

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

5/6/2021 - Senate Health, (Ninth Hearing)

HB140 MODIFY ELECTION NOTICES, BALLOT LANGUAGE FOR PROPERTY TAX LEVIES *(MERRIN D)*

To enact the "Ballot Uniformity and Transparency Act" to modify the form of election notices and ballot language for property tax levies.

CURRENT STATUS

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

3/3/2021 - House Commerce and Labor, (First Hearing)

HB157

MODIFY MUNICIPAL INCOME TAX RULES - COVID WFH (JORDAN K, EDWARDS J)

To repeal Section 29 of H.B. 197 of the 133rd General Assembly to modify municipal income tax employer withholding rules for COVID-19-related work-from-home employees.

CURRENT STATUS

4/20/2021 - House Ways and Means, (Fifth Hearing)

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

4/22/2021 - Introduced

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

4/27/2021 - Introduced

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

4/20/2021 - **REPORTED OUT**, House Civil Justice, (Fourth Hearing)

SB15 FISCAL OFFICERS-LIABILITY *(WILSON S)*

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

CURRENT STATUS

3/24/2021 - 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

5/4/2021 - Senate Judiciary, (Third Hearing)

SB67 STUDY PROGRESS / CHALLENGES OF AFRICAN AMERICANS *(WILLIAMS S)*

To establish a committee to study the progress and challenges of African Americans in Ohio and to make an appropriation.

CURRENT STATUS

3/16/2021 - Senate Finance, (First Hearing)

SB93 REQUIRE VOTE-COUNTY SALES TAX INCREASE *(ANTANI N)*

To require voter approval of any increase in the rate of a county sales tax.

CURRENT STATUS

3/3/2021 - Referred to Committee Senate Ways and Means

SB97 MUNICIPAL INCOME TAX-WORK FROM HOME *(ROEGNER K)*

To modify municipal income tax employer withholding rules for COVID-19-related work-from-home employees

CURRENT STATUS

3/3/2021 - Referred to Committee Senate Ways and Means

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

Week in Review

Friday, April 30, 2021

FY22-23 BUDGET

While Sen. Matt Dolan (R-Chagrin Falls) commended the House for including its school funding plan in the budget, the Senate Finance Committee chair said he's worried about the cost of the plan and other education-related issues. "It's expensive. So the first question that I'm going to look at is, where did you get the money from for the additional costs that Cupp-Patterson's going to require?" Dolan said during the Impact Ohio Akron-Canton Regional Virtual Conference budget panel discussion on Friday.

Members of both Democratic and Republican Senate leadership supported efforts to increase the state's emphasis on providing public child care and preschool options during a virtual meeting with early childhood advocacy group Groundwork Ohio Friday. Senate Finance Committee Chairman Sen. Matt Dolan (R-Chagrin Falls), Senate President Pro Tempore Jay Hottinger (R-Newark), Senate Minority Leader Kenny Yuko (D-Richmond Heights) and Sen. Vernon Sykes (D-Akron) all characterized public child care and preschool as budget priorities, with the lawmakers saying that early childhood issues are important to families and businesses.

CENSUS

The U.S. Census Bureau Monday said Ohio will be one of seven states to lose a seat in the U.S. House of Representatives, while six states are set to gain seats. Monday was the first release of data by the Census Bureau from the 2020 count, which included the population counts used for apportioning seats in the U.S. House of Representatives. Block-level data, which is used by states to draw the district lines, will be released on Thursday, Sept. 30. Acting Census Bureau Director Ron Jarmin said that as of April 1, 2020, the U.S. had a population of 331,449,281 million, an increase of 7.4 percent from the 2010 Census. However, he said that rate was lower than the previous growth rate from 2000 to 2010 of 9.7 percent, and the second lowest growth rate in U.S. history, trailing only 1930-1940.

CORONAVIRUS

Gov. Mike DeWine announced during his Tuesday briefing fully vaccinated Ohioans will no longer need to quarantine if they are exposed to someone with COVID-19. DeWine said the policy change should be particularly helpful for high school students involved in extracurricular activities like sports. Currently, those 16 and 17 years old can get vaccinated, and DeWine said about 21 percent, over one in five, of that group have received at least one dose of the COVID-19 vaccine. Further, he said thinks it "won't be too long" until those 12 years of age and older will be eligible for the vaccine.

