

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

HB531 COUNTY PROSECUTOR LEGAL SERVICES *(GHANBARI H)*

To allow a county prosecutor to provide legal services to a metropolitan planning organization, regional transportation planning organization, or regional council of governments.

■ **CURRENT STATUS**

1/12/2022 - Introduced

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**

1/10/2022 - Senate Appoints Managers; L. Blessing Named as Conference Committee Chair. Other Senate Conferees are T. Schaffer & N. Antonio

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

12/15/2021 - **PASSED BY SENATE**; Vote 26-5

ABORTION

Civil liberties organizations and abortion clinics on Friday asked Hamilton County Court of Common Pleas Judge Alison Hatheway for a second preliminary injunction to prevent the state from enforcing fetal remains law 133-SB27 (Uecker). The filing was made by the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), ACLU of Ohio, Planned Parenthood Federation of America and Fanon A. Rucker of the Cochran Firm, according to the ACLU. The law requires all embryonic and fetal tissue from a procedural abortion be cremated or interred, which the ACLU and Planned Parenthood argue would impose "severe burdens on patients" and further stigmatize abortion. In April 2021, Hatheway granted an injunction preventing 133-SB27 from taking effect until 30 days after the Ohio Department of Health's (ODH) rulemaking is complete. According to the ACLU, the rules became effective on Sunday, Jan. 9, meaning abortion providers need to comply with the law by Tuesday, Feb. 8.

AGRICULTURE

Ohio's county and independent fairs are integral to the economic wellbeing of the state, Lt. Gov. Jon Husted said Friday at the 97th Annual Ohio Fair Managers Association Convention at the Hyatt Regency Columbus. Husted noted that John Deere recently announced that a fully autonomous tractor will be available for farmers later in 2022, saying that's an example of how technological advances will help Ohio's agriculture industry grow.

ATTORNEY GENERAL

A second effort to start the process on a proposed initiated statute that would bar vaccine mandates was rejected again Friday by Attorney General Dave Yost -- this time because it didn't get the required 1,000 valid signatures needed to be considered. The "Vaccine and Gene Therapy Choice and Anti-Discrimination Act," a proposal to enact Section 3792.02 of the Ohio Revised Code, was first submitted to Yost's office more than a month ago, and would enact language similar to HB248 (Gross). It would "prohibit a person, public official or employee, public agency, state agency, political subdivision, school, child day care center, nursing home, residential care facility, health care provider, insurer, institution, or employer from requiring any vaccine or gene therapy." It was rejected the first time because of three defects identified by Yost's office.

Ohio Attorney General (AG) Dave Yost announced grants and the creation of a guide for courts and communities seeking to establish sex-buyer education classes, or so called "john schools," while he helped kick off the annual Human Trafficking Summit Thursday. Yost said his office will provide \$10,000 grants each to 10 qualifying communities seeking to create sex-buyer education programs. The newly announced guide and grants are rooted in 133-HB431 (Abrams-Carfagna), which took effect last spring. The new state law created legal sanctions aimed specifically at sex buyers, including stiffer fines and a requirement that offenders attend sex-buyer education classes.

FY22-23 BUDGET

Ohio collected nearly a quarter billion dollars more in tax revenue than expected in December, setting records for income tax withholding and non-auto sales tax collections, according to preliminary data from the Office of Budget and Management (OBM). "Overall, this is just another indicator that we're going in the right direction," OBM Director Kim Murnieks told *Hannah News* in a phone interview. Total tax receipts reached \$2.29 billion in December, \$243.6 million or 11.9 percent higher than expected. Year-to-date collections of \$13.21 billion are \$580.3 million or 4.6 percent above projections. Sales tax collections were \$90.7 million or 8.4 percent above estimate; the non-auto sales tax made up the bulk of the overage, bringing in \$80.6 million or 8.5 percent more than expected. Auto sales tax collections were up \$10.1 million or 7.8 percent versus estimates. Year-to-date collections are up \$212.1 million or 3.4 percent over estimates.

