

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

4/28/2021 - Referred to Committee Senate Ways and Means

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

6/10/2021 - **SUBSTITUTE BILL ACCEPTED**, House Criminal Justice, (Second 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

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

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

SB18 INTERNAL REVENUE CODE *(ROEGNER K, SCHAFFER T)*

To expressly incorporate changes in the Internal Revenue Code since March 27, 2020, into Ohio law, to exclude certain loan amounts forgiven under federal law from the commercial activity tax, to authorize a commercial activity tax exclusion for Bureau of Workers' Compensation dividends paid to employers, and to declare an emergency.

CURRENT STATUS

3/31/2021 - **SIGNED BY GOVERNOR**; eff. immediately

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

6/22/2021 - House Civil Justice, (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

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

4/21/2021 - Referred to Committee Senate Finance

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

7/13/2021 - Introduced

🔄 Week in Review

Friday, Aug. 20, 2021

ARTS, SPORTS AND ENTERTAINMENT

At least five Ohio athletes brought medals home from the Tokyo Olympic Games this summer. The most successful Ohioans were Katie Nageotte of Olmstead Falls who won a gold medal in women's pole vault and Hunter Armstrong of Dover who won a gold medal as part of the 4x100 men's medley relay team. Joe Kovacs of Columbus was one of two Ohioans winning a silver medal, bringing home the hardware in men's shot put. He came in just behind his Team USA teammate, Ryan Crouser. Duke Ragan of Linn was the other silver-medal winner, taking second place in men's featherweight boxing. Ragan is the first U.S. professional boxer to win a medal at the Olympic Games, according to Team USA. Oshae Jones of Toledo won a bronze medal in women's welterweight boxing, becoming the first female welterweight Olympic medalist for Team USA.

According to Team USA's website, six Ohioans will compete in the Paralympic Games, which begin on Tuesday Aug. 24 and end on Sunday, Sept. 5. They include Brittni Mason, track and field; Grace Norman, paratriathlon; Jenna Fesemyer, track and field; Mindy Cook, goalball; Steven Haxton, paracanoe and rowing; and Taylor Farmer, shooting.

ATTORNEY GENERAL

On Thursday, Aug. 19, a day before the Friday, Aug. 20 deadline set by Attorney General Dave Yost for local entities to join a nearly \$1 billion proposed settlement agreement with three opioid distributors, his office said nearly all have done so. According to his office, 142 of the 143 litigating political subdivisions in Ohio have signed on to the settlement, known as the OneOhio agreement. The only litigant which has not signed on is Scioto County. Yost announced the framework of the settlement with the three largest opioid distributors -- Cardinal Health, McKesson, and AmerisourceBergen -- in July, with a provision requiring at least 95 percent of the litigating entities in Ohio to join in order for it to move forward. That target had been met earlier in the week.

Franklin County Court of Common Pleas Judge Chris Brown granted the state's motion to freeze former Public Utilities Commission of Ohio (PUCO) Chair Sam Randazzo's assets as federal prosecutors continue their investigation into the 133-HB6 (Callender-Wilkin) corruption scheme. Brown granted the motion based on alleged criminal conduct and the fact that Randazzo was giving away and liquidating property, according to Attorney General Dave Yost's office. The order allows for the seizure of up to \$8 million in assets from Randazzo. However, Randazzo answered the judicial hold on personal retirement accounts and Social Security benefits in a 32-page brief in a lower court filing accusing Yost of abandoning his previous agreement to stay the state's 133-HB6 (Callender-Wilkin) lawsuit while the U.S. Attorney pursues criminal charges against former House Speaker Larry Householder and others.

FY22-23 BUDGET

Legislative, executive and advocacy leaders unpacked details of the recently adopted state budget Wednesday in a Columbus Metropolitan Club forum where they debated whether the spending plan meets the moment and properly prioritizes the needs of Ohioans. The panel included House Minority Leader Emilia Sykes (D-Akron), Senate President Pro Tem Jay Hottinger (R-Newark), Office of Budget and Management (OBM) Director Kim Murnieks and Executive Director Hannah Halbert of Policy Matters Ohio. Much of the discussion focused on the familiar debate about whether continued income tax cuts -- a primarily 3 percent across the board in HB110 (Oelslager), plus elimination of another bracket and an increase to the earnings threshold for paying income tax in the first place -- boost economic growth or squander revenue needed for public services.

