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Legislative Report

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OHIO PUBLIC TRANSIT ASSOCIATION

Bill Information

SB4 EXEMPT EMS LINE OPERATORS-PUBLIC RECORDS *(ROEGNER K)*

To include emergency service telecommunicators and certain Ohio National Guard members as individuals whose residential and familial information is exempt from disclosure under the Public Records Law.

CURRENT STATUS

2/9/2021 - Senate Judiciary, (Third Hearing)

SB15 FISCAL OFFICERS-LIABILITY *(WILSON S)*

To change the circumstances in which certain fiscal officers may be held liable for a loss of public funds.

CURRENT STATUS

2/2/2021 - Senate Local Government and Elections, (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 and to declare an emergency.

CURRENT STATUS

2/9/2021 - Senate Ways and Means, (Second Hearing)

Week in Review

Friday, Feb. 5, 2021

ADDICTION/SUBSTANCE ABUSE

The Senate Judiciary Committee heard sponsor and proponent testimony Tuesday on the latest version of legislation setting enhanced penalties for drug dealing within 1,000 feet of addiction treatment centers, once again sponsored by Sen. Theresa Gavarone (R-Bowling Green). Past versions of SB25 -- the "Relapse Reduction Act" -- have included 133-SB55 and 132-HB296, also offered by Gavarone. She said her bill seeks to deter drug dealers who attempt to entice those in treatment to continue using drugs while they are leaving a treatment center.

Attorney General Dave Yost announced Thursday that the "lion's share" of Ohio's \$24.7 million settlement with opioid consultant McKinsey & Co. will help launch OneOhio Recovery Foundation's partnership with local communities beset by the drug epidemic. That is the state's portion of a national big-pharma agreement that exceeded a half billion dollars, according to the AG. Although

local jurisdictions were not part of the nationwide lawsuit, Yost said, under last year's creation of OneOhio to resolve disagreements over state- versus locally-led drug litigation, Ohio communities will have access to the funding through the state-local covenant.

AGRICULTURE

Farmers in three Northwest Ohio counties -- Putnam, Hancock and Auglaize -- are among the first to receive payments for their participation in the state's H2Ohio water quality program, the Ohio Department of Agriculture (ODA) announced Thursday. Local soil and water conservation district (SWCD) boards in those counties have approved 154 VNMPs which include 98,000 acres, totaling approximately \$197,000 in payments. Remaining SWCD boards will continue to meet throughout the spring to approve VNMPs and allocate payments.

ARTS, SPORTS AND ENTERTAINMENT

The Ohio arts industry is not yet in "recovery" and likely won't get to that point until Fall 2021 at the earliest, arts and cultural leaders said Wednesday. "There is a little light at the end of the tunnel. We now have a vaccine, and so that's positive. But at the same time, we also do not know yet when audiences are ready to come back to the theatre. Recent studies have shown, probably not until the fall is when we'll see some sense of return to what we were familiar with," ProMusica Chamber Orchestra CEO Janet Chen said during a Columbus Metropolitan Club (CMC) forum entitled, "Survival of the Arts: Now or Never."

ATTORNEY GENERAL

Ohio has joined a bipartisan coalition of 32 states and the District of Columbia to ask the federal appeals court to overturn a ruling by the U.S. District Court in Cleveland suggesting robocall protections do not apply to calls placed between 2015 and 2020 based on an Obama-era amendment to the Telephone Consumer Protection Act (TCPA). Attorney General Dave Yost says the friend-of-court brief, led by Indiana and North Carolina, asks the 6th Circuit Court of Appeals to vacate last year's October decision by Chief District Judge Patricia Gaughan, who agreed the U.S. Supreme Court's July 2020 decision in *Barr v. American Association of Political Consultants, Inc.* had severed the 2015 amendment requested by former President Barack Obama to allow automated government collections, but only on a prospective basis, leaving the previous five years unprotected by TCPA.

Attorney General Dave Yost says he supports the indictment of former Columbus police Ofc. Adam Coy for murder and dereliction of duty in the December shooting death of Andre Hill, and will prosecute the case with full confidence in the grand jury's findings. Yost responded to the indictment late Wednesday after the Franklin County Grand Jury charged the 19-year police veteran with murder, felonious assault and two counts of dereliction of duty for failing to activate his body camera and failing to inform fellow officers that "he felt Mr. Hill presented a danger," the AG said. The grand jury no-billed or rejected charges for "purposeful murder."

