

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)

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

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 - 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**

11/17/2021 - Senate Small Business and Economic Opportunity, (First Hearing)

Friday, Nov. 12, 2021

ADDICTION/SUBSTANCE ABUSE

Gov. Mike DeWine Friday announced his five appointments of Tom Gregoire, Lawrence "Larry" Kidd, Jane Portman, Christopher Smitherman and John Tharp to the OneOhio Recovery Foundation Board and his appointment of Lovell Custard and Deb Flores to the foundation's expert panel. The foundation will soon be established to distribute a portion of the settlement funds from the drug manufacturers and distributors of opioids to communities in Ohio. The governor's office worked with the Ohio Attorney General's Office and Ohio's local community leaders to create the OneOhio plan to jointly approach settlement negotiations with the drug manufacturers and distributors of opioids. DeWine's office said OneOhio ensures a settlement recognizing that every corner of the state has been hit hard by the crisis and outlines how the funds can be used. To launch the work of the OneOhio Recovery Foundation, 55 percent of all Ohio settlement dollars will go directly to the foundation for addiction abatement and to promote mental wellness, DeWine's office said.

AGING

Nominations are now being accepted through Friday, Nov. 19 by the Ohio Association of Gerontology and Education (OAGE) for its Practitioner of the Year Award. Presented annually with the support of the Ohio Department of Aging, the award recognizes individuals and organizations that either have improved services to older adults through research and evaluation or have developed noteworthy partnerships with institutions of higher learning (e.g., universities, community colleges, technical schools) for the betterment of Ohio's elders. Nominations can be submitted via the OAGE website at <http://oage.org/practitioner-of-year/>.

The Ohio Department of Aging (ODA) recently awarded more than \$5.3 million in Coronavirus Relief Funds to 53 senior centers and 22 adult day services providers to support nutrition services, including home-delivered and congregate meals. The funds are intended to assist with the safe re-opening and operation of meal programs, including costs associated with COVID-19 cleaning and sanitation supplies, personal protective equipment, emergency preparedness procedures and protocols, preparation supplies, technology solutions, and other expenses.

ATTORNEY GENERAL

The U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) does not have the authority to require private businesses to implement COVID-19 vaccination or weekly testing requirements, according to a lawsuit filed by Attorney General Dave Yost on Friday. Yost and six other attorneys general filed the lawsuit in the U.S. Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals, and are asking the court to block implementation of the OSHA rule while the case is litigated. President Joe Biden announced the vaccine/testing mandate for large businesses in September, and OSHA issued the emergency rule on Thursday, Nov. 4. Yost announced a separate lawsuit to block the vaccine/testing rule for federal contractors on Nov. 4.

FY22-23 BUDGET

Tax collections exceeded forecasts by almost \$127 million or 6.2 percent in October, as all major sources beat forecasts, according to preliminary figures from the Ohio Office of Budget and Management (OBM). Sales tax collections were up \$58 million or 5.8 percent, mostly from a 6.6 percent or \$56.2 million overage in the non-auto sales tax, plus a 1.2 percent, \$1.7 million bump for the auto sales tax. For the fiscal year so far, sales taxes are \$58.1 million or 1.4 percent ahead of estimates.

BUSINESS/CORPORATE

Lordstown Motors Corporation (LMC) and Hon Hai Technology Group, known as Foxconn, announced Wednesday that they had entered a definitive agreement building on their prior agreement in principle. The new Asset Purchase Agreement implements the prior terms. LMC is selling its facility -- excluding certain assets such as the hub motor assembly line and battery module and pack lines -- to Foxconn for \$230 million, with a \$100 million down payment by Thursday, Nov. 18. Subsequent \$50 million payments will be made on Feb. 1, 2022 and no later than April 15, 2022, with the balance of the purchase price paid at closing.