CHILDREN/FAMILIES

Advocates say that the expanded Child Tax Credit (CTC) is already benefiting American families and could potentially reduce the number of children living in poverty in the U.S. by half, but the federal program is not without barriers to access. First enacted in 1997, the Child Tax Credit allowed eligible parents and caregivers to make a claim when they filed their taxes. The American Rescue Plan (ARP), signed into law in March 2021, made the CTC available to more children and their families. The ARP did away with an earnings requirement that extended eligibility to 23 million children who previously did not qualify because their families made too little. The expanded CTC also boosted the total cash benefit to \$3,600 per child for children ages zero to 6 and \$3,000 for children ages 6 to 17 -- up from a maximum of \$2,000 per child. The CTC is available to families making up to \$75,000 per year for single filers, \$112,500 per year for heads of household, and \$150,000 for married couples filing jointly.

The Children's Defense Fund-Ohio has released the 2021 KIDS COUNT County Profiles featuring 16 indicators of child wellbeing across five different "domains" -- health care, safety, homes and communities, finance and education. "These profiles offer a comprehensive snapshot of state, county, and school district level data, and they give unique insight into areas of opportunity where fiscal recovery funds can be used to address now gaping racial and economic divides and stabilize our communities as we emerge from the public health crisis," the nonprofit organization said in a press release. At a state level, the data show Ohio had an infant mortality rate of 6.9 per 1,000 births in 2019, which is unchanged from 2018 numbers. The number of teen births per 1,000 female ages 15 to 17 decreased minimally from 6.9 in 2019 to 6.8 in 2020."

CORONAVIRUS

Solid organ transplant recipients, people with advanced HIV, some cancer patients and others considered to be severely immunocompromised are now eligible for a third dose of the Pfizer or Moderna vaccines, Ohio Department of Health (ODH) Chief Medical Officer and Director Bruce Vanderhoff said Friday. "This is a recommendation for a very small group of individuals," Vanderhoff said during a Zoom press conference, noting the group is estimated to include less than 3 percent of the Ohio population. However, by midweek, federal public health officials announced plans to begin COVID-19 booster shots the week of Monday, Sept. 20 for everyone as vaccine effectiveness can wane over time, particularly given the spread of the Delta variant. The plan is pending approval from the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and CDC Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP). Booster shots of the Moderna or Pfizer vaccines will be available to adults eight months after their second shot, ensuring those prioritized for shots first have similar booster access. Plans are being developed for those who received a single-shot Johnson & Johnson (J&J) vaccine, and the FDA and ACIP review could lead to guidance on booster shots for eligible minors.

Gov. Mike DeWine Tuesday implored parents to have their children wear masks to school and called on school officials that have not instituted a mask mandate to do so at least for the short term, saying that it would otherwise be "very difficult" to keep the Delta variant of COVID-19 out of classrooms and "impossible" to contain its spread after that point given the example seen in states such as Florida. The Delta variant represents a potential "perfect storm," he continued, as it is "sweeping" across the state and many who are unvaccinated have contracted it. The goal of in-person learning and athletic events for the school year is already "clearly at risk" as a result, DeWine said.

As students across the state return to school, officials with the Ohio Department of Health (ODH) and Ohio High School Athletic Association (OHSAA) are encouraging schools to implement masking, social distancing and vaccination protocols that protect children and prevent the need for extensive quarantining. Ohio schools and hospitals can avoid the problems occurring in Florida and other states where masks are optional in schools, ODH Director Bruce Vanderhoff said during a press conference Wednesday. The state's top doctor warned that the Delta variant is continuing to spread throughout the state, mostly among the unvaccinated,

President Joe Biden announced Wednesday that long-term care facilities will be required to ensure all staff are vaccinated in order to continue receiving Medicare and Medicaid funding, as part of remarks on his administration's plan for COVID-19 booster shots. The booster shot plan will include direct shipments to long-term care facilities, according to federal public health officials, and is slated to begin Monday, Sept. 20 pending approval by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and CDC Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP). People would receive a third dose eight months after their second one. Plans for Johnson & Johnson recipients are being developed.