FY22-23 BUDGET

House hearings on the governor's proposed FY22-23 budget began Thursday in the House Finance Committee with testimony from invited witnesses including Office of Budget and Management (OBM) Executive Director Kim Murnieks, Legislative Service Commission Executive Director Wendy Zhan and Ohio Tax Commissioner Jeff McClain. This followed Monday's unveiling of the proposed budget by Gov. Mike DeWine and Lt. Gov. Jon Husted. The budget, which sees a 2 percent increase in General Revenue Fund (GRF) spending in FY22 over FY21 and another 3.4 percent increase in FY23, looks very different from what was anticipated a year ago when the COVID-19 pandemic closed down the state and the economy. All this without having to touch the state's Rainy Day Fund (RDF). That is largely due, according to DeWine, to the influx of federal funds into the state in addition to steps the state took early on which included freezing and cutting spending and then refinancing the state's debt as well as the unintended consequences of the pandemic's shifting consumers' buying habits from purchasing services -- which are not subject to the state sales tax -- to purchasing goods, which are resulting in an increase in the state's sales tax revenue.

Gov. Mike DeWine's second biennial budget proposal for primary and secondary education follows the broad contours of his first, proposing \$1.1 billion for students' health and social-emotional wellness but leaving the foundation formula alone in deference to the General Assembly's work on the topic. Boosting attainment of workforce credentials and access to computer science education are also among education priorities in the budget.

Gov. DeWine proposed a \$1 billion COVID recovery initiative as part of his proposed FY22-23 budget. He explained that the proposal, which uses one-time funds only, seeks investments of \$460 million to help small businesses, \$250 million for expansion of broadband access and \$70 million to strengthen the state workforce as part of a goal for Ohio to emerge from the pandemic "even stronger." The aid to small businesses includes grants totaling \$200 million for bars and restaurants, \$150 million in general relief, \$50 million for the lodging industry, \$40 million for indoor entertainment venues and \$20 million for new businesses that were often unable to receive previous funding.

The three state agencies that administer DeWine's signature water quality initiative would be allocated \$240 million over the next biennium under the executive budget proposal. That's up from the \$180 million transferred to the H2Ohio program in FY20-21, Murnieks said. Under the administration's FY22-23 budget proposal, the Ohio Department of Agriculture (ODA) would receive nearly \$100 million over the biennium, while the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency (Ohio EPA) would get \$92 million and the Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR) would be allocated \$50 million.

The Ohio State Highway Patrol would get an increase in its budget to fund its operations under the proposed budget, thanks to registration and title fee increases at the Ohio Bureau of Motor Vehicles. Under DeWine's proposal, motor vehicle registration fees would increase by \$10 and title fees would increase by \$2, with the increase going to fund the patrol's regular highway operations as

well as non-highway operations such as Statehouse security and assistance to cities when requested. Murnieks said the increase would raise about \$127 million per fiscal year.

The Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction (DRC) looks to continue reform of the state parole system in the next biennium as it works to reduce officer caseloads from 67:1 to 50:1 with a \$12 million infusion in both fiscal years. The agency's biggest percentage change, however, will slash \$69.4 million from coronavirus relief in FY22 and zero the fund in FY23. Gov. Mike DeWine's proposed budget would provide DRC \$2 billion from all funds in FY22 for a 0.4 percent increase over FY21 and \$2.1 billion in 2023 for a 2.7 percent increase over the first year.

Secretary of State Frank LaRose's office is looking to improve its business service division and reduce the time, effort and cost of starting a business through its FY22-23 budget. According to the Blue Book for the secretary of state, the office is seeking a 21.1 percent increase in General Revenue Fund funding for FY22 from FY21, while the FY23 budget will not have any increase from FY22. Both fiscal years call for a \$13.6 million budget, up from the \$11.3 million budget in FY20. The all-funds budget would be a 44.6 decrease from FY21, after the state received federal funds to help conduct the 2020 presidential election. The all-funds budget is \$37.1 million for FY22 and \$36.2 million for FY23.

Gov. Mike DeWine said Wednesday his focus on law enforcement has not wavered since his days as Greene County prosecutor and that budget priorities including universal police body cameras, safer schools, narcotics enforcement, and illegal gun interdiction are central to executive funding requests for FY22-23. DeWine expanded on Monday's "Blue Book" rollout with an extended press conference on budget recommendations supporting public safety and criminal justice initiatives at the local level -- an emphasis the governor repeated.

During the first hearing in the House Finance Committee on the governor's proposed budget on Thursday, Office of Budget and Management (OBM) Director Kim Murnieks said it shouldn't be a surprise that the OBM FY22-23 revenue forecast is lower than that of the Legislative Service Commission (LSC): "It's ... pretty normal for OBM's forecast to be more conservative than LSC's forecast because we have to implement the budget after it's passed. We have to live with it for two years, and live within it for two years. So it really doesn't serve us well to be overly optimistic," Murnieks said.

LSC Director Wendy Zhan said her agency's higher tax revenue forecasts compared to OBM's -- \$487.8 million more in FY22 and \$390.3 million in FY23 -- are driven substantially by LSC's more optimistic view of how much tax revenue will grow in FY21. LSC predicts 9.6 percent growth from FY20 to FY21, while OBM predicts 7.4 percent.