Earlier in the day, the governor also signed two bills related to mental health issues that he said will "update and modernize" several

of the state's mental health laws. SB2 (Gavarone) will prioritize state psychiatric hospital beds for patients who need the most care and provide for the least restrictive environment for their care. It will further enter Ohio into the Ohio into the Psychology Interjurisdictional Compact (PSYPACT). SB57 (Hackett-Antonio), among other provisions, codifies decades of historical practice of allowing real estate property tax exemptions for certain properties used by individuals with a mental disability or substance use disorder.

The Ohio Department of Health (ODH) launched a dashboard Monday to provide county-level data on COVID test positivity rates, ODH Chief Medical Officer Dr. Bruce Vanderhoff said. The dashboard map displays counties in varying shades of blue based on the positivity rate, including a special lighter shade in counties where data might be skewed because fewer than 20 tests were administered in a given week, Vanderhoff said. Downloadable CSV files of weekly county-level data are also available.

Gov. Mike DeWine told vaccine providers Friday night they could resume administering the Johnson & Johnson (Janssen) COVID-19 vaccine after the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) of the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the CDC and the federal Food and Drug Administration (FDA) Friday lifted a temporary pause to evaluate reports of rare instances of a blood-clotting condition. The FDA and CDC issued a statement saying the Johnson & Johnson (J&J) vaccine is "safe and effective in preventing COVID-19," that its benefits outweigh risks, and that data suggest the chance of developing the clotting condition is "very low." The agencies said providers, caregivers and patients should review updated fact sheets for the vaccine that now include information about the clotting condition. Those fact sheets are available at <https://tinyurl.com/kcwz48dz> and <https://tinyurl.com/rywbxxx2>.

DISABILITIES

Two special hunting events at Pike State Forest and Blue Rock State Forest gave hunters with disabilities the chance to enjoy the outdoors while hunting for wild turkey in early April, according to the Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR).

ECONOMY

Gov. Mike DeWine's administration announced Monday the approval of assistance for six projects expected to create 622 new jobs and retain 449 jobs statewide. During its monthly meeting, the Ohio Tax Credit Authority (TCA) reviewed economic development proposals brought by JobsOhio and its regional partners. The projects are expected to collectively result in more than \$29 million in new payroll and spur more than \$99 million in investments across Ohio.

EDUCATION

The school superintendents and treasurers who helped to write the Cupp-Patterson funding plan started walking senators through its various components Tuesday as part of a series of budget hearings, as they'd done repeatedly in the House the past two years. Tuesday's hearing on HB110 (Oelslager) in the Senate Primary and Secondary Education Committee featured several witnesses discussing the funding plan's base cost calculation; distribution formula; funding of choice programs; and funding of career-tech education and educational service centers. For the second time, presiding at the hearing was Sen. Louis Blessing (R-Cincinnati), vice chair of the committee, who posed several questions about sustainability of growth under the plan and comparison to the prior formula.

Then on Wednesday, a school finance expert told senators the State Appropriations Limitation (SAL) was a factor in the House's decision to slow the phase in of extra funding for economically disadvantaged students in its version of the budget.

The State Board of Education's Legislative Committee, also on Wednesday, began discussions on whether to endorse the Cupp-Patterson plan or otherwise weigh in on legislative school funding deliberations. Ohio Department of Education budget chief Aaron Rausch and Legislative Director Marjorie Yano presented an overview of the plan to committee members, as well as a list of school funding principles the full board had previously endorsed as part of a budget request several cycles ago in 2012 -- an approach Chair Steve Dackin said might be a way to weigh in now.

In addition, Wednesday also saw a new coalition launched to help champion the plan, also known as the Fair School Funding Plan.

Attorneys Curt Harman and Christopher Finney recently sued the State Board of Education (SBOE) on behalf of Hamilton County resident Daniel Regenold over President Laura Kohler's decision to limit public comment on topics such as "The 1619 Project" of the *New York Times* and critical race theory at board meetings for the past several months after the board had heard several months of commenters, prompting Kohler to announce she would not entertain further speakers on the topics. "I no longer believe that these discussions are productive," she said. The suit alleges this violates Regenold's First Amendment rights who had sought to speak at the April board meeting on critical race theory.

