

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

3/23/2021 - Senate Transportation, (Seventh Hearing)

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 - 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 - 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

3/17/2021 - **PASSED BY SENATE**; Vote 33-0

SB18

INTERNAL REVENUE CODE (ROEGNER K, SCHAFFER T)

To expressly incorporate changes in the Internal Revenue Code since March 27, 2020, into Ohio law and to declare an emergency.

CURRENT STATUS

3/23/2021 - House Ways and Means, (Sixth Hearing)

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

Friday, March 19, 2021

AGRICULTURE

Ohio Department of Agriculture (ODAg) Director Dorothy Pelanda spoke Tuesday to the House Agriculture and Conservation Committee, providing an overview of agency work and priorities and fielding lawmaker questions on fair ride inspections, expanding Ohio's meat processing capacity, hemp, water quality and other topics.

ATTORNEY GENERAL

Ohio Attorney General Dave Yost released this year's edition of the state *Sunshine Laws Manual* Monday, kicking off Sunshine Week, a national initiative promoting government transparency and access to freedom of information resources. The manual, known as the "Yellow Book," provides information on the Ohio Public Records and Open Meetings acts and details law changes and legal decisions affecting the open government laws during the past year.

Attorney General Dave Yost Wednesday announced that he has filed a federal lawsuit seeking to block a provision in the federal stimulus American Rescue Plan Act that prevents states and local governments from using funds in the bill to offset losses from tax cuts or credits. In announcing the lawsuit, Yost's office said the bill "threatens to withhold needed federal funds from Ohio in an effort to handcuff the state's authority to make changes to its tax structure and economic policy." Yost is asking the U.S. District Court of Southern Ohio to bar the enforcement of the provision.

CHILDREN/FAMILIES

The Ready, Set, Soar Ohio coalition for child development and wellness heard Friday about the priorities of the administration and two lawmakers on early childhood topics, also hearing from the Health Policy Institute of Ohio (HPIO) about troublesome indicators for children's wellbeing in Ohio. The coalition, organized by nonprofit advocacy group Groundwork Ohio, invited virtual remarks from Ohio Department of Medicaid (ODM) Director Maureen Corcoran; Dyane Gogan Turner, chief of the Bureau of Maternal, Child and Family Health at the Ohio Department of Health; Sen. Louis Blessing III (R-Cincinnati) and Rep. Allison Russo (D-Upper Arlington); and Reem Aly and Zach Reat of HPIO.

Gov. Mike DeWine's newly announced "Eliminating Disparities in Infant Mortality Task Force" held its first meeting Tuesday. The group is charged with addressing Ohio's racial disparities in infant mortality.

CIVIL RIGHTS

Members of the Women's Suffrage Centennial Commission (WSCC) approved a tentative date of Sunday, Aug. 8, 2021 for a summer event on Statehouse grounds at their March meeting. The members are still discussing a potential hybrid virtual/in-person event model as well as other features of the event. Almost all the group's plans for honoring the 100th anniversary of the 1920 adoption of the 19th Amendment allowing women to vote were put on hold due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and commission members are now in the process of rescheduling these activities for 2021.

A new group has formed during the pandemic that aims to help women in Ohio gain better access to economic opportunities. "As a result of wanting to have their voices heard, women from across the state have joined together to form the Ohio Women's Coalition (OWC), a diverse, nonpartisan alliance of women-supporting organizations, women in business, women leaders, and women business owners that support their mission of improving the economic position for all women. The OWC was created to amplify the voice of women in Ohio and to help draw attention to the unique challenges that women encounter, especially underserved women of color, to gain access to economic opportunities in order to achieve financial stability and prosperity," the group said.

CORONAVIRUS

Vaccine eligibility expanded to those age 40 and up on Friday, March 19 and will open to all Ohioans over the age of 16 starting Monday, March 29, Gov. Mike DeWine announced during a press conference at Ohio's first mass vaccination clinic in Cleveland. The announcement puts Ohio ahead of President Joe Biden's target for states to open vaccination to all adults by May 1, something DeWine's office said it was on pace to beat when Biden announced it last week.