BUSINESS/CORPORATE

Speaking at her group's "State of American Business" event on future competition, U.S. Chamber of Commerce President and CEO Suzanne Clark pledged the national organization will fight against over-regulation by the government while also urging elected leaders to work with business. Clark further discussed ways to respond to the workforce shortage and the need for more U.S. trade agreements with other countries. Ohio Chamber of Commerce President and CEO Steve Stivers told *Hannah News* that he thought Clark's comments were "on target" in regard to the current economy and that government should "be a helper and not a hindrance."

CORONAVIRUS

The U.S. Supreme Court reinstated a stay Thursday to prevent the federal Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) from enforcing a rule to require COVID-19 vaccination or regular testing for those working at businesses with 100 or more employees. But it allowed the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to move forward with a rule requiring vaccination of workers at health care facilities. Attorney General Dave Yost, whose office argued the OSHA case recently before the Supreme Court on behalf of a multi-state coalition challenging the OSHA rules, cheered the decision.

The level of new COVID-19 cases continued to remain high with the week seeing the following:

- The state topped 500,000 new cases just since Dec. 1, 2021.
- In the first 11 days, January became the third-highest month for reported COVID-19 cases. The Ohio Department of Health (ODH) update Tuesday listed 19,611 new cases, bringing the monthly total to 210,786. The two higher months are December 2021 (325,878) and December 2020 (279,317), with both months including some backlogged cases. By comparison, only 86,222 cases had been reported through Dec. 11, 2021 -- less than half of the January amount. ODH also noted Tuesday that the current high volume means

some cases reported in the past 24 hours may not have been included in the daily update.

- On Thursday, Jan. 13, ODH reported 19,262 new cases -- the tenth highest figure of the pandemic -- along with 416 hospitalizations and 33 ICU admissions. The 21-day averages are now 17,603 cases, 336 hospitalizations and 31 ICU admissions, with January now at over 250,000 cases reported.

- As of Friday, Jan. 7, Ohio reached over 30,000 deaths over the pandemic.

With two-thirds of a 1.2 million unit shipment of home COVID tests delayed by strong demand, ODH said it will prioritize distribution to K-12 schools, colleges and universities when the supplies arrive. ODH said it has received and is distributing 400,000 proctored testing kits this month, but the remaining 800,000 it ordered for January have been delayed by the manufacturer amid high demand from the Omicron variant surge.

ODH Director Dr. Bruce Vanderhoff and Ohio National Guard Adjutant General John Harris briefed reporters Thursday on President Joe Biden's deployment of 20 U.S. Air Force medical personnel -- including nurses, physicians and respiratory therapists -- to the Cleveland Clinic. Vanderhoff said they will "augment" the state response and may be there for one to two months starting next week. He added that the hope is that this will provide more bed space and allow the clinic to accept more transfer patients.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) announced that, as of Saturday, Jan. 15, it will require insurers and group health plans to cover the cost of over-the-counter, at-home COVID tests. The administration says it will require coverage of eight tests per covered individual per month, meaning, for example, a family of four could get 32 tests covered in a month. HHS said there's no limit on the number of tests that are covered if ordered or administered by a health care provider following an individualized clinical assessment.

ECONOMY

The Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS) reported Thursday it received 17,469 initial unemployment claims last week, Jan. 2-8, nearly double the 9,199 new claims from Dec. 5-11. (See *The Hannah Report*, 12/16/21.) The eight-week average is now 10,534. ODJFS initial claim numbers rose slightly to 9,337 from Dec. 12-18, then 11,955 for Dec. 19-25 and 12,349 across Dec. 26-Jan. 1. Continued claims have also risen to 57,157 for Jan. 2-8, up from 40,127 from Dec. 5-11. The intervening periods include 42,310 for Dec. 12-18, 42,654 for Dec. 19-25 and 48,846 for Dec. 26-Jan. 1. National figures from the U.S. Department of Labor showed 230,000 initial claims last week, up 23,000 from the week before, compared to a four-week average of 210,750.