CITIES

Two of Ohio's three largest cities will have new mayors after the Nov. 2 election, with Aftab Pureval winning the job in Cincinnati and Justin Bibb winning Cleveland mayor. Neither race had an incumbent as Cincinnati Mayor John Cranley was term-limited and is running for governor, and Cleveland Mayor Frank Jackson chose not to run again. Other mayoral races on the ballot will also see fresh faces, including former Sen. Peggy Lehner, who was unopposed for mayor of Kettering. Cleveland Heights will have its first mayor ever in Kahlil Seren after the city switched from a council-manager form of government to a mayor-council. In Lima, Democrat Sharetta Smith will be the city's first woman and first Black to be mayor. She succeeds David Berger, who has been mayor of the city since 1989. In Dayton, two-term City Commissioner Jeffery Mims Jr. will succeed Mayor Nan Whaley, who is running for governor. Mitch Rhodus will also take over as Fairfield mayor after his win Tuesday. Other mayoral races saw incumbents easily win re-election. They include Toledo Mayor Wade Kapszukiewicz, Youngstown Mayor Jamael Tito Brown, Hamilton Mayor Pat Moehler, and Don Walters in Cuyahoga Falls.

CORONAVIRUS

The Ohio Department of Health (ODH) reported nearly 5,000 new COVID-19 cases Thursday, Nov. 11 at 4,994, following 5,527 on Wednesday and 4,952 on Tuesday. There were also 190 hospitalizations and 17 intensive care unit (ICU) admissions Thursday. The month has already seen seven days where at least 4,000 new cases were reported, with over 45,000 in total. The state's total number throughout the pandemic is now nearly 1.6 million cases. The latest 21-day averages include 3,763 cases, 176 hospitalizations and 18 ICU admissions.

CRIME AND PUNISHMENT

Gov. Mike DeWine Tuesday announced he was expanding his Governor's Expedited Pardon Project, which eliminates administrative hurdles and provides free one-on-one help for qualified citizens seeking legal absolution for past criminal offenses. The governor first launched the initiative in 2019 in partnership with the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction (DRC), the Ohio State University Moritz College of Law and the University of Akron School of Law to fast-track the pardon applications of specific candidates who have become law-abiding and contributing members of society. At the time, he said the goal was to help "worthy Ohioans" to move beyond their criminal past. According to the governor's office, the latest expansion of the program enlists new law partners to reach more potential pardon candidates and to help guide candidates through the pardon process. The new partners include Cleveland State University Cleveland-Marshall College of Law, University of Dayton School of Law, and Ohio Justice & Policy Center in partnership with the University of Cincinnati College of Law.

DEATH PENALTY

The Ohio Prosecuting Attorneys Association (OPAA) and two member counties told legislators Wednesday the state is sliding down a "slippery slope" to even consider a repeal of the death penalty with aggravated murders on the rise, abolitionists purportedly eyeing a similar attack on life in prison without parole, and Ohio voters allegedly in support of capital punishment for the "worst of the worst." OPAA Executive Director Lou Tobin and Cuyahoga and Trumbull counties' prosecuting attorneys offices voiced strong opposition in the third hearing on HB183 (Schmidt), which would replace Ohio's death penalty going forward with life without parole (LWOP) but provide no immediate relief for inmates already on Death Row.

ECONOMY

The nation added 531,000 nonfarm payroll jobs in October and the national unemployment rate edged down 0.2 percent to 4.6 percent, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) said Friday, with job gains occurring in the leisure and hospitality, professional and business services, manufacturing, and transportation and warehousing sectors. Jobs fell in education. According to BLS, the number of unemployed persons, at 7.4 million, continued to trend down. Both measures are down considerably from their highs at the end of the February-April 2020 recession. However, they remain above their levels prior to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic (3.5 percent and 5.7 million, respectively, in February 2020).

BLS said that among the major worker groups, the unemployment rate for adult men (4.3 percent) declined in October. The jobless rates for adult women (4.4 percent), teenagers (11.9 percent), Whites (4.0 percent), Blacks (7.9 percent), Asians (4.2 percent), and Hispanics (5.9 percent) showed little or no change over the month.

EDUCATION

The Ohio School Boards Association (OSBA) returned to the Greater Columbus Convention Center this week for its annual Capital Conference, which featured learning sessions, nationally known speakers, a Student Achievement Fair and trade show with nearly 500 exhibitors. The association expected attendance of more than 6,000. Its Delegate Assembly was expected to consider an amendment to the organization's constitution to remove the ability for the six largest districts by enrollment to appoint trustees to the association's board directly, and for more populous regions to get additional at-large appointees. Cambridge City Schools officials proposed the change, saying the current structure has left Southeast Ohio under-represented in the association.