Tax Commissioner Jeff McClain Thursday told the House Finance Committee that the executive budget proposal has "no major policy items" for the Ohio Department of Taxation (ODT), but two dozen "technical or clarifying items." Among those is elimination of the requirement for those taking advantage of the state's business income deduction (BID) to report their occupations using North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) codes. That requirement was part of a tax policy omnibus passed in 2019 that repealed the short-living prohibition on claiming the BID for lobbyists and lawyers.

Addressing the biennial Tax Expenditure Report -- a review of the effects of various tax credits, exemptions and deductions -- McClain said the estimated foregone revenue will total \$9.2 billion FY22, compared to \$8.7 billion five years ago in FY18.

At the Common Sense Initiative's (CSI) Small Business Advisory Council Thursday, Lt. Gov. Jon Husted and Development Services Agency (DSA) Director Lydia Mihalik offered details on the executive budget proposal's support for small businesses. Husted said it represents a "responsible, balanced budget that does not create a fiscal cliff." This will be done through extensive use of funds provided by the federal government for a one-time effort focused on helping small businesses and communities during the pandemic.

CENSUS

With a perfect storm of aging residents, low birth rates, COVID-19 deaths and immigration cutbacks, 16 states saw population decreases last year as the United States experienced the slowest national population growth since the Great Depression. The nation grew only about 7 percent between 2010 and 2020, similar to the previous historic low between 1930 and 1940, according to new Census Bureau estimates, which do not reflect the 2020 census counts. The agency will release the final 2020 census tally in March.

CHILDREN/FAMILIES

The final report from the Governor's Lead Advisory Committee was released Saturday with data on the number of children affected by lead poisoning and recommendations on the best ways to continue the state's lead abatement efforts. Data from the report show that the state has made considerable progress on protecting children from lead poisoning since 1999, but there are still Ohio children whose health and brain development are at risk of harm from lead, particularly in the state's urban cores.

CORONAVIRUS

Gov. Mike DeWine and Ohio First Lady Fran DeWine received their first dose of the COVID-19 vaccine Tuesday morning. Later that day, the governor spent most of his briefing discussing equity in vaccine distribution. On Monday, the Ohio Legislative Black Caucus Foundation had called on DeWine to specially define ways his administration would address the low vaccination rate for Black Ohioans.

A bill that would establish legislative oversight of the governor's executive orders Wednesday drew proponent testimony from a wide-ranging group of people all with one common issue -- their disdain for COVID-19 safety restrictions and for what many

described as "tyrannical" behavior on the part of Gov. Mike DeWine. Over 20 individuals appeared in person before the Senate Government Oversight and Reform Committee Wednesday and over 200 people submitted written comments in support of SB22 (Johnson-McColley), which would establish the Ohio Health Oversight and Advisory Committee and also allow for legislative oversight of certain public health orders.

The Health Policy Institute of Ohio (HPIO) said this week that its examination of data on vaccinations given in Ohio found some data on ethnicity and race for those receiving the COVID-19 vaccination was unknown, which it said will make it harder for policymakers to know if vaccine efforts are reaching communities of color. HPIO said its analysis found that the race of COVID-19 vaccine recipients is unknown for more than one in eight vaccinations administered in the state, and ethnicity is unknown in more than one in four.

On Thursday, Gov. DeWine said his administration will be making the vaccine available to those 65 and older starting the week of Feb. 8, but after that, he will not be expanding the eligibility. With nearly 2.5 million Ohioans in the 65 and older age range, he said it will take time to get that group vaccinated. Asked when he would estimate the rest of the population would be eligible, DeWine refused to speculate, saying it all depends on the availability of vaccines.

CRIME AND PUNISHMENT

Ohio Gov. Mike DeWine signed an executive order Friday expanding his Human Trafficking Task Force to include five more state agencies: the departments of commerce, developmental disabilities, the rehabilitation and correction and transportation, and the State Medical Board of Ohio.

A 20-month investigation of Cuyahoga County Corrections Center (CCCC) reveals "pervasive" gaps in its medical treatment of disabled inmates and those needing psychiatric care -- more bad news for a crowded jailhouse rocked by problems in recent years. Disability Rights Ohio (DRO) released an 18-page report that cites substandard emergency medicine, neglect of pregnant mothers, extended isolation periods that threaten those with chronic conditions, and apparent non-compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Greater Ohio Policy Center's (GOPC) highest priority for the FY22-23 operating budget is securing a policy change dedicating millions of dollars for the redevelopment of brownfields, GOPC Strategic Engagement Director Jason Warner said.

EDUCATION

Teachers and staff at Ohio's K-12 schools, including public, private, and career-tech entities, started to receive their COVID-19 vaccines necessary for in-person learning in the state beginning Monday, Feb. 1 and based on a four-week schedule spelled out by the governor. DeWine reiterated his goal to get schools in Ohio to return to either a full-time in-person or in a hybrid model by March 1.