EDUCATION

Five families with children in the EdChoice program have asked a Franklin County judge to make them parties to the new case in which Ohio school districts are challenging the constitutionality of the voucher program. "Applicants are the intended and direct beneficiaries of the programs and are therefore, in essence, the real parties in interest," states a motion to intervene filed by attorneys with the Cleveland-based Robinson Law Firm and the Virginia-based Institute for Justice. The motion was filed Friday, just days after the districts formally launched their long-planned lawsuit.

The sole bidder for a contract to administer a \$125 million program to provide families a stipend for afterschool activities declined to sign a contract, potentially putting the budget-funded project behind schedule. Sue Cosmo, director of the Office of Nonpublic Educational Options at the Ohio Department of Education (ODE), said the vendor, ClassWallet, told the department during negotiations that some of the work envisioned for the program was outside its usual scope, and in late December decided not to accept a contract. Members of the State Board of Education's (SBOE) Emerging Issues and Operational Standards Committee had previously expressed concerns over possible fraud in the program which would permit families earning up to 300 percent of the federal poverty level to apply for \$500 per child in each of FY22 and FY23 for the likes of before- and after-school programs, summer programs, museum admissions, music lessons or tutoring.

At least 70 percent of Ohio's K-12 schools offered behavioral prevention programs during the 2019-2020 school year, according to ODE's first prevention services survey. ODE Office of Integrated Student Supports Director Jennifer Vargo and ODE Office of Whole Child Supports Assistant Director Emily Eckert shared the results of the survey with the State Board of Education's (SBOE) Integrated Student Supports Committee on Tuesday.

A new law enacted in the state budget that enables ODE to fine school districts for "consistent or prolonged" failure to provide busing to charter and private school students is unconstitutional and was implemented in an arbitrary fashion by the department, Groveport-Madison Schools allege in a lawsuit. In the lawsuit, filed in Franklin County Common Pleas Court and assigned to Judge Michael Holbrook, Groveport Madison said ODE's move to deduct nearly \$700,000 from its state funding "will have a disastrous, and irreparable, impact" on the district's ability to transport students.

School uniforms don't seem to have any effect on young students' behavior or attendance overall, but students who attended schools with uniform requirements did report lower levels of "school belonging" in fifth grade, according to a new national study out of Ohio State University (OSU). The findings of the study came from data on more than 6,000 school-age children.

ELECTIONS

The Ohio Elections Commission Thursday reconsidered a 2016 case involving former state Rep. Stephen Slesnick and imposed a \$200 fine when the campaign explained that it did not have all of the documentation needed to file the missing paperwork, and the secretary of state's office said it considered the campaign committee to be closed down.

ELECTIONS 2022

Democrat Tim Ryan's U.S. Senate campaign announced Friday that he raised \$2.9 million in the final quarter of 2021. The campaign said it has more than \$5 million on hand. The announcement comes ahead of the Monday, Jan. 31, filing deadline for year-end reports from candidates. The campaign said 97 percent of contributions to the campaign last quarter were \$100 or less, and more than 26,000 people donated to the campaign for the very first time last quarter.

Rep. Craig Reidel (R-Defiance) announced Monday that he is running for the 9th Congressional District, which under redrawn lines includes Defiance, Erie, Fulton, Henry, Lucas, Ottawa, Sandusky, Williams and Wood counties. The incumbent is U.S. Rep. Marcy Kaptur (D-Toledo).

Former state legislator Bob Hagan (D-Youngstown) announced on social media he is running for the Ohio Senate. He will be seeking the Democratic nomination for the seat currently held by Sen. Michael Rulli (R-Salem), who is running for reelection.

Republican gubernatorial candidate Jim Renacci on Monday outlined his education platform, including defunding any school district that requires masking and doesn't follow other educational standards established by his administration. Renacci also called for a "need to remove Common Core, social-emotional learning standards, comprehensive sex education, and divisive racial concepts from our Ohio education model." Later in the week he said that he is putting \$4 million of his own funds into his campaign "to ensure the campaign has enough resources" as he seeks to beat Gov. Mike DeWine in the Republican primary in May. Renacci's campaign also said it has hired three new regional field staffers, bringing the campaign's total number of full-time staff to 14. The campaign said it has already spent \$1 million.