Interim State Superintendent Stephanie Siddens assured attendees at the OSBA Capital Conference that the Ohio Department of Education (ODE) is well equipped to handle pandemic-related education challenges amid a number of leadership transitions at the department. Siddens took over the role of interim state superintendent in early October after her predecessor John Richard announced his resignation from ODE shortly after the retirement of former State Superintendent Paolo DeMaria. Siddens told *Hannah News* Monday after her address that there were no updates on the search for a permanent state superintendent but said the subject will be discussed at the upcoming State Board of Education (SBOE) meeting scheduled for Monday, Nov. 15 and continuing Tuesday, Nov. 16. She said she didn't think the recent resignations of former SBOE President Laura Kohler and SBOE member Eric Poklar, both appointed members, would have any effect on the board's search for a permanent replacement to DeMaria.

While many have attributed the school bus driver shortage directly to the pandemic, a pair of industry insiders say the problem is actually years in the making and may reflect the changing labor market across the U.S. At this year's OSBA Capital Conference, David Oglesby, who serves as the assistant supervisor of transportation at Kettering City Schools, and Randy Snyder, transportation manager at Westerville City Schools, took a deep dive into the root cause of the bus driver shortage plaguing Ohio, discussing the results of a recent survey of districts across the state.

At his annual school funding overview for the OSBA Capital Conference, economist Howard Fleeter said delayed state payment reports expected in December will shed light on how the new K-12 formula is actually working and expressed worry that substantial income tax cuts in the recent operating budget could provide a pretense to avoid following through on the phase-in of that formula.

Fleeter tempered that forecast later, saying he'd expect significant blowback if the Senate tries not to follow through with the new Cupp-Patterson formula, aka the Fair School Funding Plan, in the next biennium. While the House spent three years advancing the plan championed by Speaker Bob Cupp (R-Lima), the Senate was more hesitant to embrace it.

Delegates to the Ohio School Boards Association (OSBA) Delegate Assembly this week elected Christine Varwig, a member of the Toledo City Schools Board of Education, as president-elect, meaning she will take over as president in 2023. The president-elect's duties include serving on OSBA's Board of Trustees and Executive Committee, and chairing the Legislative Platform Committee and Federal Relations Network, according to OSBA.

The Ohio Department of Administrative Services (DAS) announced Monday that it has worked with the Ohio Department of Health (ODH) to ship nearly 20 million personal protective equipment (PPE) items to Ohio schools since the beginning of the academic year, as part of efforts supporting in-person learning.

Supplies have gone to all 51 educational service centers (ESCs), and include almost 11.4 million masks, 8.24 million gloves, 65,000 gowns, 14,360 face shields and 720 gallons of hand sanitizer. ODH recently updated its guidance on out-of-school quarantine as well.

The House Primary and Secondary Education Committee unanimously approved a bill providing schools continued latitude to deal with the repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic Wednesday after adopting a handful of amendments. Among those final changes to SB229 (Blessing) were one Chair Gayle Manning (R-North Ridgeville) previewed during Tuesday's hearing, calling for school districts to consult with parents on the decision of a principal and reading teacher as to whether a student should be retained under the third grade reading guarantee. The legislation already contained a provision stating students should not be retained under the reading guarantee based on test scores alone, extending flexibility previously granted in 133-HB409 (Koehler).

Students from the Wildlife and Sustainability Career Technical program at the Aerospace and Natural Science Academy of Toledo helped restore a wetland through the new H2Ohio Students Take Action Program. Over the past year, in collaboration with Metroparks Toledo and MAD Scientist Associates, the Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR) led students from two 10th grade classes on virtual field trips. They learned about the H2Ohio initiative, and specifically the wetland habitat restoration at Oak Openings Preserve Wetland Restoration.

ODE announced that the public comment period for the Alternate Assessment Participation waiver is now open through Monday, Nov. 15. ODE explained the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) requires states to ensure that the total number of students assessed in each subject using the Alternate Assessment for Students with the Most Significant Cognitive Disabilities (AASCD) does not exceed one percent of the total number of all students in the state who took Ohio's state tests. States that anticipate exceeding one percent in alternate assessment participation must submit a waiver request to the U.S. Department of Education 90 days before the beginning of the alternate assessment testing window.