On Thursday, Aug. 19, according to ODH, 3,446 cases of COVID-19 had been reported in the last 24 hours, which is the highest number of new cases in months. There have been 170 hospitalizations and 10 intensive care unit admissions in the last 24 hours, ODH said on its coronavirus website.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Google announced Thursday that it will invest \$1 billion in a "substantial" expansion of the data center in New Albany in Central Ohio and has further acquired 618 acres in Columbus and Lancaster for potential future data center locations. Google also announced Thursday that it would establish a "Google Cloud" region in Columbus, joining the existing network of seven regions in the U.S. and 27 worldwide. These can provide faster services so that Google Cloud Platform enterprise customers can operate more reliably and at higher speeds.

EDUCATION

Ohio will name a new state superintendent around year's end if the State Board of Education can meet an expedited timeline envisioned by its President Laura Kohler, she told *Hannah News* in an interview. In the shorter term, the board will hold a special meeting Monday, Aug. 23 to designate a new interim superintendent, after Deputy Superintendent John Richard's decision to leave in October disrupted the board's action to designate him the temporary successor to Superintendent Paolo DeMaria, who retires in late September. Kohler said she and Vice President Charlotte McGuire will be recommending the interim appointment of Stephanie Siddens, who serves as senior executive director of the Center for Student Supports at the Ohio Department of Education (ODE). Kohler cited Siddens' 15-year tenure with the department, her experience working directly with board members and her thoughtful manner in responding to questions and concerns from the board as reasons for the recommendation.

ODE is offering free assessments to gauge students' school readiness, via its Restart Readiness Assessment portal at <https://oh-reset.portal.cambiumast.com/>.

The Ohio ODE Task Force on Best Academic Practices Models for Black Students Friday took stock of where it stands and worked on a template questionnaire for schools to fill out to help determine where they are in areas of best practices. After July's meeting when State Superintendent Paolo DeMaria introduced six broad areas of best practices, he further refined those areas to four during Friday's meeting.

A Northwest Ohio school board member was recently selected as the Ohio School Boards Association's (OSBA) 2022 president-elect nominee. If elected during OSBA's statewide conference in November, Chris Varwig will become OSBA president in 2023 following her term as president-elect.

ELECTIONS 2022

The campaigns of two Democrats running for governor said they are requiring all staff to be vaccinated against COVID-19: Dayton Mayor Nan Whaley's campaign announced Thursday that it is requiring the vaccine for current and future campaign staff. Eric Hyers, the senior strategist for Cincinnati Mayor John Cranley's gubernatorial campaign, told the *Cincinnati Enquirer* that it will also require vaccines for the staff because it is the best strategy to prevent COVID-19.

Two Hamilton County Democrats announced their plans for 2022, with both seeking to switch legislative chambers. The *Cincinnati Enquirer* reported that Rep. Catherine Ingram (D-Cincinnati) is planning to run for the Ohio Senate next year. She is seeking the seat currently held by Sen. Cecil Thomas (D-Cincinnati), who is term-limited. Ingram is not term-limited in her current House seat until 2024. By running for the Senate, her House seat will now be an open race. Meanwhile, Thomas plans to run for the House seat currently held by Rep. Brigid Kelly (D-Cincinnati), who is running for Hamilton County auditor.

Secretary of State Frank LaRose's re-election campaign named a leadership team in each of Ohio's 88 counties that he said will lay the groundwork for his 2022 campaign.

A second Democrat Wednesday joined the U.S. Senate race, setting up a primary with U.S. Rep. Tim Ryan (D-Niles). Morgan Harper, a consumer protection attorney and community organizer in Columbus who unsuccessfully ran for Congress in 2020, announced her run. A progressive candidate who challenged U.S. Rep. Joyce Beatty (D-Columbus) in the Democratic primary in 2020, Harper said she is running "with an ambitious policy vision and bold, progressive platform that will help her to mobilize the coalition that Ohio Democrats need to win in the general election and defeat the Trump Republicans that are threatening our democracy." She said she will fight for workers, the environment, racial justice, universal health care, abortion rights, and an end to gun violence.

Republican gubernatorial candidate Jim Renacci Wednesday launched a new ad in which he highlights his early support for former President Donald Trump. Renacci argues that Gov. Mike DeWine only backed Trump "out of political expediency."