The Senate Primary and Secondary Education Committee kicked off hearings Tuesday for Sens. Steve Wilson (R-Maineville) and Robert McColley's (R-Napoleon) re-introduced proposal to require a half-credit of financial literacy instruction for Ohio students and a license endorsement for those providing that instruction. Under SB1, an updated version of 133-SB342 (Wilson-McColley), high schoolers entering ninth grade from the summer of 2021 and onward would need to complete a half unit of instruction in financial literacy, with the elective credits for graduation dropping from five to four-and-a-half in response. Beginning in the 2023-24 school year, those teaching the financial literacy unit would require a license validation on the subject, and the State Board of Education would need to consult an advisory committee including at least five classroom teachers before adopting rules on the license validation.

The state's DataOhio portal, a public repository for state agency data, has added Ohio Department of Education (ODE) datasets to its offerings. "The department is excited to contribute to the vision of making the DataOhio portal the centralized location for state of Ohio data. Nearly half of department datasets added to the DataOhio portal are available to the public for the first time, including new, interactive visualizations, which bring new insight to data previously presented in table format and allow users to customize views most relevant to them," the agency said in an announcement. The portal is available at www.data.ohio.gov.

ELECTIONS 2022

Gov. Mike DeWine has \$3.6 million on hand for his re-election campaign in 2022, according to new campaign finance filings released Friday. DeWine Husted for Ohio, the DeWine's campaign committee, reported raising \$1.6 million in the last half of 2020. The committee spent \$43,774 and has \$3.6 million on hand. It also received \$78,270 in in-kind contributions from the Ohio Republican Party, and the committee still owes \$4 million in loans that DeWine personally lent to the campaign. Only one potential Democratic opponent reported raising money for a potential 2022 run. Cincinnati Mayor John Cranley, who has been exploring a run, reported \$367,769 in contributions, and has spent \$48,482. His campaign committee has \$442,784 on hand.

The U.S. Census Bureau said that it is scheduled to finish its apportionment counts by April 30, 2021. The release of the apportionment counts will kick off the process of drawing new district lines for Congress and the Ohio General Assembly. Ohio will also learn how many congressional seats it will have over the next decade, with the state expected to lose at least one seat.

Another top state Republican Monday said he will not seek the seat currently held by U.S. Sen. Rob Portman (R-OH) in 2022, and instead will run for re-election. Attorney General Dave Yost said in a fundraising email that he had received support and encouragement to run, but added, "After much consultation, thought and prayer, I've decided to run for re-election as Ohio Attorney

General instead of seeking a seat in the U.S. Senate."

Former Columbus Mayor Michael Coleman said Wednesday that he will not run for the U.S. Senate in 2022, while U.S. Rep. Tim Ryan (D-Niles) has reportedly told people he will get into the race.

Former Ohio Department of Health Director Amy Acton said Thursday she is continuing to explore a possible run for the U.S. Senate, adding that she is stepping away from her current role at the Columbus Foundation as she considers her run. Acton became the face of Ohio's response to the COVID-19 pandemic last year, frequently appearing with Gov. Mike DeWine during his press conferences. She resigned from her role as director of the Ohio Department of Health last summer.

ENERGY AND UTILITIES

FirstEnergy will be filing a request with the Public Utilities Commission of Ohio (PUCO) to zero-out its 133-HB6 (Callender-Wilkin) "decoupling" rider -- an annual profit guarantee that would have doubled previously stayed nuclear charges for a total payout of \$2 billion in consumer subsidies absent state intervention, Ohio Attorney General Dave Yost announced Monday.

Senators were met with a united voice Tuesday on SB10's (Romanchuk) partial repeal of 133-HB6: the current bill is a good start on correcting the "ill-gotten" gains of the House legislation and should be followed by a cumulative override of all consumer abuses in subsidy omnibus HB6. The Senate Energy and Public Utilities Committee heard from former Sen. Jeff Jacobson on behalf of the Office of Ohio Consumers' Counsel (OCC), energy counsel Kim Bojko on behalf of the Ohio Manufacturers' Association (OMA) and Senior Attorney Robert Kelter of the Environmental Law and Policy Center (ELPC), also receiving written-only testimony from a half dozen parties including PJM Power Providers Group (P3). All three witnesses said the Legislature should strip FirstEnergy's "decoupling" profit guarantees in HB6 and "significantly excessive earnings" exemptions in 133-HB166 (Oelslager) from Ohio law as soon as possible. And all three reminded senators of FirstEnergy's former CEO's reference to decoupling as 'recession-proofing.'