Republican U.S. Senate candidate J.D. Vance announced Tuesday that he is holding a statewide town hall tour that started Thursday, Jan. 13. Dubbed the "No BS Town Hall Tour," the campaign said the six-day tour will consist of 14 town hall stops across the state. Events will be held in Dayton, Ottawa, Toledo, Independence, Delaware, Middletown, Lebanon, Cincinnati, Cincinnati Mini-March for Life, Grove City, Austintown, Woodsfield, Marietta and Portsmouth. Vance also announced this week that he raised more than \$1 million in the last quarter of 2021. The campaign said his contributions came from 11,010 unique donors and 4,610 new donors from the third quarter. It also said 90 percent of donors contributed \$250 or less.

Democratic gubernatorial candidate Nan Whaley picked up another endorsement of a former mayoral colleague Thursday as Youngstown Mayor Tito Brown announced his support of the former Dayton mayor over former Cincinnati Mayor John Cranley. Brown said he believes Whaley is an innovative leader and he has seen her performance while they worked together in the Ohio Mayors Alliance. "We need someone with tough leadership in Columbus," Brown said, adding that Whaley will put voters first and not play politics.

The Ohio Nurses Association (ONA) said it is bringing back candidate endorsements for the Ohio General Assembly in 2022. A member-driven operation, the ONA's endorsement process involves registered nurses from across Ohio who will interview and vet the candidates in their respective districts. Candidates who are most likely to be nursing allies and ready to tackle important health care issues will be considered for endorsement, ONA said.

The following endorsement was made over the week:

- The U.S. Senate campaign of Tim Ryan announced the endorsement of Rep. Emilia Sykes (D-Akron).

EMPLOYMENT/UNEMPLOYMENT

The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) reported Friday that nonfarm payroll employment rose by 199,000 jobs nationally in December while the national unemployment rate declined to 3.9 percent. One of the largest factors in the drop in the unemployment rate was a decline of 483,000 unemployed persons nationally last month, with the number of unemployed persons now at 6.3 million. As the nation has recovered from the pandemic, the national rate has dropped by 2.8 percentage points in the last 12 months, while the number of unemployed persons is down by 4.5 million over the last year.

ENVIRONMENT

The Ohio Air Quality Development Authority (OAQDA) approved up to \$500,000 in bond financing to support clean air equipment upgrades at Pegasus Specialty Vehicles LLC. The Hardin County transportation company was also awarded a \$20,000 grant through the Clean Air Resource Center (CARC), according to OAQDA

FEDERAL

The Democratic members of Ohio's congressional delegation Friday held a virtual press conference touting the bipartisan infrastructure bill while urging cooperation by state and local entities in order to capture more of the funding in the bill being distributed through a competitive grant process. U.S. Reps. Joyce Beatty (D-Columbus), Marcy Kaptur (D-Toledo), Shontel Brown (D-Cleveland) and Tim Ryan (D-Niles) as well as U.S. Sen. Sherrod Brown (D-OH) praised President Joe Biden for passage of the bill, and said it will deliver results for communities.

Cuyahoga Valley National Park (CVNP) has started a \$2 million project to remove vacant structures and restore natural landscapes throughout the park, according to the National Park Service (NPS). Funded by the Great American Outdoors Act (GAOA), the enhancements will provide increased recreational opportunities for park visitors. The project is expected to be completed in Spring 2022, NPS said.

GAMING/GAMBLING

Revenue at Ohio's four casinos rebounded 64 percent in 2021 after the pandemic took a toll on earnings in 2020, according to recent numbers reported to the Ohio Casino Control Commission. In total, the casinos earned \$983.7 million in 2021, up from \$643.4 million in 2020. The four casinos earned nearly \$84.6 million in December, an increase from November's \$78.1 million and more than the nearly \$59.9 million earned in December 2020.