Gov. Mike DeWine continued discussion on the forthcoming expansions in vaccine eligibility Thursday, saying the state is expected to receive around 500,000 doses in the week access opens to everyone age 16 and older on Monday, March 29. Around 2.4 million Ohioans have received at least a first dose of the COVID-19 vaccine, he added, and that is increasing by 40,000 to 60,000 people per day. The state is currently receiving around 400,000 doses per week, and DeWine again said they are in "a race" against new strains of the virus.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE

The soon-to-be-expanded Ohio Criminal Sentencing Commission (OCSC) revived the call Thursday for a comprehensive overhaul of Ohio's criminal code and moved forward on the statewide sentencing data system long sought by Chief Justice Maureen O'Connor to reduce courts' "unforced errors" -- an information platform scheduled for initial rollout next month when the commission becomes an official "criminal justice agency." O'Connor-backed sentencing reform bill 133-HB1 (Plummer-Hicks-Hudson) which cleared the General Assembly charged OCSC to issue recommendations on the bill's impact by December 2021, also granting the commission agency status and regular access to the state Law Enforcement Automated Data System (LEADS) and National Crime Information Center (NCIC), effective April 12.

Panelists at the Columbus Metropolitan Club's (CMC) Wednesday forum said the COVID-19 pandemic has been disproportionately hard on women, but they touted the next round of federal pandemic relief, the American Rescue Plan Act, for provisions they said would go a long way in helping women and families.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The Ohio Ethics Commission Friday unanimously approved a formal opinion that gives clearance for public officials to serve in a

leadership capacity with a membership organization if the city they serve pays membership dues to the organization. The opinion, 2021-1, is based off the precedent of the commission's opinion 2016-1 on whether a city council member of a city that provides financial support to a nonprofit corporation can be employed as the corporation's director.

The Ohio Third Frontier Commission recently approved \$72.7 million in funding to provide capital for startup companies, advance medical technology and support of a new high school tech internship pilot program, according to a release from the Development Services Agency (DSA).

EDUCATION

Ohio Department of Health (ODH) Director Stephanie McCloud signed an addendum Monday to the administration's pandemic protocols for sports, easing quarantine requirements for school sports. Unless they develop symptoms, students will not be required to quarantine from sports and extracurricular activities when they have "incidental" exposure to COVID in the classroom.

Ohio's charter school laws stack up about the same against the model law promoted by the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools (NAPCS), according to the organization's latest state rankings. Legislative work across the U.S. was largely focused on the pandemic response, the alliance noted. "As a result, there weren't as many charter school bills enacted in 2020 as in the past," NAPCS stated in its latest report. Ohio's laws ranked 24th out of 45 states with charter school laws, down one place from last year's ranking of 23rd.

The Smithsonian National Museum of American History will host a webinar on Tuesday, March 23 featuring experts' perspectives on the COVID-19 pandemic through a historical lens. "Curators and historians will use important objects from the past as a springboard to a lively discussion of how critical explorations of the past help us to better understand the present," according to the event description. Registration information is available at: <https://tinyurl.com/ruvhmdfk>.

The Senate approved emergency legislation Wednesday to give local schools more flexibility on state testing and graduation requirements amid the pandemic, and the House quickly agreed to the other chamber's amendments. The legislation, HB67 (Koehler-Bird) now heads to Gov. Mike DeWine's desk and, because of an emergency clause, will take effect immediately upon his signature. Testing windows open next week. Earlier in the week, the Senate Primary and Secondary Education Committee changed the bill to, among other things, narrow the circumstances under which students can use course grades in lieu of exam scores toward graduation.

Reps. Don Jones (R-Freeport) and Phil Robinson (D-Solon) presented their sponsored HB200 to the House Primary and Secondary Education Committee Tuesday, saying the bill would "fix" the state's school report card system. Among the main changes the bill would include scrapping the "A-F" letter grade system for graded measures and returning to descriptors, with the lowest descriptor being "in need of support," and the highest, "significantly exceeds expectations."

The Ohio departments of higher education (ODHE) and education (ODE) have partnered for a new statewide initiative which aims to improve the number of students who complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). Through FAFSA 21, ODHE and ODE will invest \$2.85 million in federal Governor's Emergency Education Relief (GEER) funding for FAFSA completion projects over the next year and a half. The departments said these funds will be used to support direct intervention, data system upgrades and professional development.

ELECTIONS

The chairman of the Summit County Republican Party has gone to the Ohio Supreme Court to challenge Ohio Secretary of State Frank LaRose's decision to remove him from the county's board of elections, claiming LaRose's actions are more retribution than over competency. LaRose announced earlier this month that he had rejected the reappointment of Bryan Williams, the county party chairman and a vice chair of the Ohio Republican Party, saying that Williams had not demonstrated the standard of competency to serve in the role.

