

## 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

---

## **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**

11/10/2021 - Consideration of House Amendments; Senate Does Not Concur, Vote 1-32

---

**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

11/30/2021 - Senate Small Business and Economic Opportunity, (Second Hearing)

## Week in Review

### ADDICTION/SUBSTANCE ABUSE

Ohio's estimated drug overdose deaths reached 5,558 during the pandemic, according to new statistics released recently by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), a jump of nearly 27 percent.

The CDC released the updated data which tracked deaths from May 2020 to April 2021, finding the number of deaths over the year was an increase of 26.6 percent from 4,410 the year before, though the CDC noted the data is incomplete. The previous high for Ohio during a 12-month period occurred from July 2016 to July 2017, when there were an estimated 5,293 deaths.

### ATTORNEY GENERAL

Ohio is joining a 14-state lawsuit to stop federal enforcement of President Joe Biden's COVID-19 vaccine mandate on health care employees. Attorney General Dave Yost announced Tuesday that Ohio had been added to the plaintiffs in *State of Louisiana et al v. Secretary of Health and Human Services et al*, filed recently in the U.S. District Court for the Western District of Louisiana to challenge the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services' authority to require the vaccine of health care workers. "Ohio operates state-run health care facilities that receive both Medicare and Medicaid funding and are subject to the vaccine mandate," Yost states in Monday's filing. He says the Biden administration's vaccine mandate affects as many as 17 million Americans working full and part-time at hospitals, nursing facilities, hospices and home health agencies.

### BUSINESS/CORPORATE

With 14,140 new business filings in October, Ohio entrepreneurs are close to breaking the record total for 2020 with two full months remaining to create a business, according to Secretary of State Frank LaRose. Ohioans have submitted a total of 170,740 new business filings through October this year, versus last year's record of 171,073 new filings from January to December, the secretary of state said.

Retail sales during the holiday season are projected to increase by 7.3 percent this year, rising from \$29.3 billion to \$31.4 billion,

according to a Tuesday report from the Ohio Council of Retail Merchants (OCRM). OCRM's research affiliate, Focus on Ohio's Future, prepared the report with the University of Cincinnati (UC) Economics Center. Calling the projection "robust," UC Economics Center Co-Director Christopher Nicak said it comes in part from a 4 percent increase in wages and salaries over 2020, from \$309.9 billion in Q1 2020 to \$322.2 billion in Q2 2021.

## **CORONAVIRUS**

The state is experiencing another surge of coronavirus cases and hospitalizations as Ohioans prepare to gather for Thanksgiving for this week, Ohio Department of Health (ODH) Director Dr. Bruce Vanderhoff said Tuesday. "We are heading into the winter with very high levels of disease transmission, and over the last couple of weeks, a definite upturn in the number of cases and the number of hospitalizations. Essentially, we are heading into the winter already in a surge," Vanderhoff told reporters during a virtual press conference. "Think about where we are in terms of the total number of positive cases," he continued. "The threshold per 100,000 is 100 cases per 100,000, and we are many times above that, both at a state level and in each and every individual county level. COVID is everywhere. It is still demonstrating an ability to spread very quickly, most especially among people who aren't protected by the vaccine." The statewide transmission rate for the most recent reporting period (pulled Nov. 18) is 496.3 cases per 100,000 population, according to ODH. That is up from 410.5 a week before (Nov. 11), and 354.3 two weeks before (Nov. 4).

In the most recent reporting period, there are 11 counties with more than 800 cases per 100,000 population including Sandusky (804.9), Fayette (830.9), Henry (877.6), Fulton (904.4), Seneca (915.2), Ashtabula (929.6), Putnam (942.1), Allen (976.1), Defiance (976.7), Van Wert (1,092.8) and Williams (1,092.9).

The Federal Drug Administration (FDA) and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) provided approvals necessary Friday for any U.S. adult to be eligible for a booster dose of the COVID-19 vaccine. The Ohio Department of Health said those who originally received the Johnson & Johnson vaccine are eligible for a single booster dose two months following their original dose; those who received Moderna or Pfizer/Comirnaty will be eligible six months after receiving their second dose, which completed the original vaccine series. Fully vaccinated adults can choose any of the three authorized COVID-19 vaccines for their booster dose.

The availability of COVID-19 booster shots for all adults and initial vaccines for young children has heightened demand for jobs across the state, Ohio Department of Health (ODH) officials told members of the Controlling Board on Monday. Those factors led to ODH's seeking a \$400,000 increase to its current vaccine distribution contract with Cardinal Health, ODH Procurement Chief Paul Maragos and ODH Warehouse Manager Dave Holston told Rep. Shane Wilkin (R-Hillsboro). The request was approved.