ELECTIONS

The General Assembly should not pass Republican-sponsored voting restriction legislation HB387 (Dean), Secretary of State Frank LaRose said Monday. "There are hundreds of bills introduced every year, and most of them get one hearing and then never go anywhere, and die at the end of the General Assembly. I anticipate that's what happens to this," LaRose, a Republican, told League of Women Voters of Ohio (LWVO) Executive Director Jen Miller during a Zoom event hosted by the voting advocacy organization.

ELECTIONS 2022

Rep. David Leland (D-Columbus) announced on social media that he will be running for the Ohio 10th District Court of Appeals in 2022. Leland, who is term-limited next year, posted his campaign announcement on Twitter, along with a link to his campaign website.

Conservative activist and attorney Scott Pullins announced that he is exploring a run for the Ohio House next year, eyeing the new 98th District created by the Ohio Redistricting Commission. However, that map is currently the subject of litigation. If approved by the Ohio Supreme Court, the 98th District would cover all of Knox County and parts of Morrow and Holmes counties.

Democratic gubernatorial candidate Nan Whaley announced Thursday that her administration would build 15 new veterans homes with 1,000 new beds and create a platform helping new veterans re-enter civilian life, as part of efforts to address veteran homelessness and addiction. The state would establish "OhioVetsConnect" as "a centralized, one-stop online portal for veterans to access and secure services including health care, jobs, training, education and benefits." Her administration would also create the OhioVetsCorps as a mentorship and navigator network.

ENERGY

The Ohio Air Quality Development Authority (OAQDA) has approved up to \$215 million in bond financing for a solar project in Northwest Ohio. Aurora Solar LLC's Powell Creek Solar Project in Putnam County will use the funding to assist with the installation of a large solar electric system in Palmer and Liberty townships, according to OAQDA.

ENVIRONMENT

The Ohio Environmental Protection Agency (Ohio EPA) has released its draft 2022 program management plan for the Water Pollution Control Loan Fund (WPCLF). The agency has scheduled a public hearing on Thursday, Dec. 2 to discuss the plan. Participants can attend the 11 a.m. hearing in person or virtually. Those attending virtually must register in advance for the meeting at

<https://tinyurl.com/3wfh89>. During the hearing, the public can submit comments on the record about the proposed plan.

FEDERAL

White House officials and U.S. Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg provided an overview Monday of spending priorities in the infrastructure funding deal approved by Congress over the weekend, noting the substantial sums for roads and bridges are accompanied by money for everything from lead water line replacement to orphan well plugging to cybersecurity response to transit to electric vehicle charging, resiliency in response to climate change and more. Ohio elected officials noted the bill's potential to address the aging Brent Spence Bridge, a major interstate link between Cincinnati and Northern Kentucky, among other benefits. The deal includes \$1.2 trillion in total spending. Both U.S. Sen. Sherrod Brown (D-OH) and Rob Portman (R-OH) noted inclusion of details from the bipartisan Bridge Investment Act, with \$12.5 billion in competitive grants for projects that improve bridge conditions and the safety, efficiency and reliability of moving people and freight.

GENERAL ASSEMBLY/STATEHOUSE

The Finance Committee of the Broadcast Educational Media Commission (BEMC) voted this week to recommend to the full commission a capital budget project list that includes more than \$1 million for a major update to audio equipment throughout the Statehouse. "If there's anything related to audio in the Statehouse, this proposal will replace every piece. Some of those pieces have been there pressing 25 years, since the last major improvement was done in the mid-1990s," Geoffrey Phillips, executive director of the commission, told *Hannah News*. The request dovetails with major renovation efforts the Capital Square Review and Advisory Board (CSRAB) is looking to undertake. The board approved the largest capital budget request since the 1990s Statehouse restoration last month.

A disagreement involving Toledo-area transit prompted the Senate Wednesday to reject House amendments to a tax policy omnibus, SB19 (Schaffer). Originally written to specify that sites owned by conservation organizations and protected by conservation easements are not subject to property taxes, sponsor Sen. Tim Schaffer (R-Lancaster) said he agreed with most of the numerous other tax policy provisions the House attached to it, including elimination of redundant paperwork for charter schools, clarification of exemptions for fraternal organizations and a study of properties receiving more than one homestead exemption. But one affecting the Toledo Area Regional Transit Authority (TARTA) generated too much concern for the chamber to go along, he said.