Gov. Mike DeWine should require all K-12 school teachers, staff and students in Ohio to wear masks as the Delta variant continues to spread across the state, Dayton Mayor and Democratic gubernatorial candidate Nan Whaley said Thursday. "One of our top priorities must be keeping kids in schools, in person. While shutting down schools or going virtual may have been necessary last year to keep our communities safe, it was a disaster for our kids, especially for those who were already at risk. We cannot go back to that. We must do everything we can to keep schools open, and our kids in classrooms," Whaley said during a press conference outside the Vern Riffe State Office Tower.

The following endorsements were made over the week:

- The gubernatorial campaign of John Cranley announced the endorsement of the International Association of Fire Fighters Local 48.
- The congressional campaign of Mike Carey announced the endorsement of U.S. Sen. Rand Paul (R-KY).

EMPLOYMENT/UNEMPLOYMENT

For the week ending Aug. 14, the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS) reported 9,684 initial unemployment claims to

the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL). The number is lower than last week, when the department reported 10,581 jobless claims. Ohioans filed 142,750 continued traditional unemployment claims last week, which was 1,052 fewer than the previous week, ODJFS said.

ENVIRONMENT

Two auto body collision repair businesses will receive a total of nearly \$300,000 in bond financing and grants to support air quality enhancements at their facilities, the Ohio Air Quality Development Authority (OAQDA) has announced. Car Pro Auto Sale LLC in Columbus and Howald's Paint & Body Works LLC in Springfield received combined totals of \$259,000 in bond financing and \$40,000 in grants, according to OAQDA. The bond financing is being provided through OAQDA's Clean Air Resource Center (CARC), which aims to make clean air compliance easily accessible and affordable for Ohio small businesses. Each business also was approved for a \$20,000 grant through the CARC program.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) announced Thursday that the Ashtabula River has been removed from the binational list of the Great Lakes' most environmentally-degraded areas. In the 1980s, the U.S. and Canada identified 43 "Areas of Concern" (AOCs) on the Great Lakes affected by historical contamination dating back over many decades. The Ashtabula River is the sixth AOC to be delisted in the U.S., and the first of four in Ohio, according to USEPA.

FEDERAL

The National Park Service (NPS) is now requiring visitors, employees and contractors to wear a mask inside all NPS buildings and in crowded outdoor spaces, regardless of COVID-19 vaccination status or community transmission levels. According to NPS, the policy follows the latest science and guidance from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The following Ohio sites are managed by the NPS:

- Charles Young Buffalo Soldiers National Monument in Xenia
- Cuyahoga Valley National Park in Cleveland and Akron
- Dayton Aviation Heritage National Historical Park in Dayton
- First Ladies National Historic Site in Canton
- Hopewell Culture National Historic Park in Chillicothe
- James A. Garfield National Historic Site in Mentor
- Lewis & Clark National Historic Trail (multiple states)
- North Country National Scenic Trail (multiple states)
- Perry's Victory & International Peace Memorial in Put-In-Bay
- William Howard Taft National Historic Site in Cincinnati

Ohio Democrats, including two candidates for Congress, called for the passage of the federal infrastructure bill at an event in Columbus Thursday, and criticized Republicans in the U.S. House of Representatives for their opposition to the bill, which passed the U.S. Senate with bipartisan support. Ohio Rep. Allison Russo (D-Upper Arlington), who is running in a special election for the 15th Congressional District, said many Republicans are outright opposing or staying silent on the bill.

GAMING/GAMBLING

Ohio's four casinos and seven racinos reported impressive revenues during the first two months of Summer 2021. Casinos raked in \$84.7 million in June and \$90.5 million in July, while racinos pulled in \$112.1 million in June and \$120.7 million in July, according to information provided by the Ohio Casino Control Commission (OCCC) and Ohio Lottery Commission (OLC). All of those numbers are higher than those reported in June and July of both 2020 and 2019.

The General Assembly should not pass sports gambling legalization bill SB176 (Manning-Antani), at least as currently written, according to a national anti-gambling leader and Ohio's top NAACP official. Stop Predatory Gambling Executive Director Les Bernal and NAACP Ohio Conference President Tom Roberts said the legislation would lead to increased child gambling and worsen wealth inequality.