GENERAL ASSEMBLY/STATEHOUSE

The House and Senate announced Thursday afternoon that they have cancelled their floor sessions scheduled for Wednesday, Jan. 19.

House Democrats Wednesday evening backed Rep. Allison Russo (D-Columbus) to be the next House minority leader, succeeding Rep. Emilia Sykes (D-Akron), who resigned at the end of last year. Rep. Thomas West (D-Canton), Russo's top rival for leader, will serve as assistant minority leader. Rep. Jessica Miranda (D-Cincinnati) is the new minority whip, while Rep. Richard Brown (D-Canal Winchester) will continue as assistant minority whip.

The Controlling Board Monday signed off on all of the items on its agenda plus a collective bargaining agreement with unions representing the Ohio State Highway Patrol. Among the items approved was a request from the Ohio Department of Education (ODE) releasing \$15 million in federal COVID relief funds for FY22 and \$5 million for FY23.

Sen. Teresa Fedor (D-Toledo) announced Monday that the 13th Human Trafficking Awareness Summit will be held virtually on Friday, March 4. It is co-hosted by Sen. Stephanie Kunze (R-Hilliard) and Reps. Tavia Galonski (D-Akron) and Tracy Richardson (R-Marysville). Information on how to register and the speakers will be forthcoming.

GOVERNOR

More public health orders probably wouldn't have a positive effect on Ohio as the state deals with record numbers of COVID-19 cases and hospitalizations, Gov. Mike DeWine said Thursday. "People are sick of any kind of orders," DeWine told *Hannah News* in an interview.

Asked why he wants to run for a second term as governor after all he and the state have gone through over the last three years, Gov. DeWine said he wants to finish what he's started. "We've started a lot of things. I want to see a lot of these through, things that are near and dear to my heart," DeWine said, pointing his administration's programs to improve water quality, mental health and Medicaid.

Gov. Mike DeWine announced that Aimee Shadwick took over as interim director of RecoveryOhio, effective Saturday, Jan. 8, after Alisha Nelson left for a private sector position. Shadwick has been external partnerships director for RecoveryOhio, the office DeWine created to coordinate addiction and mental health efforts. Nelson was the inaugural director, following DeWine from the attorney general's office.

HEALTH

Tracy Maxwell Heard, executive director of Multiethnic Advocates for Cultural Competence and a former state lawmaker, addressed the issue of racism in public health settings during a Thursday news conference, explaining that while a number of communities and local groups have acknowledged the existence of bias in health care, the state itself -- and the governor -- have not. She went on to say that that is a necessary step because without official recognition of the discrimination there "is no requirement [for the entities] to respond." The news conference, which also included representatives from the Universal Health Care Action Network (UHCAN) of Ohio, the Northeast Ohio Black Health Coalition and the Ohio Unity Coalition, was called to release their report describing people's experience with discrimination in the health care system.

HIGHER EDUCATION

Ohio Northern University (ONU) has received a \$1 million gift commitment from 2000 alumnus Dr. Michael Craig Cox to support student and faculty, research initiatives, and science-related programming. The Dr. Michael Craig Cox Endowed Fund for Careers in the Sciences will represent the first alumni-established fund of its kind at ONU.

HUMAN SERVICES

The child care study panel formed through budget negotiations over the Step Up to Quality (SUTQ) rating system took a deep dive into the details of the program during its second meeting. The Study Committee on Ohio's Publicly Funded Child Care and the Step Up to Quality Program was created by the conference committee on HB110 (Oelslager). Similar to the group's first meeting held last month, committee members spent the bulk of their time hearing from Mindy Kowalski of the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS) and Wendy Grove, director of the Office of Early Learning and School Readiness at the Ohio Department of Education (ODE), the designee for Interim Superintendent Stephanie Siddens.

Also on Wednesday, ODJFS Director Matt Damschroder announced that administrative requirements in the SUTQ program were being simplified, following up on the governor's call for the department to reduce "program bureaucracy." Paperwork is being reduced and the renewal process, streamlined.