Also Wednesday, the upper chamber passed legislation allowing government agencies to use blockchain technology, HB177 (Carfagna-Fraizer), on a 33-0 vote. In addition, the Senate passed another in a line of several interstate licensing compact bills to win approval recently, approving SB204 (Roegner), to have Ohio join the Counseling Compact. The bill passed 33-0. Finally, the Senate unanimously approved SB231 (Hottinger), which allows the assigned fiduciary of a deceased person to receive that person's tax refunds. Sen. Jay Hottinger (R-Newark) said state law accounts for filing of returns on behalf of a deceased person, but not refunds.

Six more state agencies and licensing boards appeared before the House State and Local Government Committee Wednesday as the committee continues its review of licensing boards. The boards that testified Wednesday were the State Fire Marshal, the Ohio Board of Nursing, the Ohio Department of Aging, the Ohio State Board of Pharmacy, the Ohio Speech and Hearing Professional Board, and the Board of Psychology.

In other action, the Senate Judiciary Committee reported out SB210 (Gavarone) which deals with spouses' legal relations; the House Criminal Justice Committee reported out HB109 (Abrams-Carruthers) which allows peace officers to sue persons injuring them in a riot; HB116 (Baldrige) which enacts the Ohio Computer Crimes Act; and HB99 (Hall) which addresses armed persons in school safety zones; the House Public Utilities Committee reported out HB381 (Grendell) which addresses electric charges; the Senate Insurance Committee reported out HB188 (Lampton-Cross) which addresses discrimination against living organ donors; and the Senate Small Business and Economic Opportunity Committee reported out HB215 (Wilkin) which enacts the Business Fairness Act.

GOVERNOR

Gov. Mike DeWine's office announced Monday that he signed HB172 (Baldrige-O'Brien) which revises the state's fireworks laws. DeWine said that HB172 "is a better bill than SB113 [Rulli], which was the original fireworks bill that I vetoed. Because it was clear to me that the Legislature would have overridden my veto, making SB113 the law, I worked with the General Assembly to arrive at a compromise that included changes I wanted to see in the legislation." Because it included an emergency clause, HB172 went into effect immediately on the governor's signature.

The governor also signed sub HB228 (Roemer) which deals state-administered municipal net profit taxes. HB228 becomes effective in 90 days.

GREAT LAKES

The harmful algal bloom (HAB) that formed on Lake Erie in 2021 was twice as severe as forecasters predicted, according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). The 2021 bloom had a severity index of 6.0, which is considered "moderately severe," NOAA lead Lake Erie HAB scientist

Richard Stumpf and other scientists wrote in the agency's final seasonal assessment of Lake Erie's toxic algae situation. In June, scientists predicted a HAB with a severity index of 3.0 out of 10 on the severity index.

HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

The State Medical Board of Ohio (SMBO) will continue its pandemic policy of allowing broad use of telemedicine until at least Thursday, March 31, 2022. The telehealth policy applies to Ohio Medical Marijuana Control Program (MMCP) patients, as well as other patients who are usually required to utilize in-person visits.

HIGHER EDUCATION

A new partnership between the city of Columbus, Columbus State Community College (CSCC), Columbus City Schools and the education nonprofit I Know I Can will offer tuition-free education at CSCC to graduates of Columbus City Schools. The Columbus Promise was based on a national model used in other cities and states. Students who graduate from Columbus City Schools during phase one of the program (classes of 2022, 2023, and 2024) and complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and an application to Columbus State can attend Columbus State full-time or part-time for up to six semesters to complete a two-year degree or shorter certificate program.

JUDICIAL

Chief Justice Maureen O'Connor says the Ohio Supreme Court's bar ceremony will remain a virtual affair, at least for the immediate future. The latest crop of aspiring lawyers participated in a cyber-ceremony on Monday when O'Connor welcomed bar applicants and their families from the Ohio Judicial Center courtroom and Justice Patrick Fischer delivered the remote keynote address.

The Office of the State Long-Term Care Ombudsman recently presented its Excellent Advocate Award to the Honorable Dixie Park of Canton. According to the ombudsman's office, "Judge Park ensures that individuals served by Stark County's Probate Court have a voice for their rights, independence, and dignity. She also ensures that guardians in her county are held to high ethical standards."