GENERAL ASSEMBLY/STATEHOUSE

The Controlling Board approved all items on its agenda Monday, with the exception of one deferred by request of the Ohio Department of Health (ODH). A request from the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS) was held by Sen. Bob Hackett (R-London) and Rep. Scott Oelslager (R-North Canton), while Rep. Shane Wilkin (R-Hillsboro) held six Ohio Department of Public Safety (ODPS) items. The ODJFS request held by Hackett and Oelslager was to transfer \$21 million from its Audit Settlements and Contingency Fund to a Human Services Project fund. ODJFS Legislative Liaison Bryan Stout discussed the transfer, saying it was not a request to increase appropriation authority and would ensure they have cash on hand to start certain operations including the Ohio Sobriety, Treatment and Reducing Trauma (START) program and IT support. It was then approved without objection.

House Minority Leader Emilia Sykes (D-Akron) Thursday announced the process for filling the 26th House District seat that was vacated when Rep. Erica Crawley (D-Columbus) resigned to take an appointment as Franklin County Commissioner last month. Sykes

said the Democratic Caucus is requesting letters of interest from individuals seeking appointment by the caucus to the open seat. Applicants should mail and email resumes and cover letters to House Democratic Chief of Staff Samantha Herd by the close of business on Friday, Sept. 3

The Capitol Square Review and Advisory Board (CSRAB) and Capitol Square Foundation (CSF) announced initial plans to celebrate the 25th anniversary of renovations at the Ohio Statehouse on Wednesday, Nov. 17, with more details coming soon. The event is scheduled for 4 to 8 p.m. and will include open house invitations to current and former members of the Legislature and previous administration officials.

The Ohio Aerospace and Aviation Technology Committee (OAATC) held its first official meeting in over a year Thursday, with Rep. Adam Holmes (R-Nashport) saying the Legislature is working to formalize his return as chair. That position had alternated between chambers until new language was passed in the budget. During the meeting, Holmes said he had been thinking about the role of the committee throughout the past year and sees "three specific objectives" of promoting advanced air mobility (AAM); developing an industrial agency to interact with entities outside of Ohio; and supporting the in-state manufacture of electric vehicle battery technology. He noted this latter poses "a real opportunity" for long-term economic benefits to the state.

GREAT LAKES

Researchers from eight Ohio universities are leading the latest round of projects supported by the Ohio Department of Higher Education's (ODHE) ongoing Harmful Algal Bloom Research Initiative (HABRI). These projects will not only focus on state agency priorities related to harmful algal blooms, but they will also inform ongoing efforts associated with Gov. Mike DeWine's H2Ohio water quality initiative. Agencies engaged in setting priorities and shaping projects include the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency (Ohio EPA), Ohio Department of Agriculture (ODAg), Ohio Department of Health (ODH), Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR) and the Ohio Lake Erie Commission (OLEC).

HIGHER EDUCATION

The U.S. Department of Education (USDOE) announced it will expand the Second Chance Pell experiment program for the 2022-2023 award year. The program provides education opportunities for justice-involved individuals who have previously been unable to access federal need-based financial aid. The expansion will allow up to 200 colleges and universities to offer their prison education programs with support from the Pell Grant program, up from the 131 currently participating. To date, students have earned over 7,000 credentials. The department said the expansion of the experiment is part of its efforts to expand access and equity in higher education.

The Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (APLU) has announced a \$90,000 grant to Ohio University (OU) meant to help the school explore how public universities can develop and scale partnerships with Manufacturing Extension Partnership (MEP) Centers to increase the capacity of small and medium-sized manufacturers (SMMs) to adopt new technologies. The grant is one of three awards in this area made possible as part of a research grant APLU received from the National Institutes of Standards and Technology (NIST).

HOUSING/HOMELESSNESS

Housing units across Ohio grew by 2.2 percent in the last decade, according to numbers released by the U.S. Census Bureau, while the vacancy rate dropped to 8.3 percent. Ohio had 5,242,524 housing units, the 2020 census determined, a growth of 2.2 percent. Ohio's total population was 11,799,448, a growth of 262,944 persons from the 2010 census, or a 2.3 percent change. Nationally, the census found the total number of housing units grew by 6.7 percent between 2010 and 2019, approximately half the rate of growth during the previous decade. The Census Bureau said the slowdown was not unexpected as a housing boom in the mid-2000s contributed to a rapid expansion of supply, while the housing crash and ensuing recession in 2007-2008 resulted in an increase in the number of vacant units.