INSURANCE

State law that took effect Wednesday and a federal law in effect as of the new year should prevent many Ohioans from receiving

surprise bills for out-of-network care in instances where it would be hard for them to have chosen in-network care, like in emergency rooms. The federal No Surprises Act, sponsored by U.S. Sen. Sherrod Brown (D-OH), took effect starting this year. Meanwhile, protections under 133-HB388 (Holmes), passed in 2020, took effect Wednesday. Both the federal and state governments offer online resources and telephone hotlines for consumers looking to learn more or get help after receiving surprise bills. The Ohio Department of Insurance's (ODI) surprise billing toolkit is at <https://tinyurl.com/2p9fnnsu>. ODI's consumer hotline is 800-686-1526. The federal Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) offer information at www.cms.gov/nosurprises and a hotline at 800-985-3059.

JUDICIAL

The Ohio Supreme Court announced Monday that the application window for technology upgrade grants is now open, with submissions accepted electronically through Wednesday, Feb. 16. The grants will be awarded in May, and are open to appeals, common pleas, municipal and county courts for projects that remove barriers to the efficient and effective administration of justice. This can include new purchases or upgrades to systems, hardware and equipment for pretrial services, electronic filing, online payment, case management and courtroom or building security. There will be webinars at 10:30 a.m. on Wednesday, Jan. 19 and 1:30 p.m. on Friday, Jan. 21. More information is available at <https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/grants/>.

The Ohio Supreme Court recently announced that Lyn Tolan has been named director of public information, succeeding Edward Miller, who retired at the end of 2021. She took over on Jan. 3. Tolan will direct the Court's communications to encourage public and news media understanding and awareness of the Supreme Court, Ohio courts and the justice system.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

County, municipal and township leaders across Ohio are in various stages of planning, meeting and acting on their charge to build regional organizations that will appoint membership to the board of the OneOhio Foundation, which will oversee the bulk of Ohio's funding from the massive opioid settlement. Most state-level appointments to the foundation board are complete, but the majority of appointees will come from 19 regional bodies representing the local governments who've signed on to the settlement. Of the 29 seats on the foundation board, the remaining 10 come from state-level leaders. Gov. Mike DeWine named his five appointees: Tom Gregoire, dean of Ohio State University's College of Social Work; business leader Lawrence Kidd; Jane Portman, Cincinnati Children's Hospital trustee and spouse of U.S. Sen. Rob Portman (R-OH); Christopher Smitherman, former Cincinnati City Council member; and John Tharp, former Lucas County sheriff. Attorney General Dave Yost gets one appointment, which he gave to Dr. Michael Roizen, chief wellness officer emeritus for the Cleveland Clinic. Senate President Matt Huffman (R-Lima) appointed Sen. Robert McColley (R-Napoleon) as his caucus representative while House Speaker Bob Cupp (R-Lima) named Rep. Gail Pavliga (R-Atwater). Minority leadership of the House and Senate have yet to name their appointees. Four local government associations -- County Commissioners Association of Ohio (CCAO), Ohio Mayors Alliance (OMA), Ohio Municipal League (OML) and Ohio Township Association (OTA) -- plan to release a toolkit and convene a webinar for local governments in January to assist with this work.

MARIJUANA/HEMP

The State Medical Board of Ohio (SMBO) received nine petitions for potential new qualifying conditions under the Ohio Medical Marijuana Control Program (MMCP). The SMBO Medical Marijuana Committee is scheduled to meet on Wednesday, Feb. 9 to decide which petitions to consider. A final vote on new qualifying conditions is expected to occur in Summer 2022. The nine conditions (as listed by the petitioners) proposed during the 2021 submission window include the following:

- Gilbert's disease
- Anxiety
- Degenerative disk disease, chronic pain and PTSD
- Bipolar, anxiety, depression and sleep disorder
- Two petitions for opioid use disorder
- Insomnia
- Lupus
- Autism spectrum disorder

The Coalition to Regulate Marijuana Like Alcohol (CRMLA) submitted an additional 29,918 signatures to the Ohio Secretary of State's Office on Thursday. Earlier this month, Secretary of State Frank LaRose informed the campaign that it was 13,062 valid signatures short of the 132,887 needed to transmit the initiated statute to the General Assembly for its consideration. The proposed law would legalize the use of marijuana by individuals age 21 and older.