According to AARP Ohio, nearly 60 percent of nursing home staff were vaccinated against COVID-19 in October, a slight increase over the previous month. AARP, which tracks the vaccination of nursing home staff and residents through its Nursing Home COVID-19 Dashboard, said 59.2 percent of staff were fully vaccinated as of Oct. 17. Nationally, it said 7 percent more nursing staff were vaccinated over the previous month, the largest monthly increase since the group began tracking vaccination rates. Nationwide, about 74 percent of nursing home staff are vaccinated. The Biden administration has recently released a federal rule that requires all health care workers in facilities that participate in Medicare and Medicaid to be fully vaccinated by Jan. 4, 2022.

## **CRIME AND PUNISHMENT**

Gov. Mike DeWine announced recently that more than \$4.8 million in funding in federal Edward J. Byrne Memorial Justice Assistance Grants (JAG) has been awarded to support the Ohio criminal justice system via multijurisdictional drug task forces, school resource officers, drug, veteran, and mental health courts, corrections projects, and justice technology initiatives. In total, 153 grants were awarded to 140 local agencies in 56 counties. The grants are administered by the Ohio Department of Public Safety's Office of Criminal Justice Services (OCJS).

## **ELECTIONS**

Secretary of State Frank LaRose notified the Summit County Board of Elections that he is releasing the board from administrative oversight, saying the board had improved its human resource management, elections administration, and quality of service to voters. LaRose had put the board into oversight earlier this year, saying "significant deficiencies were determined where board members did not provide the standard of competence necessary to continue serving in their respective role." He also

rejected at the time the appointment of Summit County Republican Party Chairman Bryan Williams to the board, resulting in a lawsuit by Williams that led the Ohio Supreme Court to unanimously order Williams' appointment to be reinstated.

## **ELECTIONS 2022**

With the passage of new congressional map SB258 (McColley) last week, U.S. Rep. Bob Latta (R-Bowling Green) said he will be running for re-election in the redrawn 5th Congressional District. The district spans from Mercer County on the Indiana border to Lorain County. Latta's home of Bowling Green sits near the

middle of the district. In his announcement, Latta noted that he currently, or has previously, represented 10 of the 11 counties comprising the new version of the district.

Rep. Shane Wilkin (R-Hillsboro) announced Monday that he will run for the 17th Ohio Senate District in 2022. The seat will be open due to term limits for Sen. Bob Peterson (R-Sabina). Wilkin, who is in his second term representing the 91st Ohio House District, previously served three terms as Highland



County commissioner.

## **EMPLOYMENT/UNEMPLOYMENT**

According to the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS), Ohio's unemployment rate was 5.1 percent in October, down from a revised 5.3 percent in September. ODJFS said the state's nonagricultural wage and salary employment increased 20,100 over the month, from a revised 5,361,200 in September to 5,381,300 in October 2021. The number of workers unemployed in Ohio in October was

289,000, down from 298,000 in September. The number of unemployed has decreased by 30,000 in the past 12 months from 319,000. The October unemployment rate for Ohio decreased from 5.6 percent in October 2020.

## **ENERGY**

Gov. Mike DeWine is urging President Joe Biden to intervene in Michigan's Enbridge pipeline dispute with Canada to spare the Upper Midwest and Great Lakes states from a major economic blow as the nation recovers from COVID-19. DeWine and Lt Gov. Jon Husted wrote Biden a letter dated Friday, Nov. 19 to explain Line 5's importance to the region. The governor says Ohio would lose roughly 20,000 jobs and \$13.7 billion in economic activity, with Michigan, Indiana and Pennsylvania facing a combined loss of 33,755 jobs and \$20.8 billion. Those figures would have "widespread implications" for the Upper Midwest and Great Lakes region's gross state product (GSP), worker earnings and tax revenues.

## **ENVIRONMENT**

Manganese, a naturally occurring mineral that is used in various industries in Ohio and across the U.S., must be kept in check by water systems to avoid discoloration, poor taste and odor, according to researchers. "It only takes a fraction of a milligram per liter, in terms of concentration, before the water looks yellow," said Craig Stow, an aquatic ecosystems expert with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). Stow was one of several water quality experts hosted by Ohio Sea Grant for a webinar series this fall.