Ohio Supreme Court justices have joined their voices with Kids Voting Ohio to cultivate citizenship and encourage young people to vote when they turn 18 -- along with 19, ages with the lowest voter turnout. Six of the Court's seven members, including Chief Justice Maureen O'Connor and Justices Sharon Kennedy, Patrick Fischer, Pat DeWine, Michael Donnelly and Melody Stewart, have taped personal stories and messages for the nonprofit, nonpartisan organization that provides Ohio schools with voter education promoting civic engagement and family and community discussions about citizenship. Those and other policymakers' videos, including Ohio Auditor Keith Faber and congressional and state legislative members, can be found at www.kidsvotingohio.org/video-library.

Secretary of State Frank LaRose and the Ohio Supreme Court announced this week the continued partnership that will give attorneys continuing education credit for serving as poll workers in the upcoming primary election. The renewal of the program, known as Lawyers for Liberty, was approved in an order by the Court this week for the May 4, 2021 primary.

ELECTIONS 2021

Gov. Mike DeWine Thursday announced the selection of two previously set election days to hold the special election for the 11th Congressional District vacancy: Tuesday, Aug. 3 is the date for the primary election for the seat, while Tuesday, Nov. 2, the General Election day, will be the date for the election for the congressional seat vacancy. The seat opened up after former U.S. Rep. Marica Fudge (D-Warrensville Heights) was confirmed as the secretary of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

ELECTIONS 2022

The author of "Hillbilly Elegy" received a large boost for a potential U.S. Senate run in 2022 after it was reported that billionaire Peter Theil, a co-founder of PayPal, has given \$10 million to a Super PAC backing his potential candidacy. While J.D. Vance has not officially put his name in the race to succeed U.S. Sen. Rob Portman (R-OH), Theil gave Vance a show of support by giving \$10 million to Protect Ohio Values, which was formed last month to support Vance.

EMPLOYMENT/UNEMPLOYMENT

The Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS) announced more Ohioans will be eligible to collect Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA), and it is working to implement provisions of the federal American Rescue Plan Act of 2021, which was signed March 11. ODJFS highlighted recently issued guidance from the U.S. Department of Labor expanding eligibility for PUA, which supports self-employed individuals, independent contractors and others who don't qualify for traditional unemployment benefits.

The Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS) released the delayed January unemployment numbers March 12, showing an unemployment rate of 5.3 percent, down from a revised 5.6 percent in December, as the state added 28,900 jobs. While monthly figures are normally released on the third Friday of every month, the February numbers are delayed every year as states and the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) conduct their annual benchmarking process to review and update previous data. ODJFS will release the February data on Friday, March 26.

ENERGY/UTILITIES

AEP Ohio filed an agreement Friday, March 12, in its rate case that is signed by the staff of the Public Utilities Commission of Ohio (PUCO), the Office of Ohio Consumers' Counsel (OCC) and several other groups. The agreement will mean small rate decreases for residential ratepayers, both AEP and OCC said. AEP said the agreement would result in a 71 cent decrease in costs for a residential customer using 1,000 kWh per month, versus \$5.68 in AEP's original application, and would reduce the monthly customer charge from \$10 to \$8.40.

While denying most of the wrongdoing in a class action lawsuit filed by rate payers against FirstEnergy in federal court, FirstEnergy admitted sending millions of dollars through a subsidiary to the dark money group that has pleaded guilty in a scheme related to the passage of nuclear subsidy 131-HB6 (Callender-Wilkin). The lawsuit was filed last year after former House Speaker Larry Householder (R-Glenford) and four others were charged in an alleged racketeering scheme where a dark money group that prosecutors allege was controlled by Householder received \$60 million to help pass 133-HB6 and defend it from efforts to rescind it via referendum.

Former U.S. Attorney David DeVillers provided an update Tuesday on the public corruption case targeting former House Speaker Larry Householder (R-Glenford) and associates and energy subsidy bill 133-HB6 (Callender-Wilkin). While not free to speak in detail on pending developments in the ongoing investigation, he described the federal grand jury process that could lead to Householder or, potentially, FirstEnergy's plea deal, jury trial, conviction, appeal, corporate suspension and/or ordered restitution. Much more is coming, at any rate, he told the Office of Ohio Consumers' Counsel (OCC) Governing Board.