NATURAL RESOURCES

The Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR) is using H2Ohio funding to help restore habitat and improve water quality along the Chagrin River, a state-designated scenic river. ODNR has awarded a \$2.2 million grant to the Chagrin River Watershed Partners to restore wetlands and strengthen riverbanks five miles from Lake Erie, according to ODNR.

Gov. Mike DeWine and ODNR Director Mary Mertz recently announced that Shawnee State Forest will expand by more than 1,200 acres which the ODNR Division of Forestry acquired with a federal partnership grant through the Forest Legacy Program. The

1,252-acre tract in Scioto County is approximately 75 miles south of Columbus and 65 miles east of Cincinnati. The land, located near Shawnee State Park and the Nature Conservancy's Edge of Appalachia Preserve, is now part of the state forest. The purchase will allow ODNR to partner with the Buckeye Trail Association and reroute a section of the Buckeye Trail off the road and through the wooded area.

PENSIONS

The Ohio Retirement Study Council (ORSC) heard a slew of pension system reports Thursday, prepared for a routine audit of the Highway Patrol Retirement System (HPRS) and reauthorized the agreement that provides health care to its own staff via the State Teachers Retirement System (STRS).

Sen. Teresa Fedor (D-Toledo) introduced legislation co-sponsored by her entire caucus, SB280, that would require STRS to reinstate COLAs. The STRS Board of Trustees voted to suspend the 2 percent COLAs in 2017.

PEOPLE

Jeanne Pease, the wife of Donald Pease, who represented Ohio's 13th Congressional District from 1977 to 1993, died at the age of 89 on Sunday, Jan. 9 in Helena, MT. She married Donald Pease in 1953 while they were attending Ohio University and moved to Oberlin in 1957 when Donald became editor of the *Oberlin News Tribune*, according to her obituary. Donald Pease died in 2002, and Jeanne continued living in their Oberlin apartment until moving into senior living until January 2020. She moved to Helena in October 2020 to be near her daughter, Jennifer Eastvold, and son-in-law.

The Center for Community Solutions (CCS), a Cleveland-based think tank, Wednesday announced the appointment of Kate Warren to a new position heading up the Greater Cleveland American Rescue Plan Council (GCARPC). This is an effort to track and influence federal relief funding flowing into Cleveland and Ohio. The council will track ARP spending, educate stakeholders about key programs and initiatives that are being funded by recovery dollars, and equip grassroots organizations to advocate for and access funding, CCS explained.

POLITICS

The Ohio Republican Party is opening up the process for its State Central Committee to endorse statewide candidates, though incumbents will have a lower threshold for endorsement than non-incumbents. The announcement came as a number of Ohio Republicans have been pushing the party not to endorse in the state primaries, seeking to lessen the advantage for incumbents. The party sent a letter to candidates and committee members outlining the process, saying incumbents will need a simple majority of the State Central Committee to be endorsed, while non-incumbents will need a two-thirds majority. The State Central Committee will consider endorsements at its Friday, Feb. 4 meeting. Candidates will first be screened by the Endorsement Policy Review Committee, which will provide a report to the State Central Committee ahead of the full meeting.

POLLS/STUDIES

A new poll from Quinnipiac University found respondents more concerned about internal threats to the country rather than external threats. Meanwhile, President Joe Biden's approval ratings continued to decline as the nation faces increasing COVID-19 cases, supply issues and inflation. The poll found a majority of respondents -- 76 percent -- believe the bigger threat to the country is political instability within the country, while 19 percent say it is other countries that are adversaries to the United States that are the bigger danger. A majority of respondents, 58 percent, also said they think the nation's democracy is in danger of collapse, and 53 percent believe political divisions to the country will worsen over their lifetime.