JUDICIAL

A sitting judge and veteran instructor for the Ohio Judicial College and National Judicial College has been sanctioned by the Ohio Supreme Court for discussing cases affecting a Facebook "friend" and his family off the record and without the knowledge of the other parties, their defense counsel, or prosecutors. Presiding Judge Bruce Winters of the Ottawa County Common Pleas Court's General and Domestic Divisions has decades of experience as a former magistrate, assistant prosecutor, probation officer, private attorney and member of the Ohio Judiciary first elected in 2008 and reelected in 2014 and 2020. He also is a well-known contributor to judicial college offerings at the state and national level.

The Ohio Supreme Court denied the Office of Ohio Consumers' Counsel's (OCC) request Wednesday to overturn a 16-year-old decision the agency says state regulators routinely exploit to dodge rehearing requests that might prove unfavorable to utilities -- including through customer refunds ordered by the Court in response to appeals by OCC and other energy stakeholders. The consumers' counsel turned to the Court in April after waiting 15 months for the Public Utilities Commission of Ohio (PUCO) to rule on its motion -- one of half dozen stakeholders to make the same request -- that commissioners reconsider their December 2019 order reviving AES Ohio's (formerly DP&L) original, 2009 electric security plan (ESP) and its "rate stabilization charge" for the third straight time after rescinding ESPs II and III at AES's request.

A 2012 change in state law describing how to tax commercial property was not intended to consider a leased property as vacant, the Ohio Supreme Court ruled Wednesday as it rejected an attempt to lower the taxable value of a Lowe's Home Center by nearly \$2.7

million. The case is *Rancho Cincinnati Rivers LLC v. Warren Cty. Bd. of Revision*. A unanimous Supreme Court explained the change to R.C. 5713.03, which directed that leased property be valued "as if unencumbered," was established to allow tax assessors to consider appraisals as better evidence than property sales prices. The Court denied a proposed "vacant-at-transfer" rule advanced by Warren County property owners who challenged the \$8.48 million 2016 tax-year value of a Lowe's.

The Ohio Supreme Court announced the adoption Tuesday of a standardized probate form for birth certification changes including gender. Ohio law on birth certification changes requires application to a probate court.

MARIJUANA/HEMP

The Coalition to Regulate Marijuana Like Alcohol (CRMLA) resubmitted the summary language for its proposed marijuana legalization law to the Ohio Attorney General's Office on Friday. The initiated statute would legalize and regulate the use of marijuana by adults ages 21 and older. The initial summary language was rejected by Attorney General Dave Yost earlier this month.

MEDICAID/MEDICAID REFORM

Buckeye Community Health Plan will remain among Ohio's Medicaid managed care companies, after the Ohio Department of Medicaid (ODM) announced its addition to the list of contract awardees following the settlement of a lawsuit against parent company Centene. ODM announced six new managed care vendors in April but put Buckeye's bid on hold pending further review, citing the then-pending litigation by Attorney General Dave Yost, which alleged Centene's use of subcontractors to misrepresent pharmacy costs, inflate dispensing fees and file reimbursement requests for money already paid to others. ODM released a statement Friday saying it had completed its review of Buckeye's bid and awarded the company a contract.

MENTAL HEALTH

The Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (OhioMHAS) recently released a report on its crisis services and related funding strategies, as well as support for local resources. The report's executive summary began by noting Ohioans of all ages and their families are seeking care in "record numbers" for substance use disorder and mental health concerns, often with "severe" symptoms being exhibited. Those can include "psychosis, suicidal ideation, agitation [and] aggression" as well as withdrawal or toxic effects of substance misuse or abuse, the report continued. In many communities, it said, people rely on emergency departments that can lack necessary behavioral health resources and the ability to respond to psychiatric behavioral health emergencies. This can lead to arrests and jailing without appropriate care, and the report noted that jail does not help those living with mental illness or the staff.

NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS

The Cleveland-based Center for Community Solutions (CCS) recently announced the promotion of Loren Anthes to the role of senior fellow and of Will Tarter to the role of fellow. Anthes serves as the William C. and Elizabeth M. Treuhaft Chair for Health Planning and directs community solutions' Center for Medicaid Policy while Tarter leads community solutions' efforts to track and analyze Cuyahoga County's investments in health and human services. He also provides leadership and support for the Council on Older Persons. Both appointments were effective Aug. 1.