Ohio High School Athletic Association (OHSAA) Executive Director Doug Ute and his staff are recommending that the organization begin charging membership dues for the first time in OHSAA's 114-year history. The proposal calls for each high school to contribute \$50 per OHSAA-sanctioned sport beginning with the 2021-2022 school year, OHSAA said. The OHSAA Board of Directors is scheduled to hold a special meeting on Monday, May 3 at 8 a.m. to vote on the proposal.

The Ohio Department of Education (ODE) recently released a new public service announcement (PSA) produced in collaboration with nonprofit TEACH called "The Future Depends on Teachers," which celebrates the role teachers play in shaping the future and invites people to explore teaching. The PSA is released prior to Teacher Appreciation Week, which is Monday, May 3 through Friday, May 7, and National Teacher Appreciation Day on Tuesday, May 4.

The Ohio High School Athletic Association (OHSAA) announced the selection of the following four new staff members take pre-existing positions vacated in late 2020 or early 2021: Charles Anderson is the new manager of officiating, while Kate Barnett and John Kuzio join as sport administrators. Laura Lemanski is the new senior accountant.

The House Primary and Secondary Education Committee held its first hearing Wednesday on a bill which would prohibit transgender girls and women from competing in female interscholastic sports. Sponsors of HB61 are Reps. Reggie Stoltzfus (R-Minerva) and Jena Powell (R-Arcanum). Powell claimed female athletes across the country are losing championships, scholarship opportunities, and medals, due to "discriminatory policies that allow biological males to compete in girls' sports" while Stoltzfus characterized it as an issue of "fairness" and a violation of Title IX.

ELECTIONS

Following the recent announcement from Reps. Bill Seitz (R-Cincinnati) and Sharon Ray (R-Wadsworth) that they will soon be introducing an extensive elections reform bill dealing with issues ranging from online absentee ballot requests to voter identification during early voting to drop boxes, Democrats started attacking it and linking it to more than 300 other restrictive measures led by Republicans around the nation to roll back certain voting procedures such as early voting. Seitz and Ray had commented that while reforms previously passed "helped to ensure there were only minimal complaints about the Ohio election results in 2020...there is always room for improvement in safeguarding the integrity of election processes."

The Ohio Supreme Court Tuesday evening unanimously ruled that Secretary of State Frank LaRose abused his discretion when he refused to reappoint Summit County Republican Party Chairman Bryan Williams to the county board of elections and ordered LaRose to reinstate Williams. The Summit County Republican Party had sued LaRose after the secretary of state had refused to follow the recommendation of the county party to reappoint Williams -- a former state representative, director, and deputy director of the board of elections -- to the board of elections for a third term, saying that Williams had not demonstrated the standard of competency to serve in the role. The party argued that Williams is more than qualified to serve, and that the reasons cited by LaRose were based on inaccurate and incomplete statements that mischaracterized the relevant facts and the board's role in identifying, investigating, and redressing the issues alleged by LaRose. It also said LaRose had personal reasons for refusing to reappoint Williams.

ELECTIONS 2021

Gov. Mike DeWine Monday announced a special election timetable for filling the 15th Congressional District seat after U.S. Rep. Steve Stivers (R-Columbus) resigns next month to become head of the Ohio Chamber of Commerce. The schedule is similar to the special election schedule to fill former U.S. Rep. Marcia Fudge's (D-Warrensville Heights) seat after she became the secretary of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, with the special election primary and general election both taking place on the same dates. Declaration of candidacy for the Stivers seat is due on Monday, May 17 with the Special Election Congressional Primary on Tuesday, Aug. 3. The actual election takes place on Tuesday, Nov. 2.

Two more members of the General Assembly have launched campaigns for the Stivers' 15th Congressional District: Rep. Jeff LaRe (R-Canal Winchester) and Sen. Stephanie Kunze (R-Hilliard) joined Sen. Bob Peterson (R-Sabina), Rep. Brian Stewart (R-Ashville) and Fairfield County Commissioner Jeff Fix in seeking the Republican nomination.