The fossil fuel industry lobbied the Legislature Tuesday on the contributions of oil and gas to Ohio's economy and the importance of its policy priorities going forward. The Senate Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee took testimony from the Ohio Oil and Gas Association (OOGA) and American Petroleum Institute (API) of Ohio. OOGA President Matt Hammond said Ohio is now fifth in the production of natural gas and 12th in crude oil and has the seventh-largest crude oil refining capacity in the U.S.

ENVIRONMENT

Putting a price on producing carbon is the least expensive, most efficient policy change legislators can make to reduce emissions that cause climate change, a new study written by an Ohio State University (OSU) researcher suggests. The case study, published recently in the journal *Current Sustainable/Renewable Energy Reports*, analyzed the costs and effects that a variety of policy changes would have on reducing carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions from electricity generation in Texas and found that adding a price -- based on the cost of climate change -- to carbon was the most effective.

ETHICS

The Ohio Ethics Commission Friday unanimously approved a formal opinion that gives clearance for public officials to serve in a leadership capacity with a membership organization if the city they serve pays membership dues to the organization. The opinion, 2021-1, is based on the commission's opinion 2016-1 concerning whether a city council member of a city that provides financial support to a nonprofit corporation can be employed as the corporation's director.

FEDERAL

President Joe Biden will make his first trip to Ohio since taking office next week when he will visit Columbus on Tuesday, March 23 to promote his \$1.9 trillion American Rescue Plan Act.

GAMING/GAMBLING

Lottery revenues and profits are continuing to exceed the agency's estimates, according to Ohio Lottery Finance Director Greg Bowers. Total sales from traditional lottery products for the month of February were \$318.3 million, which is \$33.5 million or 11.8 percent more than sales in February 2020, Bowers told members of the Ohio Lottery Commission.

Legislation legalizing sports gambling and electronic bingo will be introduced shortly after the Senate's two-week spring break, Senate Select Committee on Gaming Chair Kirk Schuring (R-Canton) said during Wednesday's meeting. The committee still plans to meet on Wednesday, March 24 and Wednesday, March 31 before crafting a bill, Schuring said. "During the religious holidays, we have a two-week ... break. During that two-week period, I'll be contacting every member of this committee for their input on the bank of evidence that has been presented to us relative to gaming as a whole. Then I'll be conferring with the Senate president From that point we'll build a bill. We'll introduce a bill, and when you all come back after the break, we will be discussing a bill," Schuring said.

GENERAL ASSEMBLY/STATEHOUSE

Licking County officials recently joined their counterparts from Coshocton County in calling for the General Assembly to remove Rep. Larry Householder (R-Glenford) from the chamber as he faces federal corruption charges for his handling of nuclear plant bailout 133-HB6 (Callender-Wilkin) while serving as speaker. House Republicans discussed Householder's future Tuesday, but Speaker of the House Bob Cupp (R-Lima) said after Wednesday's session he had no update and wouldn't disclose details of internal caucus discussions.

Hannah News' interview series of freshman legislators featured Sen. Sandra O'Brien (R-Rome), who said one of the first things she learned in politics is the impact that getting out and connecting to her constituents can have. "The reason I won my seat is because I personally met 4,000 new people, most all of them in Trumbull County. I started campaigning at least a year-and-a-half before the election. That was pre-COVID, so I went to pancake breakfasts, church dinners -- any place people were gathering, I would show up," O'Brien said. "And when I show up to a function, I don't eat. I just work the room. My goal is to meet and speak to as many people as I possibly can."

Pandemic relief legislation, which passed the Senate Finance Committee and the full chamber this week, provides millions of dollars for a variety of businesses and helps with rent and utility bills. The chamber passed SB108 (S. Huffman-Romanchuk), offering funding to bars, restaurants and entertainment venues; SB109 (Manning-Rulli), offering funds to businesses, fairs, child care providers and veterans homes; and SB110 (O'Brien-Wilson), offering rent and utility assistance. Senate President Matt Huffman (R-Lima) said a fourth bill, SB111 (Blessing-Brenner), providing funding to schools, should pass soon.