FEDERAL

Sen. Rob Portman (R-OH) was one of 10 Republican senators to meet with President Joe Biden Monday afternoon to discuss the next round of COVID-19 relief. On Sunday, the group sent a letter to the president proposing a slimmed COVID-19 relief bill and requesting a meeting with Biden to discuss the details of the proposal -- Biden extended an invitation for a meeting to the group later that day.

Later, commenting on that meeting with President Biden Portman characterized Republicans' \$600 billion proposal as "generous," and said the biggest difference between the Republican proposal and Democrats' \$1.9 trillion proposal is the income cap for cash stimulus checks. Portman said Tuesday on a conference call that the Democrats' proposal would send stimulus checks to a family with four kids with a household income around \$300,000, while he said Republicans' proposal would offer a more "targeted" approach for stimulus checks.

U.S. Sen. Sherrod Brown (D-OH) said that lawmakers should "go big" on the next federal COVID-19 relief package in order to avoid long-lasting damage to the American economy and middle-income families. In response to a question by *Hannah News* on a conference call Wednesday, Brown said he emphasized to President Joe Biden in a recent conversation the importance of passing a sizeable stimulus package, and he said Trump-appointed Federal Reserve Chairman Jerome Powell agreed.

GAMING/GAMBLING

Anyone interested in lobbying the Senate Select Committee on Sports Gaming will need to testify publicly before getting a private meeting, Chairman Kirk Schuring (R-Canton) said during the committee's organizational meeting on Wednesday. "I'm getting a lot of requests to meet with many people privately. I am not going to meet with people until after they give their public testimony," Schuring said.

GENERAL ASSEMBLY/STATEHOUSE

House Speaker Bob Cupp (R-Lima) announced the members on the House standing committees over the week. Rep. Scott Oelslager (R-North Canton) continues as chair of House Finance with other returning chairs including Rep. Kyle Koehler (R-Springfield) for the renamed House Agriculture and Conservation Committee; Rep. Kris Jordan (R-Ostrander) for House Financial Institutions; Rep. Scott Lipps (R-Franklin) for House Health; Rep. Tom Brinkman (R-Cincinnati) for House Insurance; Rep. Scott Wiggam (R-Wooster) for House State and Local Government; and Derek Merrin (R-Monclova) for House Ways and Means. There are 23 committees and five House Finance subcommittees in the 134th General Assembly, compared to 22 standing committees/subcommittees in the 133rd, which also saw five finance subcommittees.

House Speaker Bob Cupp (R-Lima) said Wednesday he hopes to pass a school funding proposal as a standalone bill and later incorporate it into the budget bill as well. The plan he and former Rep. John Patterson (D-Jefferson) developed with a working group of educators over the past few years was reintroduced Wednesday as HB1 (Callender-Sweeney) after passing the House but getting little Senate traction in the waning days of the 133rd General Assembly. A total of 68 bills were introduced this week.

The House adopted rules Wednesday for the 134th General Assembly that undo some of the changes made two years ago under former Speaker Larry Householder (R-Glenford). Majority Republicans also turned back Democratic attempts to add revisions allowing virtual committee meetings and testimony and requiring members to wear masks as a pandemic health precaution, among others.

Wednesday's Senate session saw passage of SB5 (Roegner), which enters Ohio into the Physical Therapy Licensure Compact; SB7

(Roegner), which enters Ohio into the Occupational Therapy Licensure Compact; SB13 (Lang), regarding the period of limitations for actions on contracts; and SR13 (Hottinger), setting rules for the chamber.

Lawmakers in the General Assembly Wednesday announced the formation of the Business First Caucus, which they said will have more than 70 legislators from the House and Senate among its members and will be a bipartisan, bicameral caucus that is focused on helping small businesses in Ohio become more successful. The co-chairs for the caucus include Reps. Craig Riedel (R-Defiance) and Jon Cross (R-Kenton) and Sens. George Lang (R-West Chester) and Mark Romanchuk (R-Mansfield).

Hannah News' interview series for freshman legislators featured Rep. Rodney Creech (R-West Alexandria), who comes to the 134th General Assembly with years of experience both in public service and in agriculture. Creech served as a Twin Township trustee for six years before he was elected as a Preble County commissioner, where he served from 2014 to 2020.

GOVERNOR

Gov. Mike DeWine on Friday announced the appointment of Adolfo Tornichio to the Greene County Court of Common Pleas, General Division. The governor also announced the appointment of Robert Lyons to the Butler County Court.