ELECTIONS 2022

U.S. Rep. Tim Ryan (D-Warren) made his bid for the U.S. Senate official Monday, becoming the first Democrat in the race. Ryan had been exploring a possible run for the seat since U.S. Sen. Rob Portman (R-OH) announced he would not seek re-election. Ryan released a 3-minute video launching his bid with a pro-worker and jobs message as he toured Youngstown with his son, Brady.

The following endorsements were made over the week:

- The U.S. Senate campaign of Tim Ryan announced the endorsements of AFSCME Ohio Council 8; OAPSE AFSCME Local 4; AFSCME Retirees 1184; Communication Workers of America District 4; International Union of Painters & Allied Trades District Council 6; Maritime Engineers Beneficial Association; Ohio State Conference of IBEW; Ohio Association of Professional Firefighters; SMART Transportation Division; and SMART Sheet Metal Workers.

ENERGY

The company at the center of the 133-HB6 (Callender-Wilkin) corruption scandal is in talks with the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Southern District of Ohio to avoid criminal charges related to the matter, according to a filing from FirstEnergy with the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC). "As these discussions are preliminary, FirstEnergy cannot currently predict the timing, the outcome or the impact of a possible resolution of this ongoing investigation," FirstEnergy said.

Columbus-based American Electric Power (AEP) is making the moves necessary to meet its goal of reducing carbon dioxide (CO2) emissions by 80 percent from 2000 levels by 2030, according to an analysis released by AEP and the Task Force on Climate-Related Financial Disclosures (TCFD). AEP, which has also set a goal of net zero CO2 emissions by 2050, plans to add more than 10,000 megawatts (MW) of renewable energy sources to its generation portfolio by 2030 and is investing in a more modern power grid and new energy technology, according to the company.

FEDERAL

Ohio is joining 37 other states and U.S. territories in urging Congress to pass the bipartisan EAGLES Act against school violence and

mass shootings in honor of the 17 people killed at Parkland, Florida's Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in 2018. Named after its mascot, companion House and Senate bills call for a coordinated, nationwide effort by state and federal authorities, educators and families and an expansion of the U.S. Secret Service's National Threat Assessment Center (NTAC).

U.S. Sen. Rob Portman (R-OH) urged the Biden administration and Democratic Congress Tuesday to embrace a bipartisan infrastructure bill prior to the president's first joint address before the House and Senate on Wednesday. Portman and other Republicans may have found an ally in Sen. Joe Manchin (D-WV) as part of an effort to defeat President Joe Biden's \$2.25 trillion proposal in favor of Sen. Shelly Capito's (R-WV) smaller, \$568 billion infrastructure plan that Manchin and Portman have publicly commended. "Infrastructure always has been bipartisan; I hope it can be in this case," Portman said during a press call Tuesday.

House Minority Leader Emilia Sykes was joined by former state representative and Hamilton County Commissioner Denise Driehaus and other local Democratic leaders Thursday to respond to President Joe Biden's Wednesday address to Congress, marking his first 100 days in office. They focused on the infrastructure piece of Biden's plan. She said she was excited to partner with the federal government to address the Cincinnati area's infrastructure needs, such as the replacement of the Brent Spence Bridge.

Also responding to Biden's address was Ohio Republican Party Chairman Bob Paduchik who called Biden's proposal a "\$1.8 trillion nanny-state plan" He called on the president to make good on his promise work with Republicans.

GENERAL ASSEMBLY/STATEHOUSE

The Senate voted unanimously to pass rent and utility assistance bill HB167 (Oelslager), sending that bill to Gov. Mike DeWine's desk. The legislation appropriates \$465 million in FY21 to DSA to fund its emergency rental assistance program, and \$100 million to the Ohio Department of Public Safety (ODPS) for emergency costs related to the pandemic in federal COVID relief dollars.

The Senate also unanimously passed SB59 (Schaffer), which prohibits the disposal of certain war relics located on public property or cemetery association property, and SB63 (O'Brien), which allows county commissioners to authorize a county department of probation to accept credit card payments.

The Senate announced the cancellation of two session dates in late May -- Tuesday, May 25 and Thursday, May 27. Senate Rules and Reference Committee meetings for those dates are cancelled as well. A session remains on the calendar that week for Wednesday, May 26.