## **FEDERAL**

Vice President Kamala Harris visited Columbus Friday along with U.S. Department of Labor Secretary Marty Walsh to tour and speak at a union hall. Harris and Walsh visited Plumbers and Pipefitters Local 189 and met with people in an apprenticeship program. Ohio Democratic Party Chair Elizabeth Walters praised the vice president's visit as a chance to celebrate the recently passed federal infrastructure spending measure, noting billions of dollars are set to flow to Ohio for roads, bridges, water, sewer and broadband projects.

Gov. Mike DeWine is suspending pre-approval requirements for heavier truck loads as part of a joint effort among numerous governors to address supply chain issues during the holiday season, an effort in which they're also urging federal action. DeWine's office said he's directed the Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT) to resume the pandemic-era practice of allowing trucks to haul loads of up to 90,000 pounds so long as they report where they traveled after their trips, suspending the requirement for pre-approval of shipments over 80,000 pounds. "Supply chain issues have led to shortages of raw materials and goods from factories to stores, and simple actions, like modifying weight limits, adjusting hours of service for truck drivers, and removing some non-safety-related restrictions on commercial drivers licenses will help ease a record-shortage of truck drivers and allow more goods to flow to market," said DeWine in a statement. "I'm calling on President Biden to review and revise any federal regulations that are hindering our efforts."

## **GENERAL ASSEMBLY/STATEHOUSE**

With work on a congressional redistricting bill wrapped up this week well ahead of the Nov. 30 constitutional deadline, the House and Senate both cleared the calendar of sessions scheduled near that date. Sessions scheduled for both chambers Monday, Nov. 29, Tuesday, Nov. 30 and Wednesday, Dec. 1 were cancelled, and the House likewise cancelled a Thursday, Dec. 2 session. Both chambers are next scheduled to meet Wednesday, Dec. 8.

## **HOUSING/HOMELESSNESS**

Home sales of 15,731 in October marked a 1.4 percent decline from figures a year earlier, but the average sales price was well ahead of what it was in October 2020, according to Ohio Realtors. The average price was \$240,509, an 8.2 percent increase from the \$222,216 seen in October 2020.

## **JUDICIAL**

Gov. Mike DeWine announced two judicial appointments Friday. Matthew P. Frericks is being appointed to the Marion County Common Pleas Court General Division and will assume office on Monday, Dec. 6, replacing former Judge Jason Warner. Frericks will have to win election in November 2022 to complete

the term expiring Wednesday, Jan. 1, 2025. In addition, Amy C. Rosebrook is being appointed to the Henry County Court of Common Pleas General and Probate Divisions and will assume office on Monday, Dec. 6, filling a vacancy left by Judge John Collier. She must run for election in November 2022

to complete the term expiring Monday, May 8, 2023. Rosebrook has been a Napoleon Municipal Court judge since 2011.

## **MARIJUANA/HEMP**

A "streamlined" process for businesses to submit new cannabis products for state agency review will be implemented on Wednesday, Dec. 1, according to the Ohio Medical Marijuana Control Program (MMCP).

The new process is intended to help the Ohio Department of Commerce (DOC) and Ohio Board of Pharmacy (OBP) review the submissions more efficiently, MMCP said. "The goal of the updated process is for licensees to provide more information up front regarding their new product concepts to support DOC and OBP coordination and a more efficient review and approval of product item ID, packaging and

labeling, and advertising submissions," MMCP said. "In addition, the process will ensure that licensees have received a product item ID approval before they incur packaging, labeling and advertising costs ahead of introducing a new product to market."

## **MEDICAID/MEDICAID REFORM**

Ohio recently updated its plans for how to spend additional funding for home- and community-based services (HCBS) provided in the federal American Rescue Plan Act, aiming among other uses to make one-time relief payments to providers in light of the difficulties caused by the pandemic. The Ohio Department of Medicaid's (ODM) plan, developed in conjunction with other state agencies involved in the work, covers \$964 million in proposed spending in the areas of provider workforce relief; technology enhancement; workforce supports; and other program and system enhancements. Workforce relief constitutes the bulk of the funding plan, at \$469 million-plus or 49 percent of the total, with providers to receive funding totaling 10 percent of their 2021 revenue. Those providers will be required to put the money toward retention and signing bonus payments for staff. The plan proposes \$212 million in workforce supports to help address shortages in the workforce affecting ODM, the Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services, Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities and Ohio Department of Aging.