Tiffin-Fostoria Municipal Court Judge Mark Repp will serve a one-year suspension from office without pay after the Ohio Supreme Court Tuesday upheld the Board of Professional Conduct's finding that the 19-year veteran of the court had violated the Ohio Rules of Professional Conduct and three sections of the Rules of Judicial Conduct in a single day.

MARIJUANA/HEMP

Doctors participating in the Ohio Medical Marijuana Control Program (MMCP) would be authorized to recommend marijuana for any condition if they expect the drug will relieve symptoms or otherwise benefit a patient, under SB261, introduced by Sen. Steve Huffman (R-Tipp City) and Senate Minority Leader Kenny Yuko (D-Richmond Heights) on Tuesday. The bill also specifically adds autism spectrum disorder, opioid use disorder, arthritis and migraines to the list of qualifying conditions under the MMCP.

MEDICAID/MEDICAID REFORM

A Franklin County judge Tuesday granted the Ohio Department of Medicaid's (ODM) request to dismiss the lawsuit filed by Paramount Advantage over its exclusion from the list of winners of a new round of Medicaid managed care contracts. Common Pleas Judge Julie Lynch made a verbal ruling from the bench granting the motion to dismiss, her office confirmed. Paramount left open the possibility of an appeal in a statement.

MENTAL HEALTH

The stigma associated with addiction and mental illness is cruel, misinformed and discourages individuals from seeking help, according to the DeWine administration and mental health advocates. Gov. Mike DeWine, Ohio Opioid Education Alliance (OOEA) leader and Nationwide Foundation President Chad Jester, RecoveryOhio Executive Director Alisha Nelson, Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (OhioMHAS) Director Lori Criss and others announced Wednesday that their new "Beat the Stigma" public service announcement (PSA) campaign will begin running next week on broadcast television, streaming services, radio, outdoor advertising and digital and social media. It also will engage communities across Ohio through grassroots activities.

NATURAL RESOURCES

The Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR) is inviting families to gather at Ohio State Parks Lodges to enjoy a delicious Thanksgiving feast on Thursday, Nov. 25. "Leave the Thanksgiving cooking and cleanup to us!" ODNR said. Reservations can be made by contacting the state park lodges directly.

PENSIONS

Attorney General Dave Yost Thursday said he has joined a coalition of seven attorneys general in an amicus brief filed before the U.S. Supreme Court which argues the rights of former Delphi Corporation employees were violated when the corporation's bankruptcy resulted in termination of their pensions. "It's an upside-down world when criminals get their day in court, but these hard-working, taxpaying citizens are denied that right," Yost said. "These Delphi retirees are entitled to due process."

PUBLIC SAFETY

The Ohio Attorney General's Office is recognizing Great Oaks Police Academy as only the second peace officer training center in the state to receive exemplary STAR certification. Attorney General Dave Yost visited the Cincinnati area Monday to honor Great Oaks as a STAR Academy, a designation requiring at least a dozen additional criteria beyond the 737 hours of instruction required by the Ohio Peace Officer Training Commission (OPOTC) for basic certification and licensing.

REDISTRICTING/REAPPORTIONMENT

The failures of bipartisan redistricting panels in Ohio and Virginia -- both of which included elected officials -- are further evidence that independent state commissions should be implemented across the country, according to Democratic redistricting expert Jeffrey Wice. "Redistricting is often called the 'bloodsport' of American politics, and we're not ever going to really take the politics out of the process unless you go the route of what California has done, and Arizona, to create completely independent redistricting committees outside of the legislature," Wice said during the recent National Conference of State Legislatures' (NCSL) annual meeting in Tampa, FL.

In filings made in three lawsuits challenging the new Ohio House and Senate maps drawn by the Ohio Redistricting Commission, the members of the commission argue that Article XI, Section 6 of the Ohio Constitution is "aspirational" and left up to interpretation by the commission. All three lawsuits filed in the Ohio Supreme Court against the maps put Section 6 at the center of their arguments as to why the maps are unconstitutional. The section requires that the commission attempt to draw maps where the statewide proportion of districts correspond closely to the statewide preferences of the voters of Ohio. In a filing made by Senate President Matt Huffman (R-Lima) and House Speaker Bob Cupp (R-Lima), the two argue that the section is not actionable in court. They note the word "attempt" in the section is not defined, nor is it defined anywhere else in Article XI, and point to Court precedent that states if a word is not defined in the Ohio Constitution, courts must imbue the word with its common, ordinary meaning.