An historic 156-year-old 36-star American flag is currently on display in the Ohio Statehouse Rotunda. The flag's display includes an exhibit of Civil War artifacts related to the Lincoln funeral train and is now open to the public through Sunday, Nov. 14, 2021, according to the Capitol Square Review and Advisory Board (CSRAB). The 36-star flag is the same one that flew over Capitol Square during the repose of President Abraham Lincoln on April 29, 1865. It was originally presented to David Nevin Murray of Portsmouth, OH for his contributions to the war effort on behalf of the Union Army during the American Civil War.

In other action, the House Civil Justice Committee reported out HB229 (Wilkin-Swearingen) which addresses qualified immunity for camp operators and HB162 (Galonski) which removes derogatory disability-related terminology from the Ohio Revised Code; the House Health Committee reported out HB185 (Sweeney) which designates March "Bleeding Disorders Awareness Month"; HB176 (Carfagna-Hall) which revises athletic training laws; and HB37 (Manning) which address emergency prescription refills; House Energy and Natural Resources reported out HB201 (Stephens) which prevents local governments from limiting use of natural gas; and the Senate Ways and Means Committee reported out SB40 (Schaffer) regarding cigarette minimum pricing.

HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

The State Medical Board of Ohio (SMBO) has permanently revoked the medical license of Ted Grace, the former director of Ohio State University's (OSU) Student Health Services. The case against Grace was one of 42 cases that were reopened as SMBO seeks to identify Ohio medical license holders who knew or suspected former OSU physician Richard Strauss was engaged in sexual misconduct and failed to take appropriate actions. The Governor's Working Group on Reviewing of the Medical Board's Handling of the Investigation Involving Richard Strauss released its final report last month.

The DeWine administration doesn't have a problem with House budget language requiring the Ohio Department of Health (ODH) and the Ohio Auditor of State's Office to help small cities determine whether they should consolidate their health departments, ODH Director Stephanie McCloud told the Senate Health Committee on Wednesday.

HIGHER EDUCATION

After low enrollment for many years, Franklin University is selling the Urbana University branch campus. Franklin opted to close the campus after the spring 2020 semester, citing the "stress and uncertainty" caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, and the campus is now listed by the commercial real estate firm CBRE without a price. The campus, originally built in 1850, sits on 115-acres and is composed of 22 buildings totaling 350,784 square feet, including new athletic facilities, a solar panel field, and surplus land.

Kent State University President Todd Diacon announced Wednesday Amoaba Gooden has accepted the position of vice president for diversity, equity and inclusion, effective Saturday, May 1. Gooden has been serving in the position on an interim basis for nearly a year while remaining as chair and associate professor in the university's Department of Pan-African Studies.

More than 70 students from Ohio's 23 community colleges were honored Thursday as part of the 2021 All-Ohio Academic Team, recognizing their achievement in academics, leadership and community service.

Ohio Lt. Governor Jon Husted and Ohio Department of Higher Education (ODHE) Chancellor Randy Gardner participated in the virtual ceremony which was held as part of Community College Month in Ohio.

IMMIGRATION

Immigration advocates from around Ohio voiced support for federal legislation that would provide a pathway to citizenship, discussing the challenges faced by recipients of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program in particular. Pastor Carl Ruby of the Central Christian Church in Springfield also called for U.S. Sen. Rob Portman (R-OH) to back the American Dream and Promise Act and the Farm Workforce Modernization Act, which have both passed in the U.S. House of Representatives.

JUDICIAL

The Moundbuilders Country Club says the Ohio History Connection (OHC) has violated the Legislature's "stated intention" in eminent domain overhaul 127-SB7 (Grendell) by neglecting to make the century-old golf course a "good faith" offer for its leasehold estate and by suing the members-only club without lawful jurisdiction. OHC, which holds "leased fee" rights to the 125 acres, tells the Ohio Supreme Court that Moundbuilders' argument is a red herring short of an honest request for more money, and that the agency's confusion over lease-interest gobbledygook was "harmless error" envisioned by SB7. OHC has maintained actual ownership of the 2,000-year-old Octagon Earthworks since 1933, while Moundbuilders' interest goes back to 1910 and runs all the way through 2078.