## **NATURAL RESOURCES**

The Department of Administrative Services (DAS) announced Monday that the state had received a Government Experience Project award from the Center for Digital Government for its 2020 redesign of the Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR) website. The new website, which leverages the DAS-managed, InnovateOhio platform, allows visitors to use location-based searching for trip planning in a 10-, 20- or 50-mile radius. More than six million visitors have used the site to plan a trip to an ODNR property, with searches by activity and amenity as well. A DAS newsletter added that the site, which is accessible on mobile devices, also centralizes news, events and help resources. Such information was previously separated across ODNR's 11 divisions.

The ODNR Division of Geological Survey is now accepting applications for the Ohio Geology Student Research Grant program. For a seventh academic year, the program will support graduate and undergraduate students who conduct geologic research in the state, according to ODNR. The division will award grants of \$2,500 to three earth science students at Ohio colleges and universities. Each grantee will be selected based on the quality of their application, the strength of their professor's letter of recommendation, and the relevancy of their proposed research.

The ODNR Division of Natural Areas and Preserves has named its 140th state nature preserve. Coyote Run will have 230 acres of preserved natural lands in Fairfield County, thanks to conservation enthusiasts and property owners David Hague and Tammy Miller, ODNR said.

An estimated 300,000 hunters will make their way to the state's forests and fields during the 2021 deer-gun hunting season, according to the ODNR Division of Wildlife. The 2021 weeklong deer-gun season begins on Monday, Nov. 29 and lasts through Sunday, Dec. 5. There is also a deer-gun weekend on Dec. 18-19. The 2021 youth deer-gun hunting season took place the weekend of Nov. 20-21, with young hunters aged 17 and under harvesting 7,634 deer, a significant increase from 2020, ODNR said.

## **POLLS/STUDIES**

A significant majority of Americans -- regardless of political affiliation -- believe the U.S. Supreme Court's decisions are primarily driven by politics, not legal reasoning, according to a national poll from Quinnipiac University. Sixty-one percent of the poll's respondents said the U.S. Supreme Court is mainly motivated by politics, while 32 percent said it's mainly motivated by the law. Democrats said 67 percent to 27 percent, Independents said 62 percent to 31 percent, and Republicans said 56 percent to 39 percent that the U.S. Supreme Court is mainly motivated by politics.

The poll found that nearly half of Americans (49 percent) oppose stricter gun laws in the U.S., while 45 percent support stricter gun laws. Republicans oppose stricter guns laws 84 percent to 13 percent, Independents oppose stricter gun laws 54 percent to 39 percent, while Democrats support stricter gun laws 91 percent to 7 percent. Among registered voters, 48 percent oppose stricter gun laws, while 47 percent support stricter gun laws.

## **PUBLIC SAFETY**

From standardizing the process of decertifying police officers over serious misconduct to curtailing no-knock warrants to wrangling with thorny union bargaining issues, lawmakers from a handful of states addressed their legislatures' responses to the wave of calls for policing reforms after George Floyd's murder and other incidents during a recent panel at the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) conference in Florida. Speakers included Walter Katz, vice president for Criminal Justice at Arnold Ventures, Sen. Whitney Westerfield of Kentucky, Rep. John Spiros of Wisconsin and Rep. Roger Goodman of Washington state. Westerfield, who moderated the discussion, noted the scale of legislative activity on policing, as evidenced by NCSL's cataloging of bills. "The database

on this subject matter alone is enormous. The number of bills that have been filed and considered and proposed in states from one end of the nation to another is enormous," he said.

Citing the "mental, emotional and physical" toll of events such as murders, fires and accidents, Gov. Mike DeWine announced Monday that a new Office of First Responder Wellness has been created within the Ohio Department of Public Safety's (DPS) Office of Criminal Justice Services. It will support law enforcement, fire, EMS, dispatch, corrections and Ohio-based military personnel with specialized support

and training to help agencies "proactively address post-traumatic stress and other traumas caused by factors that are unique to first-responder careers." The office will work with local and state mental health agencies, including the Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (OhioMHAS), to give "continuing, comprehensive resources" to first responder entities.

Gov. Mike DeWine, joining Ohio State Highway Patrol (OSHP) Superintendent Col. Richard Fambro and a new class of uniformed cadets at the highway patrol academy in Columbus on Tuesday, said he would provide the patrol \$15 million over five years for body cameras, video storage equipment, maintenance and user training. "Body-worn cameras have become a standard tool for law enforcement," DeWine said, reinforcing troopers' and citizens' need for safety, trust and transparency. The governor had asked Fambro to design the program and solicit technology proposals last year. He noted OSHP has had dash- and rear-seat cameras for more than two decades and would be integrating body-cams into current protocols, starting with Columbus headquarters and followed by Bucyrus, Cambridge, Cleveland, Findlay, Jackson, Piqua, Warren and Wilmington patrol districts through May 2022.