In other findings, the Quinnipiac Poll saw 45 percent of respondents backing Democrats as more likely to protect their right to vote, while 43 percent said Republicans and 12 percent gave no opinion. Asked if they are confident state elected officials will protect their right to vote, 66 percent say they are either very confident (34 percent) or somewhat confident (32 percent), while 32 percent say they are either not so confident (16 percent) or not confident at all (16 percent). The poll also surveyed respondents' thoughts on the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Respondents gave the CDC a negative 37 percent approval to 57 percent disapproval rating for its handling of the response to the coronavirus.

REDISTRICTING/REAPPORTIONMENT

The Ohio Supreme Court Wednesday struck down the new General Assembly maps adopted along party-lines by the Ohio Redistricting Commission and gave the commission 10 days to come up with a new plan. The 4-3 decision saw Republican Chief Justice Maureen O'Connor join with the Democrats on the Court in declaring the new Ohio House and Senate maps invalid based on a violation of Article XI, Section 6(A) and 6(B), which state that the commission "shall attempt" to draw maps that correspond with the voting preferences of Ohio voters over the last 10 years. The 146-page decision included two concurring opinions and two dissenting opinions that further debated what "shall attempt" means, and whether the Court itself had jurisdiction to decide the constitutionality of a four-year map adopted by a simple majority of the commission.

Further, two justices -- O'Connor and Justice Jennifer Brunner -- suggested Ohio voters may want to take another stab at reforms based on the results of the latest round of redistricting. The majority opinion, authored by Justice Melody Stewart, and Brunner's concurring opinion, also took issue with how the process played out.

The Ohio Supreme Court was clear that the Ohio Redistricting Commission's statewide elected officials -- the governor, secretary of state and auditor of state -- need to play a greater role in the actual drawing of state legislative districts, Gov. Mike DeWine said

Thursday. "The Court is saying that this action should be taken by the whole commission -- and not just the final vote -- but the whole commission should be involved from day one in the drawing of maps," DeWine said during an interview with *Hannah News*. "Now, I think as a practical matter it's hard to have all members of the commission sit around and draw maps. It's probably not the most efficient way to do it, but I think what the Court is saying is that all members of the commission need to be involved in it from the beginning."

A federal judge Wednesday paused action on a federal lawsuit challenging new congressional districts created as a part of SB258 (McColley), deferring to the Ohio Supreme Court which is hearing two separate lawsuits challenging SB258. The lawsuit was filed last month by Rev. Kenneth L. Simon and Helen Youngblood, both of Youngstown, who argued that the new map resulting in their having less opportunity than other members of the electorate to participate in the political process and elect representatives of their choice. U.S. District Court Judge John R. Adams of the Northern District of Ohio Eastern Division, said pausing the case for 60 days while the Ohio Supreme Court considers its challenges would ensure "the efficient use of judicial resources." He said the Ohio Supreme Court could invalidate the congressional map and render the federal lawsuit moot -- a position which turned out to be correct when on Friday, Jan. 14, the Ohio Supreme Court also struck down the recently approved congressional map in SB258 (McColley) on a 4-3 vote.

TELECOMMUNICATIONS/BROADBAND

Ohio Attorney General Dave Yost Monday joined a bipartisan group of 51 attorneys general in urging the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to help stop the flood of foreign-based illegal robocalls that attempt to scam Americans. The comments submitted by the attorneys general call for the FCC to require gateway providers -- the companies that allow foreign calls into the United States -- to take steps to reduce how easily robocalls have been able to enter the U.S. telephone network, including implementing STIR/SHAKEN, a caller ID authentication technology that helps prevent spoofed calls.

Ohio State University (OSU) was announced Tuesday as the recipient of a \$3 million Broadband and 5G Sector Partnership grant and will design a curriculum to help develop the skilled workforce needed for broadband expansion. Once complete, this model will be available to all higher education institutions in the state. Lt. Gov. Jon Husted announced the selection during a meeting of the Governor's Executive Workforce Board.