PENSIONS

Gov. Mike DeWine's chief deputy legal counsel, John Danish, has been named the new general counsel for the Ohio Police & Fire Pension Fund (OP&F), the retirement system announced. He succeeds Mary Beth Foley, whom the OP&F Board promoted to executive director following retirement of the prior director, John Gallagher.

PEOPLE

Richard "Dick" Schafrath, a former legislator and standout football player for Ohio State University and the Cleveland Browns, died Sunday at age 84. Schafrath was elected to the Senate in the 1980s and retired from the chamber mid-term in 2000 to take a position at the Ohio Department of Health.

Ruth Edmonds has returned to the Center for Christian Virtue (CCV) after a brief run for Congress earlier this year, CCV announced. Edmonds will serve as the group's director of Christian engagement after previously serving as the church relations director, charged with engaging with pastors across the state about the cultural and political challenges facing them. She had left CCV to run in the Republican primary for the 15th Congressional District but was unsuccessful in a crowded field.

POVERTY

Federal food assistance benefits for Ohioans are set to increase by almost \$700 million total starting in October, after the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) released updates Monday to the calculations used to set benefits. Average benefits for families are estimated to increase about \$36 per person, the federal agency said. USDA released changes to the Thrifty Food Plan, as required by the 2018 Farm Bill and an executive order from President Joe Biden signed in January. It will affect benefits for federal fiscal year 2022, starting Friday, Oct. 1, 2021. The agency said reevaluation of the plan concluded the cost of a "nutritious, practical, cost-effective" diet is 21 percent higher than under the prior plan.

The financial advisory website WalletHub recently released a comparison of all 50 states and the District of Columbia to determine where children are the most disadvantaged. The ranking used 27 relevant metrics under three categories: socio-economic welfare, measuring factors like the share of children in foster care, the share of children whose parents lack secure employment, and the share of children living in "extreme" poverty; health, under which factors like a state's infant mortality rate, child food-insecurity rate, and

child death rate are measured; and education, which includes factors like the public high school graduation rate, the quality of public schools, and the number of young children not enrolled in school.

PUBLIC SAFETY

The Office of Criminal Justice Services (OCJS) announced the addition of Beachwood (Cuyahoga County), Norwalk (Huron County) and Holland (Lucas County) police Tuesday to law enforcement agencies now on board with state standards for use of force, including deadly force, and agency recruitment and hiring.

The Ohio State Highway Patrol (OSHP) is urging motorists to drive sober. During the "Drive Sober or Get Pulled Over" campaign, which runs from Friday, Aug. 20 to Labor Day on Monday, Sept. 6, troopers will focus enforcement efforts on removing impaired drivers from Ohio's roadways. Motorists can do their part in keeping the roadways safe by following all traffic laws, never driving impaired and always designating a sober driver, OSHP said. In 2020, there were 13,141 OVI-related crashes, which resulted in 685 deaths and 7,981 injuries, the patrol said.

REDISTRICTING/REAPPORTIONMENT

The Ohio Redistricting Commission will hold public regional hearings in 10 cities around the state later this month as the process of redrawing General Assembly lines begins. The co-chairs of the commission, Sen. Vern Sykes (D-Akron) and House Speaker Bob Cupp (R-Lima), said the hearings will take place from Monday, Aug. 23, through Friday, Aug. 27, and will give Ohioans an opportunity to contribute ideas for the future of Ohio's state legislative districts by offering public testimony and submitting map proposals. Hearings will be held in Cleveland and Youngstown on Monday, Aug. 23; Dayton and Cincinnati on Tuesday, Aug. 24; Zanesville and Rio Grande on Wednesday, Aug. 25; Lima and Toledo on Thursday, Aug. 26; and Akron and Mansfield on Friday, Aug. 27.

