation. Haque provided the new General Assembly an overview of PJM operations and policies and addressed several leading concerns for the regional and national energy market heading into the third decade of the millennium.

Over a hundred opponents of HB118 (Riedel-Stein) and SB52's (Reineke-McColley) wind referendum option flooded the House and Senate Tuesday with testimony attacking limits on the burgeoning commercial demand for renewable energy and proponents' "misinformation" campaign around the Ohio Power Siting Board (OPSB) approval process and the industry's engagement of affected property owners.

The Public Utilities Commission of Ohio (PUCO) imposed a \$100,000 civil forfeiture on a competitive supplier of electricity and natural gas Wednesday for "slamming" customer accounts and failing to provide mandatory enrollment information. The action against Reliant Energy Northeast came in addition to a compliance order and contingent forfeiture of \$50,000 aimed at the Perry County utility Foraker Gas. PUCO said Reliant, while doing business as NRG Home, NRG Business, and NRG Retail Solutions, was enrolling customers without their permission and, in some instances, had failed to provide copies of their contracts.

FEDERAL

President Joe Biden spent part of Tuesday touring the radiation oncology center at the James Cancer Hospital Tuesday before promoting his \$1.9 trillion stimulus plan in a speech at Ohio State University. Biden opened his remarks by expressing sympathy for the victims of the mass shooting that occurred Monday evening in Boulder, CO, saying the investigation is ongoing.

GAMING/GAMBLING

Craig Robinson is the new president and general manager of Miami Valley Gaming (MVG), the racino's parent company has announced. MVG, which is a joint venture with Delaware North Companies and Churchill Downs Incorporated (CDI), runs a harness racing track and gambling facility in Lebanon.

An Ohio iLottery system could be created in the gambling bill that is crafted after initial testimony is completed in the Senate Select Committee on Gaming, according to Senate President Matt Huffman (R-Lima). "There were really three issues," Huffman said, explaining the committee process to a reporter following session on Wednesday. "One had to do with sports gambling. The other had to do with instant bingo games. And then we had a third issue, which dealt with what's known as the iLottery and how that would go." Huffman praised Senate Select Committee on Gaming Chair Kirk Schuring (R-Canton) for coming up with the idea for a select committee and for his handling of the process thus far, reiterating Schuring's plan to introduce a bill after the chamber's spring break period.

GENERAL ASSEMBLY/STATEHOUSE

Lobbying expenditures for meals, beverages, gifts, and receptions declined by 89 percent in 2020 as compared to 2019, according to the Joint Legislative Ethics Committee (JLEC) as the state limited in-person events due to the COVID-19 pandemic. JLEC recently released the 2020 lobbying statistics report, which is required to be published on or before March 15 of each year. According to JLEC, \$82,170.19 was spent on lobbying the General Assembly last year. In 2019, \$775,566.51 was spent, and \$489,229.07 was spent in 2018.

Hannah News' interview series with freshman legislators featured Rep. Sharon Ray (R-Wadsworth), who said while she has decades of public service experience, the thrill remains. "It's still magical to me to be able to get elected. Every election I win I do the same thing. I get tears," Ray said. "It's a big responsibility and it always amazes me that somebody said, 'Yes we want you to do it.' I don't take that lightly." Also featured was Rep. Dontavius Jarrells (D-Columbus), who said he can trace his interest in politics back to growing up in Cleveland and having to take three buses to get to middle school. "I remember a moment when there was a homeless woman on the bus, and the bus was crowded. There were no other seats except the one sitting next to her. I sat there because I was tired and had a heavy bookbag. There were some folks on the bus who started talking about her, and started calling her names," he said. "No one was speaking up for her. For me, it was that moment I spoke up for her. I started talking about that you don't know this person's struggles with life."

Meetings of the Joint Committee on Agency Rule Review (JCARR), Joint Medicaid Oversight Committee (JMOC) and Ohio Retirement Study Council (ORSC) can now be streamed by the Ohio Channel, according to memos signed by House and Senate leaders. The memos -- signed by Senate President Matt Huffman (R-Lima), House Speaker Bob Cupp (R-Lima), Senate Minority Leader Kenny Yuko (D-Richmond Heights) and House Minority Leader Emilia Sykes (D-Akron) -- authorize Ohio Government Telecommunications (OGT) to broadcast and record hearings of those panels.