Wednesday's Senate session also included passage of SB15 (Wilson), regarding liability protections for fiscal officers; SB20 (Hackett), regarding county utility supply contracts; SCR1 (Schaffer), urging Congress to pass the Mark Takai Atomic Veterans Healthcare Parity Act; and academic testing bill HB67 (Koehler-Bird).

Wednesday's House session saw passage of SB5 (Roegner-Blessing), to have Ohio join the Physical Therapy Licensure Compact; SB7 (Roegner), to have Ohio join the pending Occupational Therapy Licensure Compact; HB21 (Koehler), to expand funding for organ donations; HB92 (Abrams-Loychik), requiring children services agencies to notify the military if they determine a parent or guardian in an abuse case is in the armed forces; and HB133 (Hillyer), regarding commerce and property tax valuations; and concurrence with Senate amendments to HB67 (Koehler-Bird), regarding academic testing.

In other legislative action, House Agriculture and Conservation Committee reported out HB95 (Manchester-Lightbody), proposing tax credits for beginning farmers; House Health Committee reported out HB135 (Manchester-Wester), prohibiting certain insurance cost-sharing practices; and HB136 (Lipps), regarding Medicaid coverage of chiropractic services; House Primary and Secondary Education Committee reported out HB170 (Bird-Richardson), offering pandemic relief to schools; House Transportation and Public Safety Committee reported out license plate and road naming bills HB171 (Lanese-Ray), HB154 (Stewart), HB180 (Abrams) and HB191 (Cutrona); Senate Local Government and Elections Committee reported out SB63 (O'Brien), allowing county probation departments to accept credit card payments; House Commerce and Labor Committee reported out HB23, requiring first responders to undergo dementia-related training; House Criminal Justice Committee reported out SB2 (Gavarone), regarding competency evaluations in criminal cases; Senate Government Oversight and Reform Committee reported out SB31 (Craig), requiring the Ohio History Connection to designate Poindexter Village as a state historic site; Senate Health Committee reported out SB6 (Roegner-Huffman), to have Ohio join the Interstate Medical Licensure Compact; and the House Families, Aging and Human Services Committee reported out HB120 (Fraizer-Richardson) which permits visits in long-term care facilities.

HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

Uninsured patients will now have access to no-cost intrauterine devices (IUDs) at Ohio reproductive health clinics through a new partnership with an international humanitarian aid organization, Planned Parenthood of Greater Ohio (PPGOH) announced Monday. IUDs are a type of long-acting reversible contraception (LARC) that are popular but prohibitively expensive for many lower-income individuals, PPGOH said.

HIGHER EDUCATION

Members of the House Higher Education and Career Readiness Committee heard presentations from Chancellor Randy Gardner of the Ohio Department of Higher Education (ODHE) and Ohio Conference of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) Past President John McNay during their Tuesday meeting.

Sen. Jerry C. Cirino (R-Kirtland) unveiled his SB135 at a news conference, explaining that he looks to improve access to a quality higher education in Ohio, reduce the financial burden on students, and meet the state's needs for in-demand jobs. The bill also addresses free speech in public universities, colleges, and schools.

The University of Cincinnati (UC) Office of Research has launched the interdisciplinary Space Research Institute for Discovery and

Exploration as part of Research2030, UC's 10-year strategic plan for research.

IMMIGRATION

U.S. Sen. Rob Portman (R-OH) will soon travel to the U.S.-Mexico border with Republican and Democratic lawmakers to better understand the situation there, the senator said Tuesday.

JUDICIAL

Gov. Mike DeWine recently announced the appointments of Gina Russo as judge on the Franklin County Municipal Court, and Anthony Moraleja as a judge on the Pike County Court. Russo replaces Judge Paul Herbert, who retired. Moraleja replaces Judge Paul Price, who was elected to another judgeship.

Sylvania Southview High School has won its first virtual and eighth overall state championship in Ohio's mock trial competition. Over 200 students from 15 high schools across Ohio vied for the state title, sponsored by the Ohio Supreme Court and hosted by the Ohio Center for Law-Related Education (OCLRE).

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

It's unclear whether Ohio townships will directly receive funds from the American Rescue Plan (HR1319) because of changes made between the U.S. House and U.S. Senate versions of the legislation, according to the Ohio Township Association (OTA). The bill, which allocates \$350 billion to states and local governments, was recently passed by Congress and signed by President Joe Biden.