Appointments made during the week include the following:

- Blaine K. Davidson of Logan (Hocking County) to Hocking Technical College Board of Trustees for a term beginning Jan. 29, 2021 and ending Aug. 26, 2023.
- Jodey L. Altier of Marietta (Washington County) to the Washington State Community College Board of Trustees for a term beginning Jan. 29, 2021 and ending Feb. 17, 2026.
- James M. Gasior of Canfield (Mahoning County) to the Eastern Gateway Community College Board of Trustees for a term beginning Jan. 29, 2021 and ending Oct. 16, 2025.
- Jerome R. Brockway of Jefferson (Ashtabula County) reappointed to the State Board of Career Colleges and Schools for a term beginning Jan. 29, 2021 and ending Nov. 20, 2025.
- Michael Duffey of Worthington (Franklin County) to the Midwestern Higher Education Compact Commission for a term beginning Jan. 29, 2021 and continuing at the pleasure of the governor.
- Annette L. Wood of Akron (Summit County) and John Banchy of Cincinnati (Hamilton County) to the Ohio Developmental Disabilities Council for terms beginning Jan. 29, 2021 and ending Dec. 31, 2023.
- Pamela Green of Cincinnati (Hamilton County) reappointed to the Ohio Developmental Disabilities Council for a term beginning Jan. 29, 2021 and ending Dec. 31, 2022.
- Jodi L. Young of Columbus Grove (Putnam County) to the Ohio Developmental Disabilities Council for a term beginning Jan. 29, 2021 and ending Dec. 31, 2022.
- Elena Foulis of Powell (Franklin County) and Jose Celso Feliciano, Jr. of Aurora (Portage County) reappointed to the Commission on Hispanic-Latino Affairs for terms beginning Jan. 29, 2021 and ending Oct. 7, 2023.
- Ngulula Sandrine Mubenga of Toledo (Lucas County) to the New African Immigrants Commission for a term beginning Jan. 29, 2021 and ending Oct. 7, 2023.
- George Charchar of Sylvania (Lucas County) and Sudarshan Pyakurel of Reynoldsburg (Franklin County) reappointed to the New Americans Advisory Committee for terms beginning Jan. 29, 2021 and ending May 14, 2023.
- Mark A. Vander Laan of Cincinnati (Hamilton County) reappointed to the Ethics Commission for a term beginning Jan. 29, 2021 and ending Jan. 1, 2027.
- Georden P. Burton of Galloway (Franklin County) to the Chemical Dependency Professionals Board for a term beginning Feb. 1, 2021 and ending Dec. 23, 2022.
- Jeffrey L. Huston of Cedarville (Greene County) to the State Board of Pharmacy for a term beginning Jan. 26, 2021 and ending June 30, 2024.
- Nancymarie Phillips of Willoughby (Lake County) to the Board of Nursing for a term beginning Jan. 29, 2021 and ending Dec. 31, 2023.
- Kent J. Appelhans of Pemberville (Wood County), Hamilton P. Schwartz of Cincinnati (Hamilton County), and Patrick R. Ferguson of West Jefferson (Madison County) reappointed to the State Board of Emergency Medical, Fire, and Transportation Services for terms beginning Jan. 29, 2021 and ending Nov. 12, 2023.
- Homa Amini of Dublin (Franklin County) reappointed to the Dentist Loan Repayment Advisory Board for a term beginning Jan. 29, 2021 and ending Jan. 28, 2023.
- Richard A. Fankhauser of Columbus (Franklin County) and Charles E. Sanders, Jr. of Dublin (Union County) reappointed to the Medical Quality Foundation Board for terms beginning Jan. 29, 2021 and ending July 20, 2023.
- Fred Pantaleano of Dublin (Franklin County) the Unemployment Compensation Modernization and Improvement Council for a term

beginning Jan. 29, 2021 and ending Jan. 28, 2023.

- Ronald J. O'Brien of Columbus (Franklin County) to the Liquor Control Commission for a term beginning March 1, 2021 and ending Feb. 8, 2023.
- Michael P. Stinziano of Canal Winchester (Franklin County) reappointed to the Liquor Control Commission for a term beginning Feb. 9, 2021 and ending Feb. 8, 2027.
- Scott M. Kent of Bucyrus (Crawford County) to the Ohio Organized Crime Investigations Commission for a term beginning Jan. 29, 2021 and ending Sept. 3, 2023.
- Kari E. Pfeifer of Crestline (Crawford County) reappointed to the Ohio War Orphans Scholarship Board for a term beginning Jan 29, 2021 and ending Dec. 31, 2024.
- Brooke M. Burns of Columbus (Franklin County), Kathleen S. Lenski of Miamisburg (Montgomery County), David E. Stucki of Brewster (Stark County), Camille R. Quinn of Columbus (Franklin County), Deminique S. Heiks of Toledo (Lucas County), Emily Wampler of Columbus (Franklin County), Ed Anderson of Painesville (Lake County), Jill N. Tayfel of Brecksville (Cuyahoga County), Kendra J. Kec of Waterville (Lucas County), and Stiney Vonderhaar of Cincinnati (Hamilton County) reappointed to the Governor's Council on Juvenile Justice for terms beginning Jan. 29, 2021 and ending Oct. 31, 2023.
- Porter R. Welch of Galena (Delaware County) reappointed to the Board of Building Appeals for a term beginning Jan. 29, 2021 and ending Oct. 13, 2024.
- Diane Carnes of Chillicothe (Ross County) has been appointed to the Ohio Real Commission for a term beginning January 29, 2021 and ending June 30, 2022.
- Dergham Ridi of Maumee (Lucas County) and Larry D. Burks of West Chester (Butler County) to the Petroleum Underground Storage Release Compensation Board for a term beginning Jan. 29, 2021 and ending July 10, 2023.
- Michael H. Fitchet of Conneaut (Ashtabula County) and Larry L. Lindrose, Jr. of Mentor (Lake County) reappointed to the State Emergency Response Commission for terms beginning Jan. 29, 2021 and ending Jan. 13, 2023.
- Michael Dinneen of Worthington (Franklin County) reappointed to the Materials Management Advisory Council for a term beginning Jan. 29, 2021 and ending July 1, 2023.