The Joint Medicaid Oversight Committee (JMOC) will be chaired by Rep. Tom Patton (R-Strongsville) in 2021, House Speaker Bob Cupp (R-Lima) announced Tuesday. Other House members appointed to JMOC include Reps. Scott Lipps (R-Franklin), Adam Holmes (R-Nashport), Allison Russo (D-Columbus) and Thomas West (D-Canton).

The Ohio Statehouse said Tuesday that beginning Monday, April 5, the north entrance and exit to the garage will be closed for construction. Parkers will need to enter and exit the garage via the south ramps at Third and State streets. In addition, the Blue Level is currently closed while workers coat the surface and paint stripes.

In addition to approving pandemic relief funds for schools, passing the transportation budget and overriding the governor's veto of SB22, the Senate Wednesday passed HB128, which repeals parts of scandal-tainted energy subsidy law 133-HB6 (Callender-Wilkin), and agreed to House amendments on SB7 (Roegner), which enters Ohio into the Occupational Therapy Licensure Compact, and SB18 (Roegner-Schaffer), tax conformity legislation.

In addition to overriding the governor's veto on SB22, the House on Wednesday passed SB18 (Roegner-Schaffer), tax conformity legislation; HB191 (Cutrona), to name a bridge in Mahoning County in honor of the late Rep. Don Manning; and HB87 (Stephens-John), to lift the 10-year limit on utility supply contracts that counties can sign.

In addition to concurring on Senate changes to the transportation budget and a partial repeal of 133-HB6 energy subsidy law via HB128 (Hoops-Stein), the House on Wednesday passed the Industrial Commission budget, HB76 (Oelslager); HB132 (Hillyer-Jones), regarding towing companies; HB120 (Fraizer-Richardson), regarding compassionate care visits in long-term care facilities during the COVID emergency; SB2 (Gavarone), regarding competency evaluations and mental health treatment in criminal cases; SB57 (Hackett-Antonio), regarding tax exemptions for permanent supportive housing; and HR13 (Sheehy), urging Michigan to keep Enbridge Line 5 operating.

In other legislative action, House Transportation and Public Safety Committee reported out HR13 (Sheehy), urging Michigan to keep Enbridge Line 5 operating, and road naming bills HB164 (Ghanbari) and HB17 (Baldrige); House Ways and Means Committee reported out HB126 (Merrin), regarding local governments' ability to contest property valuations, and SB57 (Hackett-Antonio), regarding a tax exemption for permanent supportive housing; House Economic and Workforce Development Committee reported out pandemic relief funding measures HB168 (Fraizer-Loychik) and HB169 (Cutrona-Swearingen); and House Insurance Committee reported out HB122 (Fraizer-Holmes), regarding telehealth.

GOVERNOR

Answering a range of questions in what retired journalist Tom Beres called "a random interrogation," Gov. Mike DeWine appeared at the City Club of Cleveland Friday for a discussion on the past year under COVID-19 restrictions, what the coming months will look like and the current political climate in Ohio. Regarding the leadership of President Joe Biden, DeWine told Beres he thought the Biden administration "has done a good job" in regard to the pandemic and that this should not be viewed through a political lens, praising the work of the Trump administration as well. He discussed the FEMA mass vaccination site at Cleveland State University as an example that has "worked out exceedingly well."

Appointments made during the week include the following:

- Sherina Ohanian of Perrysburg (Wood County) to the Owens Community College Board of Trustees for a term beginning March 19, 2021 and ending Sept. 21, 2022.
- Tamara L. Baird Ganley of Troy (Miami County) reappointed to the Edison State Community College Board of Trustees for a term beginning March 19, 2021 and ending Jan. 17, 2027.
- Dawson Cosgrove of Kirtland (Lake County) to serve as a student member on the Miami University Board of Trustees for a term beginning March 19, 2021 and ending Feb. 28, 2023.
- Arianna Galligher of Columbus (Franklin County) to the Counselor, Social Worker, and Marriage and Family Therapist Board for a term beginning March 19, 2021 and ending Oct. 10, 2023.