The Ohio Supreme Court agreed Wednesday to consider whether the law barring union pickets at the homes and workplaces of public employer representatives is an unconstitutional restriction on free speech rights when it agreed to hear *Portage Co. Educators Assoc. for Developmental Disabilities - Unit B, Ohio Education Association/National Education Association v. State Employee Relations Board*.

Seeking a collective voice to address social and racial injustice, the newly formed Ohio Black Judges Association envisions helping more Black students enter the legal field as lawyers and judges, according to the Ohio Supreme Court's news service, *Court News Ohio*. Of the 723 judgeships in Ohio, 56 are held by African Americans.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

The Joint Committee on Force Accounts launched testimony Thursday on the major question facing Ohio counties big and small: What cap increases will they need for employee labor costs to keep construction projects in-house and to spend tax dollars wisely so that roads, bridges and other critical infrastructure do not fall into further decay? Members, including legislators and appointees of the County Engineers Association of Ohio (CEAO), County Commissioners Association of Ohio (CCAO), Ohio Township Association (OTA), Ohio Municipal League (OML) and Ohio Contractors Association (OCA), heard from a half dozen county engineers and other local officials on the state of roads and bridges and their losing battle with inflation.

MEDICAID/MEDICAID REFORM

Buckeye Community Health Plan and Paramount Advantage -- both current managed care contractors and bidders for Ohio's new, multi-billion dollar Medicaid managed care contracts -- filed protests against the Ohio Department of Medicaid (ODM) award decisions announced earlier in April. Paramount was not chosen for a contract based on bid scoring, while a decision on Buckeye was put on hold pending state litigation against parent company Centene. ODM characterized its decision on Buckeye as neither an award nor a denial while the company said ODM made an "arbitrary and capricious" decision to avoid an affirmative award or denial of a managed care contract for Buckeye despite bid scoring that rated it better than all but one applicant. But Paramount Advantage said Buckeye's ability to score so highly while under investigation reveals flaws in the bidding process, while also asserting a bias embedded in the procurement process in favor of large out-of-state corporations.

The contracted actuary for the Joint Medicaid Oversight Committee (JMOC) projects a growth rate of approximately 3 percent to 4 percent in Medicaid per-member, per-month (PMPM) costs in both years of the upcoming biennium. Optumas Managing Director Steve Schramm presented the projections Thursday to the committee, as part of JMOC's biennial process of setting a growth target for the Ohio Department of Medicaid (ODM) to meet. Optumas projects PMPM of \$785 on the low end and \$796 on the high end, or growth of 3.1 percent to 4 percent, for FY 22. For FY23, it projects a PMPM of \$809 to \$828, or 3.1 percent to 4.1 percent growth.

NATURAL RESOURCES

The Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR) Division of Forestry (DOF) is planning to plant or distribute more than 20,000 trees in Northwest Ohio and the Maumee River Basin this spring. "Planting trees is always a great thing, particularly in Northwest Ohio, which is the least-forested part of the state," ODNR DOF Chief Dan Balsler said. "These efforts increase our state's natural infrastructure and support the state's H2Ohio program to improve water quality."

The northern cardinal -- which was recognized by the General Assembly as the state bird in 1933 -- will be featured on the 2021 Ohio Wildlife Legacy Stamp, according to ODNR. "Easily identifiable, the cardinal is one of Ohio's most iconic species. All Ohioans and supporters of wildlife conservation can celebrate this colorful bird by purchasing the 12th annual Ohio Wildlife Legacy Stamp," the department said.

The first weekend start to Ohio's spring wild turkey hunting season resulted in 3,875 birds taken by hunters on April 24-25, according to the ODNR Division of Wildlife. The 2021 spring wild turkey hunting season started on a Saturday instead of the traditional Monday following a change approved by the Ohio Wildlife Council in 2020. Wild turkey hunting was open in Ohio's south zone only beginning Saturday, April 24. Hunting in the northeast zone, comprised of five counties in Ohio's snow belt, opens Saturday, May 1.

The ODNR Division of Natural Areas and Preserves is encouraging individuals to refrain from picking wildflowers this spring. "Imagine if every person who visited a nature preserve picked just one wildflower," ODNR Division of Natural Areas and Preserves Chief Jeff Johnson said. "With thousands of people coming every year, there would be no wildflowers left for others to enjoy on our state lands." Picking or digging plants from most public lands, including state nature preserves, is illegal.