With the Ohio Redistricting Commission holding 10 public hearings next week to take testimony on the drawing of new General Assembly districts, House and Senate Democrats from Toledo and Cincinnati held separate virtual news conferences this week -- joined in both cases by representatives of the Equal Districts Coalition -- urging citizens to show up and participate in the public hearings. In Toledo, Sen. Teresa Fedor (D-Toledo) and Reps. Paula Hicks-Hudson (D-Toledo), Lisa Sobecki (D-Toledo), and Michael Sheehy called for fairer maps for the General Assembly and in Congress in this round of redistricting. The legislators noted that their city is included in the infamous "Snake on the Lake" district under the current congressional map, requiring U.S. Rep. Marcy Kaptur (D-Toledo) to represent a district that stretches from Toledo to Cleveland along Lake Erie. In Cincinnati, Desiree Tims, president and CEO of Innovation Ohio, one of the members of the Equal Districts Coalition, discussed the importance of fair maps for that area, noting one woman whose home in the current map that she said is split between the 1st and 2nd congressional districts. She said under a fairer map, Cincinnati should be anchoring its own congressional district, not split apart with nearby counties. She was joined by Sen. Cecil Thomas (D-Cincinnati) and Reps. Brigid Kelly (D-Cincinnati), Catherine Ingram (D-Cincinnati), Jessica Miranda (D-Cincinnati) and Sedrick Denson (D-Cincinnati), as well as Katy Shanahan, the state director of All on the Line Ohio, another member of the Equal Districts Coalition.

STATE GOVERNMENT

Energy Project Managers Patrick Love and Daniel Nigon-Kirgis told members of the Ohio Facilities Construction Commission (OFCC) about how to reduce the spread of COVID-19 through the use of heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) systems during the commission's Thursday meeting. As the virus spreads more easily among people indoors, Love said ventilation and filtration strategies have been shown to help reduce transmission. OFCC began researching the topic after the Ohio Department of Education (ODE) asked for guidance last year, and the commission subsequently released a whitepaper with summarized industry guidelines for school districts.

TRANSPORTATION/INFRASTRUCTURE

The Ohio Turnpike and Infrastructure Commission continues to work through glitches in its new customer service center software after its initial deployment, Executive Director Ferzan Ahmed told commission members during Monday's meeting. He said the vendor, TransCore, sent employees on site again during two weeks in July to help investigate and review ongoing issues, and said the company is taking an active role in resolving the problems. He also said staff has begun to work on the commission's budget for next year, and there are key areas within the organization where they will need to look at future staffing levels to handle the management of the new toll collection system once it is installed and the consultants are gone. There are also key staff members in these areas near retirement, though he said leadership is working on a comprehensive succession plan.

UTILITIES

American Electric Power (AEP) has announced a new corporate "sustainability" policy to achieve 80 percent carbon reduction by 2030 and to cease investment in all forms of fossil fuel production or generation going forward. AEP's "Sustainable Finance Framework" report prioritizes renewable energy as a driver of environmental, social and economic change more than it does the viability or resilience of its fiscal policy. Dubbing climate change a "defining issue of our time," the company says it plans to "lead the transition to a clean energy future" both reliable and affordable and one that engineers social and economic change.

The chairman of the Office of Ohio Consumers' Counsel (OCC) Governing Board has issued a second appeal to the head of the Public Utilities Commission of Ohio (PUCO) Nominating Council for a special meeting "to consider reforms of the council's processes for evaluating applicants for appointment as PUCO commissioners." Chairman Michael Watkins is a 10-year appointee to the OCC Governing Board as well as a retired police officer and six-term lodge president for the Fraternal Order of Police (FOP) of Ohio. He had

written PUCO Nominating Council Chairman Michael Koren last November to call for an ad hoc meeting of the panel following former commission Chairman Sam Randazzo's resignation amid ongoing revelations in the 133-HB6 (Callender-Willkin) scandal.

The Public Utilities Commission of Ohio (PUCO) has set public hearings on AES Ohio's proposal to increase customer charges by \$120.7 million annually, a request opposed by agency analysts. PUCO staff are instead recommending the following:

- Reducing the annual revenue increase to a range between \$61.1 million and \$66.7 million.
- Limiting the fixed customer charge to \$9.75 rather than the \$15.66 sought by AES.

WORKFORCE

Over 103,400 Ohioans currently work in the clean energy and vehicles sectors, according to a report from Environmental Entrepreneurs (E2) and the Clean Energy Trust, and legislation being considered at the federal level could add thousands of additional jobs through increased investment in these sectors. The report found that clean energy businesses were "hit hard" by the pandemic and resulting economic downturn in 2020, which represented the first year-to-year decline since the two organizations began tracking the Ohio clean energy industry.