- Brian J. Miller of Toledo (Lucas County) reappointed to the State Vision Professionals Board for a term beginning March 23, 2021 and ending March 22, 2024.
- Jamillee L. Krob of Canton (Stark County) and Trevor J. Vessels of Dublin (Franklin County) reappointed to the State Dental Board for terms beginning April 7, 2021 and ending April 6, 2025.
- Tammy H. Brown of Loveland (Clermont County) reappointed to the State Speech and Hearing Professionals Board for a term beginning March 23, 2021 and ending March 22, 2024.
- Todd McKinley Fowler of Thurman (Gallia County) to the Medical Quality Foundation Board for a term beginning March 19, 2021 and ending July 20, 2023.
- Will Lucas of Toledo (Lucas County) and Lynn C. Slaby of Copley (Summit County) reappointed to the Ohio Casino Control Commission for terms beginning March 19, 2021 and ending February 21, 2025.
- Tracy S. Freeman of Pickerington (Fairfield County) reappointed to the Environmental Education Council for a term beginning March 19, 2021 and ending Oct. 1, 2022.
- Terri A. Specht of Johnstown (Licking County) and Alexis M. Siomka of Findlay (Hancock County) to the Ohio Livestock Care Standards Board for terms beginning March 19, 2021 and ending Jan. 15, 2024.
- Julia "Rita" McNeil Danish of Gahanna (Franklin County) to the Ohio Civil Rights Commission for a term beginning March 19, 2021 and ending July 28, 2025.
- Matthew G. Hiscock of Wadsworth (Medina County) reappointed to the Statewide Emergency Services Internet Protocol Network Steering Committee for a term beginning March 19, 2021 and ending Dec. 31, 2024.
- Leslie Prater of Ridgeway (Logan County) reappointed to the Ohio AMBER Alert Advisory Committee for a term beginning March 19, 2021 and ending Feb. 6, 2023.
- DeAnna Holliday of Ironton (Lawrence County) to the Governor's Council on Juvenile Justice for a term beginning March 19, 2021 and ending Oct. 31, 2023.
- Robert F. Krapenc of Westerville (Franklin County) to the Ohio Criminal Sentencing Commission for a term beginning March 19, 2021 and ending Aug. 21, 2024.
- Nathaniel Kaelin of Hamilton (Butler County), Stuart D. Hobbs of Columbus (Franklin County) and Samuel H. Porter, III of Columbus (Franklin County) reappointed to the Ohio Historic Site Preservation Advisory Board for terms beginning March 10, 2021 and ending Jan. 14, 2024.

HIGHER EDUCATION

U.S. Secretary of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Secretary Marcia Fudge has donated her official congressional papers to Ohio State University (OSU). Fudge represented the 11th Congressional District of Ohio in the U.S. House of Representatives from 2008 to 2021. She was confirmed earlier this month as the 18th HUD secretary.

Ohio State University, Kent State University and the University of Toledo are the latest institutions to announce plans for in-person commencements this spring. Several other universities have made similar announcements this month, as well as announced plans to return to in-person learning in the fall.

The Ohio Dominican University (ODU) Board of Trustees announced that Connie Gallaher will serve as the university's 17th president. She will succeed Robert Gervasi, who after four years of service will step down as president in June. Gallaher will begin at ODU on Sunday, April 25 as president-designate, and she will assume the presidency in June.

The House Higher Education and Career Readiness Committee heard from Jack Hershey of the Ohio Association of Community Colleges (OACC) and Bruce Johnson of the Inter-University Council of Ohio (IUC) during its Tuesday meeting. Both Hershey and Johnson submitted written testimony similar to their testimony before the House Finance Subcommittee on Higher Education.

Ohio Treasurer Robert Sprague announced a partnership with Ohio State University's (OSU) College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences (CFAES) meant to expand the use of the college's "Real Money. Real World." financial literacy program statewide. With the partnership, the treasurer's office will assist OSU Extension with its outreach efforts to more students who can benefit from "Real Money. Real World." OSU Extension is the outreach arm of CFAES and currently offers the financial literacy program in over half of Ohio's 88 counties. The program averages approximately 14,000 students annually.

The Kent State University Board of Trustees approved the establishment of two new institutes -- the Anti-Racism and Equity Institute and the Environmental Science and Design Research Institute.

Bowling Green State University (BGSU) announced it will join the numerous other Ohio colleges and universities making plans for in-person spring commencement ceremonies.