GUNS

The Ohio Attorney General's Office announced the creation Tuesday of a searchable "Ohio Stolen Gun Portal" website meant to increase public safety by helping to identify and recover stolen firearms and to prevent their resale. A first for Ohio, according to the AG, the database catalogues firearm serial numbers compiled from police and sheriffs' offices throughout Ohio and reported to the Law Enforcement Automated Data System (LEADS).

HIGHER EDUCATION

OhioHealth and Ohio University (OU) have entered into a memorandum of understanding meant to encourage and streamline their medical research collaborations. The organizations have long conducted joint medical and health research.

Kent State University (KSU) announced that it has launched a national search for the university's next leader of the Department of Intercollegiate Athletics. A 12-member search committee led by Lamar Hylton, vice president for student affairs, has been appointed to recruit and screen candidates for the director of athletics position.

JUDICIAL

Grant applications for 2021's Ohio Courts Technology Initiative are being accepted electronically through Friday, March 5, with awards announced in May.

LIQUOR/ALCOHOL

Another potential side effect of the coronavirus pandemic: Ohio liquor sales saw an uptick in 2020 according to data from the Ohio Division of Liquor Control. Though the agency did not explicitly link the increased sales to COVID-19, Ohioans spent \$247 million more on liquor in 2020 than they did in 2019.

NATURAL RESOURCES

The Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR) Division of Natural Areas and Preserves (DNAP) has secured a stretch of the Little Beaver Creek State Wild and Scenic River in Columbiana County. The purchase will provide for the protection and conservation of important habitat along the waterway, as well as provide recreational space, ODNR said.

ODNR has begun preparing Hargus Lake for the upcoming dam rehabilitation construction project this spring. The lake is part of the A.W. Marion State Park, which is located in Pickaway County near Circleville. Immediate effects of the pre-construction work include reducing water levels by 10-12 feet and closing some facilities, according to ODNR.

The ODNR Office of Real Estate and Land Management is offering nearly \$6 million in grants to purchase and improve public outdoor recreation areas across the state. Applicants may request up to \$150,000 for a single project during the grant period, according to

ODNR.

NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS

Citizens for Community Values announced Monday that it has changed its name to Center for Christian Virtue. The group said the name change "comes after years of prayer, conversation, and research with Catholic and evangelical leaders into what challenges face the church, Christians, and our state and nation. It reflects both the heart of the organization -- a love for Jesus -- and a recognition of the unique challenges and opportunities Christians will face in the years to come."

Goodwill Columbus announced the hiring of Ryan Burgess as its president and CEO. He currently serves as cabinet secretary for Gov. Mike DeWine. Burgess succeeds current Goodwill President and CEO Margie Pizzuti, who will be retiring in March after 15 years as the agency's leader.

PENSIONS

John Gallagher will retire as executive director of the Ohio Police & Fire Pension Fund (OP&F) at the end of the fiscal year, the retirement system announced this week. Gallagher has been director for several years since succeeding William Estabrook, who retired at the end of 2012.

PEOPLE

Former Rep. Fred Strahorn (D-Dayton) is the new executive director of Ohio Healthy Homes Network (OHHN), the housing organization announced Friday. Strahorn, who was term limited in 2020, served as House minority leader from 2015 to 2018. Strahorn has also served in the Senate.

The office of Lt. Gov. Jon Husted announced Tuesday that Hayley Carducci will be the new press secretary, filling a staff position that had been vacant since November. Carducci previously worked with Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities and at the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services during the Kasich administration. She was additionally a producer and reporter at WTOV in Steubenville and a reporter for the *Steubenville Herald Star*.

POLLS/STUDIES

A new national poll released Wednesday by Quinnipiac University found 61 percent of respondents are generally optimistic about the next four years with Joe Biden as president, but sharp party divisions remain. The poll of 1,075 adults conducted from Thursday, Jan. 28 through Monday, Feb. 1, showed 90 percent of Democrats and 62 percent of independent voters are optimistic about the next four years, while 65 percent of Republicans are pessimistic.