### **REDISTRICTING/REAPPORTIONMENT**

Gov. Mike DeWine Saturday morning signed SB258 (McColley), which sets congressional boundaries for Ohio's 15 congressional districts for the next four years, though some groups have suggested they will challenge the map in court. The new map was introduced a week ago by Senate Republicans, and quickly moved through the Senate and House over the week despite the objections of legislative Democrats and voting rights groups. The General Assembly had until Tuesday, Nov. 30, to adopt a new map. DeWine, who previously suggested maps first introduced by each of the legislative caucuses would not pass constitutional muster, said on Saturday in a written statement that he thought the new version of SB258 was the best offered by any of them.

The new congressional redistricting map that was passed last week by the General Assembly and signed by Gov. Mike DeWine as a part of SB258 (McColley) on Saturday was challenged in the Ohio Supreme Court Monday evening by 12 Ohio voters working with a national redistricting group started by former Attorney General Eric Holder. The lawsuit, supported by Holder's National Redistricting Action Fund (NRAF), argues that the map is a partisan gerrymander in violation of the Ohio Constitution's Article XIX, which states that when passing a map without bipartisan support, the General Assembly "shall not pass a plan that unduly favors or disfavors a political party or its incumbents" and "shall not unduly split governmental units."

Gov. Mike DeWine focused on congressional district "competitiveness" Tuesday -- a criterion missing from 2018's Issue 1 redistricting language -- in defending the U.S. House map of newly signed SB258 (McColley). The governor dismissed Democratic opposition to the congressional map at a press conference.

### **STATE GOVERNMENT**

The new unemployment insurance tax system for employers is slated to go live on Monday, Dec. 6, according to an announcement Tuesday from the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS). It will replace the current Employer Resource Information Center, which is over 10 years old. The new State of Ohio Unemployment Resource for Claimants and Employers (SOURCE) is also expected to replace the 17-year-old Ohio Job Insurance benefits system and the legacy unemployment appeals system in late 2022. SOURCE will offer employers "multiple self-service reporting and payment options, online tutorials, an improved way to request information and upload documents and easier navigation than the current legacy system," the department said. ODJFS is offering virtual trainings and has brief step-by-step videos at <https://jfs.ohio.gov/ouio/TheSOURCE/>.

### **TRANSPORTATION/INFRASTRUCTURE**

Motorcycle Ohio announced earlier this month that \$2.5 million in funding is available for government agencies and nonprofit organizations that are interested in offering certified motorcycle rider training. A division of the Ohio Bureau of Motor Vehicles (BMV), Motorcycle Ohio establishes motorcycle safety and education programs to provide affordable motorcycle rider training courses in order to reduce fatalities and injuries on Ohio's roadways through rider education, public information campaigns and licensing improvement.

### **UTILITIES**

The Ohio Attorney General's Office says auditors hired by the Public Utilities Commission of Ohio (PUCO) to probe invalidated FirstEnergy charges provided the commission no "updates" of their interim summary during a six-month contract period. The AG says the Office of Ohio Consumers' Counsel's (OCC) request for the never-released audit and/or related communiques between FirstEnergy, the auditor and PUCO is therefore pointless. OCC had asked PUCO for Oxford Advisors' final audit report and related communications in October after an undated text from former FirstEnergy CEO Chuck Jones surfaced indicating commission staff had begun to question Randazzo's treatment of the utility. Led by Randazzo, Commissioners Beth Trombold, Lawrence Friedeman, Daniel Conway and Dennis Deters followed by dismissing the audit case without a final report after the Ohio Supreme Court overturned FirstEnergy charges.

## **WORKERS' COMPENSATION**

The Ohio Bureau of Workers' Compensation's (BWC) investment portfolio was valued at \$22.37 billion as of June 30, down from \$25.89 billion on June 30, 2020, according to BWC's FY21 annual investment report. "This [\$3.52 billion] decrease was largely the result of pandemic-related special dividends distributed to eligible employers totaling approximately \$6.2 billion during October-December 2020," says the report, which was approved by the BWC Board of Directors on Friday. "The BWC investment portfolio had a FY21 total return (net of management fees) of 15.2 percent and net investment income of \$3.46 billion," the report says.

During her remarks to the board, BWC Administrator/CEO Stephanie McCloud said after meeting with union and management representatives, the agency set a "return to office" date of Monday, Jan. 3, 2022.

actionTRACK - Hannah News Service, Inc.  
[www.CHWadvisors.com](http://www.CHWadvisors.com)