House Democrats on Friday released a draft map of congressional districts they say is a "more realistic vision" for Ohio compared to the House and Senate Republican maps discussed during committee hearings this week. "Ohioans are right to be angry that Republicans are again trying to gerrymander the state with their 13-2 partisan maps," House Minority Leader Emilia Sykes (D-Akron) said. "House Democrats have a plan that keeps our largest communities together, has compact district lines and ensures that communities that live, work and play together remain together," Sykes continued. "Ours is a good faith attempt to deliver the fair map voters demanded of us, and a realistic starting point to get to a 10-year map."

The Joint Congressional Redistricting Committee began its work on new congressional maps by scheduling hearings on Wednesday and Friday, even as each chamber continues its own hearings on separate redistricting proposals. Members of the joint committee include Sen. Theresa Gavarone (R-Bowling Green) and Rep. Shane Wilkin (R-Hillsboro) as co-chairs, and Sens. Robert McColley (R-Napoleon) and Sen. Vern Sykes (D-Akron), and Reps. Scott Oelslager (R-North Canton) and Beth Liston (D-Dublin) as members. The joint committee is hearing all four bills: SB258 (McColley), SB237 (Yuko-Sykes), HB479 (Oelslager) and HB483 (Brown-Galonski). Saying they wanted to address Republican concerns over equal population, Senate Minority Leader Kenny Yuko (D-Richmond Heights) and Sykes presented a new SB237 to the Joint Committee on Redistricting during the committee's first hearing Wednesday even though it had not yet been officially amended by the Senate Local Government and Elections Committee.

Meanwhile, the Senate Local Government and Elections Monday continued to hear opponent testimony to a plan introduced by Senate Republicans -- SB258 (McColley). A plan introduced by Senate Democrats -- SB237 (Yuko-Sykes) -- was also amended by sponsor Sen. Vern Sykes (D-Akron) to reflect changes the sponsors spoke to last week. The public flogging of SB258 continued on Tuesday as lawmakers held their fourth hearing on the bill. The committee also held its fourth hearing on SB237 but no in-person witnesses testified on the Senate Democratic Caucus' plan.

The House Republican Caucus' plan for congressional districts was created out of "fear," former Ohio Democratic Party (ODP) Chair David Pepper told the House Government Oversight Committee on Wednesday. Pepper's opponent testimony on HB479 (Oelslager) largely focused on the proposed districts for Hamilton County, with the former Cincinnati City Council member specifically accusing U.S. Rep. Steve Chabot (R-Cincinnati) of meddling in the map drawing process.

SECRETARY OF STATE

Secretary of State Frank LaRose Tuesday used the meeting of his Ready for November Task Force to highlight Ohio's audit procedures after elections while calling those audits performed outside of the purview of governmental entities "problematic." With this year's General Election occurring a week ago, LaRose said he wants to use the task force meetings to educate the public not only about how elections officials prepare for the election, but the work they do after the election. He said the weeks after the election are some of the busiest times. He is also using the task force as a platform to highlight how Ohio's elections are secure. The calls for post-election audits have been increasing over the last year.

STATE GOVERNMENT

Monday's Controlling Board saw all items still on the agenda approved, following deferral of three items by agency request. Four items were held for questions and then approved without objection. Among those receiving questions was an Ohio Department of Health (ODH) request for an increase in appropriation authority to spend \$9.7 million from federal funds regarding the pandemic. The request was amended Monday to reduce the overall appropriation increase and make a "minor change to the scope," according to Controlling Board President W. Fletch Zimpher.

The Ohio Department of Development earlier this year awarded \$35,863,038 in Ohio Historic Preservation Tax Credits for the rehabilitation of 31 historic buildings, the agency said. Together, the projects are expected to leverage \$368 million in private investments in 13 communities, including two communities new to the program: New Lexington and Van Wert.