Local governments in Ohio would be unable restrict the use of coal, oil, natural gas and petroleum under legislation being considered in the House Energy and Natural Resources Committee. The committee, which met for the first time in the 134th General Assembly on Thursday, heard sponsor testimony from Rep. Al Cutrona (R-Canfield) on HB192, which prohibits any political subdivision from banning or limiting the use of fossil fuels for electricity generation. It would also prohibit local governments from banning or limiting the construction or use of a pipeline to transport oil or natural gas.

MARIJUANA/HEMP

While the Ohio Medical Cannabis Industry Association (OMCIA) strongly supports rule amendments allowing more dispensaries to open across the state, cannabis entrepreneurs need more information on a proposed state "lottery" system to award licenses, OMCIA Executive Director Matt Close said recently.

MEDICAID/MEDICAID REFORM

Ohio's Medicaid work requirements program is "starkly different" from those of most other states, including two under review by the U.S. Supreme Court, Ohio Department of Medicaid (ODM) Director Maureen Corcoran told the federal Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) in a recent letter. Those two programs in litigation, in Arkansas and New Hampshire, officially saw their federal approvals withdrawn this week. Corcoran took CMS up on its offer to consider other information submitted within 30 days of a February letter informing the state that the federal agency was reviewing whether to revoke the authorization for Ohio's work requirements. The Biden administration sent such letters to Ohio and several other states, saying it did not believe work requirements fit the objectives of Medicaid.

MILITARY AFFAIRS

Members of the House Armed Services and Veterans Affairs Committee heard from Major General John C. Harris, Jr. during their Wednesday meeting. Harris, who leads the Ohio National Guard, submitted nearly identical testimony as he had before the House Finance Subcommittee on Transportation. Harris gave an overview of all the operations the Ohio National Guard has undertaken during the last year from dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic to civil unrest. He said currently the Ohio guard has over 800 members deployed worldwide and over 900 on duty in Ohio. Additionally, there are about 80 Ohio Army National Guard members supporting the National Capital Region through March.

NATURAL RESOURCES

The Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR) Division of Mineral Resources Management's Abandoned Mine Lands Reclamation Program will have a lot more funding in the near future, ODNR Director Marty Mertz said Thursday, explaining that the federal government also has program for abandoned mine land work that will promote economic development. Ohio stands to receive \$25 million this year -- up from the \$10 million a year the state has received in recent years. Mertz made the announcement during testimony before the House Energy and Natural Resources Committee. Thursday's meeting was the first for the committee, which is chaired by Rep. Jason Stephens (R-Kitts Hill).

Thanks to a "legendary" run of strong walleye hatches dating back to 2015 and accelerating in 2018, there is a wealth of fish in Lake Erie for anglers to catch this spring, according to the ODNR Division of Wildlife.

Anglers and hunters can now apply for controlled access opportunities this spring, according to the ODNR Division of Wildlife. The online application period is open until Wednesday, March 31, ODNR said.

OHIO HISTORY

The Ohio History Connection will host an online edition of its "Pleasures of the Cup" series on the evening of Saturday, March 20,

inviting online participants to help solve a mock murder while enjoying cocktail recipes provided for the event. Registration information is available at: <https://tinyurl.com/kxs4puhw>.

PEOPLE

Influential Statehouse lobbyist Neil Clark, a co-defendant in the 133-HB6 nuclear subsidy saga, was found dead in Florida, local authorities confirmed Tuesday. The sheriff's office in Collier County, FL confirmed the death of Clark at age 67, while the county medical examiner's office said Tuesday it had Clark's remains in its care and was conducting an investigation and autopsy. The medical examiner's office said results would be turned over to law enforcement, as is custom.

POLLS/STUDIES

The Center for Community Solutions (CCS) released a collection of community fact sheets Monday regarding "data on poverty, education, employment, income, health coverage, health outcomes, enrollment in safety net programs and more." However, CCS noted the data is from 2019 and said it can only provide a pre-pandemic "baseline" for conditions that have likely worsened. The data is broken down by Ohio's congressional and legislative districts. CCS has previous fact sheets for all 88 counties, large cities, Cuyahoga County cities and council districts, neighborhoods and wards in Cleveland, and the "status of women" in the state.