TAXATION

The nearly \$8 billion issued to employers by the Ohio Bureau of Workers' Compensation (BWC) are almost certainly subject to the Commercial Activity Tax (CAT) and income tax, Ohio Department of Taxation (ODT) officials told the Senate Ways and Means Committee on Tuesday. Responding to a question from Sen. Kristina Roegner (R-Hudson) during his proponent testimony on federal tax conformity bill SB18 (Roegner-Schaffer), ODT Legislative Director Tim Lynch said the agency currently views the dividends as taxable under the CAT.

TECHNOLOGY

Lt. Gov. Jon Husted Thursday announced the completion of the first phase of the broadband telehealth pilot project at Switzerland of Ohio School District in Monroe County during the governor's bi-weekly press conference. Husted, who was visiting the Swiss Hills Career Center during the call, said the program is now fully operational in the district and telehealth services are being provided to the students. He noted the rural district is hard to serve with Internet needs because of its size and topography.

TOBACCO/SMOKING

The latest "State of Tobacco Control" report from the American Lung Association gives Ohio failing grades in state efforts to prevent tobacco usage, as well as its taxes on tobacco products and prohibiting flavored tobacco products. The group said that even during the pandemic, tobacco use remains a serious public health threat, adding that in addition to tobacco-related death and disease, smoking also increases the most severe effects of COVID-19.

TRANSPORTATION/INFRASTRUCTURE

The Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT) announced it has launched a new tool to help the media and the public stay up to date on the agency's snow fighting efforts. The ODOT Winter Media Center includes information about material usage, downloadable video b-roll and photos, story ideas, and links to ODOT's snow and ice page, weather information, and a live feed of ODOT's social media posts from across the state.

As technology in passenger vehicles gets smarter, researchers are looking to keep up by making roads safer and more efficient with technology that can communicate with these vehicles. That research and the challenges that come with it were the subject of a webinar held Thursday that was sponsored by Ohio State University, AAA, the Transportation Research Center in East Liberty, DriveOhio, Columbus State Community College and Smart Columbus.

UNEMPLOYMENT COMPENSATION

The Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS) has established a new toll-free number for individuals to notify the agency if they believe their personal information was compromised and used to file a fraudulent unemployment claim -- 833-658-0394.

Gov. Mike DeWine Thursday announced his administration has formed a new public-private partnership team to improve Ohioans' experiences with the unemployment system after issues within the system have caused a backlog of claims. The ODJFS Public-Private Partnership Team, which currently is at 16 members but is expected to grow, will report directly to Henderson, DeWine said. It includes "highly skilled experts" -- most on loan from top insurance and banking companies in the state including Fifth Third Bank, Nationwide, Western & Southern Financial Group, Encova Insurance, and KeyBank -- who will provide recommendations and solutions to improve the call center, claims processing, and fraud detection in the state unemployment compensation system. DeWine said they will look at long-term and short-term improvements.

This move, however, was opposed by the Ohio Civil Service Employees Association (OCSEA) which suggested a greater investment in ODJFS staff, citing past contracting as a "major reason" behind claims delays and fraud issues.

For the week ending Jan. 30, the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS) reported 47,786 initial unemployment claims to the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL). That is slightly fewer than the number of new jobless claims reported last week, which was 49,974. Last week's total was the highest number of new jobless claims since May 2020.

During Thursday morning's House Finance Committee meeting, Office of Budget and Management (OBM) Director Kim Murnieks was asked by Reps. Mike Skindell (D-Lakewood) and Bride Rose Sweeney (D-Cleveland) about the state's plans for repaying the money borrowed for unemployment compensation. Murnieks said the federal government will not charge interest on the loan until April 2021 at the earliest. She said the executive budget proposal doesn't address the Unemployment Insurance Trust Fund, but the DeWine administration looks forward to working on the issue with members of the General Assembly in the near future.

VETERANS

In the session's first meeting of the Senate Veterans and Public Safety Committee, members heard testimony from Ohio State University researchers who are conducting the Ohio Veterans Neuromodulation -- Operation Wellness (NOW) pilot program, which is a state-funded program treating veterans' mental health issues including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), insomnia, depression, anxiety and substance abuse through a procedure known as transcranial magnetic stimulation (TMS), which stimulates targeted areas of the brain with powerful magnets. TMS is non-invasive.

WORKERS' COMPENSATION

The Ohio Bureau of Workers' Compensation's (BWC) new four-year contract with managed care organizations (MCOs) includes a "significant change in how we pay the MCOs, from what the historical practice has been," BWC Interim Administrator/CEO John Logue said Friday at the BWC Board of Directors monthly meeting. "We are no longer using a pool of money that will be split among the MCOs on a pro rata basis based on their activity. The new methodology introduces a variable component determined by the number of active claims an MCO is managing, and that number is adjusted monthly."