STUDIES/POLLS

Ohio ranks ninth among the "Most Charitable States for 2022," in a report by the personal finance site WalletHub. The Buckeye State also saw an 11th place ranking in "Volunteering and Service" and 16th in "Charitable Giving." State rankings were developed through

"19 key indicators of charitable behavior." The report found Americans donated over \$471 billion in 2020, up 5.1 percent from 2019. It also explored the challenges charities faced during the pandemic. The top 10 states included Utah, Maryland, Minnesota, Oregon, North Dakota, Pennsylvania, Virginia and Colorado at first through eighth, with Georgia ranked 10th. Ranks for Ohio's other neighbors included Indiana, 31st; Kentucky, 33rd; Michigan, 40th; and West Virginia, 45th.

TELECOMMUNICATIONS

The Department of Development (DOD) decided Monday to re-file a rule addressing non-compliant grantees in the state's new broadband expansion program, shortly before it was considered by the Joint Committee on Agency Rule Review (JCARR). Lawmakers created a program to fund expansion of broadband into unserved and underserved areas earlier this year in HB2 (Carfagna-Stewart).

TREASURER OF STATE

Noting that November is National Adoption Month, Ohio Treasurer Robert Sprague launched a program Monday, "Family Forward," to help families manage the high costs associated with the adoption process, which can range from \$10,000 to over \$50,000. Family Forward, a linked deposit program administered by the treasurer's office, can provide reduced interest loans for qualified adoption expenses up to \$50,000. Applicants will work with lending institutions to apply for the program, and once a loan is approved the treasurer's office will deposit funds with the institution at a below market rate. The interest savings will then be passed on to the borrowers. Rep. Jon Cross (R-Kenton) also praised the announcement as the program was established through his 133-HB405.

UNEMPLOYMENT COMPENSATION

The Ohio Supreme Court decided 4-2 Tuesday to accept an appeal filed by the state in a case over Gov. Mike DeWine's decision to cut off pandemic-era unemployment compensation supplements earlier than they would have otherwise expired. DeWine in June halted the extra \$300 payments to jobless workers under the Federal Pandemic Unemployment Compensation (FPUC) program, heeding calls from business groups who argued they were keeping people out of the workforce. The payments were due to expire in September. Former Attorney General Marc Dann sued on behalf of workers receiving the payments, citing state law that requires the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS) to seek "all advantages available" from the federal government on unemployment.

For the week ending Nov. 6, the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS) reported 11,232 initial traditional unemployment claims to the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL). That number is higher than last week, when the state reported 7,375 traditional jobless claims. Ohioans filed 43,713 continued traditional unemployment claims last week, which was 3,663 more than the previous week, according to ODJFS.

UTILITIES

The Office of Ohio Consumers' Counsel (OCC) and Northeast Ohio Public Energy Council (NOPEC) say HB317 (Wilkin) is not the reform-minded utility bill ratepayers deserve but instead a transparent repackaging of a 13-year-old ratemaking scheme that has piled ever-increasing distribution charges on Ohioans. Consumers' Counsel Bruce Weston and NOPEC CEO Chuck Keiper wrote Chairman Jim Hoops (R-Napoleon) and other members of the House Public Utilities Committee to request major changes to HB317 and to commend a couple of bright spots in the bill.

VETERANS

Wounded military service members from across the country will get specialized care at the new Military Medicine Program at the Ohio State University (OSU) Wexner Medical Center and College of Medicine. The program features a team of advanced reconstructive surgeons, military specialists and rehabilitation experts to help treat severely injured military members. Increasingly, the university explained, troops have suffered severe injuries from improvised explosive devices (IEDs) that shatter bones, tear limbs and damage muscles and nerves. Survivors often suffer from uniquely debilitating wounds that can require a lifetime of physical and mental care.

WORKFORCE

Gov. Mike DeWine, Lt. Gov. Jon Husted and JobsOhio President J.P. Nauseef offered an update Monday on the Cleveland Innovation District -- the second of three so far in Ohio -- nine months after it was first announced. The project is expected to generate 20,000 jobs in the next 10 years and create an economic impact of \$3 billion. "The Cleveland Innovation District will play an essential role in attracting and retaining STEM graduates who will make Ohio a global leader in developing life-saving research and treatments worldwide," DeWine said.