HOUSING/HOMELESSNESS

Rental assistance program dollars designed to keep struggling Ohioans in their residences during the COVID-19 pandemic aren't always being used for that purpose, Legal Aid Society of Columbus attorney Jyoshu Tsushima told the House Civil Justice Committee

on Tuesday. "Many landlords are ... taking rental assistance in addition to forcing tenants to move out since the landlords cannot predict if the tenant can pay rent moving forward, which completely undermines the purpose of providing rental assistance to keep tenants housed during the pandemic," Tsushima said during proponent testimony on HB20 (Leland-Crossman), which would prohibit evictions and foreclosures during the ongoing coronavirus emergency.

JUDICIAL

Judicial candidates should be listed as Republicans or Democrats on the ballot in Ohio elections, two expert researchers told the Senate Local Government and Elections Committee on Tuesday. Speaking as proponents of SB80 (Gavarone-Cirino), University of Pittsburgh Political Science Professor Chris Bonneau and University of Akron Bliss Institute for Applied Politics Director Emeritus John Green said statistical evidence has consistently shown that states with transparently partisan judicial elections experienced increased voter participation. During his research, Bonneau said he's found that on average, ballot roll-off in states with partisan judicial elections averaged 11.1 percent, compared to 21.8 percent for states with non-partisan elections. In this context, "roll-off" refers to the voters who voted in the presidential or gubernatorial elections, but didn't vote in state supreme court races.

Major state legal groups including the Ohio State Bar Association, the Ohio Association for Justice and the Ohio Judicial Conference all appeared before the House Government Oversight Committee Thursday to voice their opposition to HB149 (Swearingen-Stewart), which would add party affiliations by judges' names in appellate and state Supreme Court races in general elections.

Vice President and General Counsel David Tschantz of Christian Healthcare Ministries in Barberton, former chair of the Board of Professional Conduct, has been elected chairman of the Board on the Unauthorized Practice of Law. Law Professor David Kutik of Case Western Reserve University was elected vice chair of the board.

MARIJUANA/HEMP

The Ohio Board of Pharmacy (OBP) on Monday submitted amended Ohio Medical Marijuana Control Program (MMCP) rules to the state's Common Sense Initiative (CSI). The board made the move after its proposed "lottery" system to award dispensary licenses was criticized by the Ohio Medical Cannabis Industry Association (OMCIA) during a virtual MMCP rules hearing. The industry group said the rules lacked clarity and were not submitted to CSI for a business impact analysis (BIA). (See *The Hannah Report*, 3/12/21.) OBP said the updated rules provide more information on how a dispensary lottery system would be implemented.

The Ohio Medical Marijuana Control Program (MMCP) will soon begin repaying the millions of dollars it has borrowed from the Controlling Board, Ohio Department of Commerce (DOC) Senior Policy Adviser Greg McIlvaine said Thursday. "The MMCP has also developed a strong financial position over the past couple years, and will provide its first repayment of its Controlling Board emergency loans this fiscal year. Specifically, the program will make three equal installments of \$2.87 million in FY21, FY22 and FY23 to repay the full \$8.6 million in emergency funds," McIlvaine told the Ohio Medical Marijuana Advisory Committee (MMAC).

NATURAL RESOURCES

The Ohio Wildlife Council received two updates to the upcoming 2021-2022 waterfowl hunting seasons during its recent meeting. The first updated proposal moves North Zone waterfowl dates for the 2021-2022 season to align duck and goose hunting and includes opportunities during the holidays. The second updated proposal changes the special waterfowl hunting weekend for youth hunters, active-duty military, and military veterans to Saturday, Oct. 2 and Sunday, Oct. 3. Because this season is traditionally held during the first weekend in October, this proposal aligns the 2021 dates with previous years.

Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR) Director Mary Mertz gave an "ODNR 101" presentation to the House Agriculture and Conservation Committee during its meeting Tuesday, detailing the entities within the department and the state's parks, forests, nature preserves and wildlife areas. Her comments reflected the budget testimony given to the House Finance Subcommittee on Agriculture, Development and Natural Resources earlier in the month.