PUBLIC SAFETY

Opponents of HB22 (LaRe) say attempts to improve expanded obstructing justice laws have done little to eliminate ambiguous or arbitrary threats to the constitutional rights of Ohioans who encounter peace officers during routine interactions, arrests or demonstrations. House members heard from supporters and detractors of the bill Wednesday, the latter collectively panning restrictions on "annoying" or "inhibiting" or "risking physical harm to" officers or failing to obey their "lawful orders" -- concerns shared by Democrats on the House Criminal Justice Committee.

TAXATION

The House Ways and Means Committee amended tax conformity measures SB18 (Roegner-Schaffer) by incorporating HB124 (Roemer-B. Young), regarding pass-through entity withholding and business income taxes, and including the option for people to have state income taxes withheld from their unemployment benefits. The committee tabled several other amendments from Democrats, but Chairman Derek Merrin (R-Monclova) said more changes would be coming thanks to the new federal stimulus legislation.

The House Ways and Means Committee heard interested party testimony on HB157 (Jordan-Edwards), the bill to repeal municipal income tax withholding rules regarding the pandemic that were enacted in 133-HB197 (Powell-Merrin). Opponents also submitted written-only comments, raising similar concerns to those who spoke against the bill in the prior hearing.

TRANSPORTATION/INFRASTRUCTURE

Sen. Bill Reineke (R-Tiffin) is working with the Ohio Turnpike and Infrastructure Commission on legislation that will go along with the turnpike's new toll collection system. Ohio Turnpike and Infrastructure Commission Director Ferzan Ahmed and his proxies updated lawmakers on the new system during testimony on HB74 (Oelslager), the transportation budget, saying it moves the turnpike to a concept of open road tolling.

The Ohio Bureau of Motor Vehicles' (BMV) list of rejected custom license plate requests for 2020 included many crude and/or profane submissions, with the topical inclusion of one regarding the coronavirus. "FK COVID" was among the 462 denials, according to media reports. Others directed pejorative abbreviations towards candidates in the presidential election or 2020 itself, while there were also the perennial attempts to disparage both the state and team up north through plates such as "MCHSUX."

The Senate Transportation Committee unveiled its latest version of the transportation budget Wednesday, increasing the amount of funds going to public transit by \$13.85 million each fiscal year. With the changes in the House, General Revenue Funds going towards public transit funding in HB74 (Oelslager) are now at \$37 million per year after Gov. Mike DeWine's budget proposal recommended a significant cut over funding from the last biennium. Describing the changes in the substitute bill, Sen. Stephanie Kunze (R-Hillard), the committee chair, said the additional GRF funds for public transit is in addition to the federal "flex funds" and federal public transportation dollars already included in the bill.

UNEMPLOYMENT COMPENSATION

For the week ending March 13, the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS) reported 115,174 initial unemployment claims to the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL). That number is lower than last week's, when the department reported 128,161. ODJFS said potentially fraudulent claims are likely inflating the totals from this week and recent weeks. "Of the 115,174 initial claims reported this week, nearly 20,000 have been flagged for potential fraud," ODJFS said, urging individuals who suspect their identity was stolen to report the issue to the department as soon as possible. The total number of initial jobless claims filed in Ohio over the last 52 weeks (3,028,950) is more than the combined total of those filed from 2014 through 2019, according to ODJFS.

UNIONS

Gov. Mike DeWine and Ohio Civil Service Employees Association (OCSEA) President Christopher Mabe announced Monday that a tentative labor agreement between the state and OCSEA has been reached. The tentative agreement replaces the current agreement, signed in 2018. OCSEA is the state of Ohio's largest labor union, representing approximately 27,000 state employees. Under Ohio law,

details of the tentative agreement cannot be discussed publicly until after OCSEA and the state complete the ratification processes, which should be in mid-April. The ratification process involves a vote of OCSEA membership, as well a review by the Controlling Board.

WORKFORCE

Lt. Gov. Jon Husted, in his role as director of the Governor's Office of Workforce Transformation, announced the results of the January round of the TechCred program Tuesday and the forthcoming start of the April application window.

Ohio Development Services Agency (DSA) Director Lydia Mihalik discussed the efforts of the Governor's Office of Workforce Transformation (OWT) during a House Economic and Workforce Development Committee meeting Wednesday, saying the state is leveraging its "strong business climate, low cost of living and access to a skilled workforce." OWT is connecting businesses with training and education institutions to fulfill the needs of job seekers and businesses, she continued, and also works with state agencies and local partners to build a skilled, productive workforce.

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