PENSIONS

Recent actuarial valuation reports showed Ohio's five state public pension funds within the required 30-year window for paying down unfunded liabilities, the Ohio Retirement Study Council heard Thursday. The council heard a mix of reports for valuations from 2019 and 2020 for School Employees Retirement System (SERS), State Teachers Retirement System (STRS), Ohio Public Employees Retirement System (OPERS), Ohio Police & Fire Pension Fund (OP&F) and Highway Patrol Retirement System (HPRS).

PEOPLE

The death of influential Statehouse lobbyist Neil Clark, a co-defendant in the 133-HB6 (Callender-Wilkin) nuclear subsidy saga, is being investigated as an apparent suicide, according to *Columbus Dispatch* and Cleveland.com stories documenting his life and career.

Allison Lawlor joined the firm Sean P. Dunn & Associates LLC this week as their new lobbyist. She most recently served as a senior legislative aide for Sen. Andrew Brenner (R-Powell). Prior to her work in the Ohio Senate, Lawlor was a legislative aide in the Ohio House of Representatives, having worked for both then-Rep. Brenner and former Rep. Margaret Conditt (R-Hamilton).

Sarah Hudacek joined Cleveland-based Center for Community Solutions (CCS) this month as the policy assistant for both Community Solutions and Advocates for Ohio's Future.

POLITICS

The Ohio Republican Party this week announced new staff hires, including Justin Bis as executive director, Garrett Arnold as political director, Tricia McLaughlin as communications director, and the promotion of Paige Sims from deputy finance director to finance director.

PUBLIC SAFETY

The Ohio State Highway Patrol (OSHP) announced Monday that it is seeking public comment during its 10th re-accreditation process with the Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies Inc. (CALEA). The OSHP is also pursuing CALEA accreditation for its training academy, which according to a release requires compliance with an additional set of standards specific to the training and development of troopers and peace officers.

STATE GOVERNMENT

The Ohio Department of Commerce (DOC) Division of Securities, other state regulators and the Commodity Futures Trading Commission recently filed a joint civil enforcement action against Metals.com, Tower Equity, Chase Metals, Barrick Capital and other associated parties. The defendants are accused of perpetrating a fraudulent precious metals investment scheme allegedly involving 1,600 investors and more than \$185 million in customer funds.

TAXATION

The U.S. Treasury Department and Internal Revenue Service announced that the federal income tax filing due date for individuals for the 2020 tax year will be extended from Thursday, April 15 to Monday, May 17. The Ohio Department of Taxation announced it would grant the same extension for the state's income tax and school district income tax filing deadline.

The Ohio Department of Taxation (ODT) Criminal Investigations Division is scheduled for an onsite assessment as part of a program to gain re-accreditation status by verifying it meets professional standards identified by the Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies Inc. (CALEA).

TRANSPORTATION/INFRASTRUCTURE

County engineers appeared before the Senate Transportation Committee Tuesday asking for a raise to force account limits in HB74 (Oelslager), the transportation budget, noting that it has been nearly two decades since the limits were set and costs of projects make it nearly impossible for most projects to get done under those limits.

The transportation budget, HB74 (Oelslager), cleared the Senate Wednesday with amendments negotiated in concert with the House, allowing it to win that chamber's concurrence Thursday and avoid a conference committee. Before the full Senate took up the bill, the Senate Transportation Committee accepted an omnibus amendment Wednesday evening that made a number of changes, including removing language that would increase force account amounts, a provision pushed for by local governments who said they want to be able to perform more small road and bridge projects using their own labor rather than contracting it out. Instead, the committee added an amendment that would add a prospective 3 percent biennial inflator and that creates a joint study committee.

WORKERS' COMPENSATION

The Ohio Bureau of Workers' Compensation (BWC) Board of Directors followed last month's 7.1 percent annual rate reduction across all private employers -- Gov. Mike DeWine's third straight, eclipsing every year of the previous administration -- in a vote Friday to allocate savings among 500-plus industries. Some will see individual premium hikes of 0.02 - 8.9 percent, while many more will enjoy rate cuts as high as 0.07 to 41.1 percent beginning July 1. Actuarial Committee Chairman Terry Jacobs explained that last month's announcement reflects an actual decrease of 15 percent in the average private employer base rate, which is then adjusted with BWC's 60 percent hike in administrative charges to employers, yielding the net reduction of 7.1 percent.