The Old-Growth Forest Network (OGFN) has welcomed four Ohio state nature preserves (SNPs) into the organization. The inductees are Baker Woods SNP (Mercer County), Gross Memorial Woods SNP (Shelby County), Davey Woods SNP (Champaign County) and Hueston Woods SNP (Butler County), according to a news release from the Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR).

NEWS MEDIA

A Cincinnati police officer says he was mistaken for a White supremacist by courthouse protestors after the murder of George Floyd and should remain anonymous during defamation proceedings against activists who purportedly threatened him and his family on social media and allegedly made false accusations to the Cincinnati Citizens Complaint Authority (CCA). The *Cincinnati Enquirer* countered that Ofc. Ryan Olthaus, whose name the newspaper published in January, has not established any "specific threat of harm" and that Hamilton County Judge Megan Shanahan therefore had no cause to grant him legal protection under the alias "M.R." in court proceedings.

OHIO HISTORY

The Ohio History Connection has announced the new Warren G. Harding Presidential Library and Museum and the newly restored Harding Home are opening for members next month, Wednesday, May 5 to Sunday, May 9.

PEOPLE

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) in Ohio has awarded Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR) Director Mary Mertz the 2021 Public Service Award. The award recognizes Mertz for her ability to advance "bold and far-reaching concepts and programs that protect lands and waters in Ohio," ODNR said.

POLITICS

The fact that both leaders of Ohio's major parties hail from the Akron area was not lost on moderators of an Impact Ohio event held by video conference on Friday. Both said they see their hometown as playing a major role in party strategy going forward. Liz Walters, the new chairman of the Ohio Democratic Party, and Bob Paduchik, the Ohio Republican Party chairman who took over earlier this year, spoke to the conference during a panel session moderated by John Green of the Bliss Institute at the University of Akron, and both noted the shifting dynamics of their area of the state. Walters said the Akron-Canton-Youngstown region is "critically important" for the party's path ahead, saying they have to make up structural deficiencies in those areas as former President Donald Trump won places where Republicans previously could not break through. At the same time, Democrats made gains in suburban areas of Akron that previously trended Republican. Paduchik said he sees Summit County as the center of the state's political battleground and important as the party continues the "working class message" that it has been using the last few election cycles.

Two of the Ohio Democratic Party's (ODP) statewide candidates addressed ODP's executive committee during a virtual meeting Wednesday evening, expressing confidence they can win next year despite Ohio moving more red in the past few election cycles. Dayton Mayor Nan Whaley spoke about her gubernatorial campaign, while U.S. Rep. Tim Ryan (D-Niles) discussed his U.S. Senate campaign that kicked off this week.

PUBLIC SAFETY

After eight months of research and more than 170 interviews with protestors and police, a report conducted by the Ohio State University John Glenn College of Public Affairs cataloguing the Columbus Police Department (CPD) response to the July 2020 protests in the wake of the killing of George Floyd by former Minneapolis Police Officer Derek Chauvin found that the department's response to the protests deepened the rift between the police and community members. Glenn College Dean Trevor Brown and Carter Stewart, former U.S. attorney for the Southern District of Ohio, led the investigation.

Police violence and misconduct cannot be tolerated in Ohio any longer, House Minority Leader Emilia Sykes (D-Akron) said Tuesday. "Gross misconduct would never fly at your job, and it shouldn't for law enforcement or other public servants who are sworn to protect and serve you, the public at large. That's why we need change now," Sykes said during a Zoom event with several other House Democrats, during which they announced a number of police reform proposals. Members of the caucus are reintroducing a number of police reform bills that were proposed by Democrats during the 133rd General Assembly, Sykes said.

The 100 Ohio State Highway Patrol (OSHP) troopers who were providing support to law enforcement in Minnesota during the conclusion of the Derek Chauvin trial returned to Ohio over the weekend, Lt. Craig Cvetan told *Hannah News*, as it was determined they were no longer needed.

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) announced this week that it is extending the REAL ID enforcement date from Oct. 1, 2021 to May 3, 2023, citing issues from the COVID-19 pandemic. DHS said the pandemic "has significantly impacted states' ability to issue REAL ID-compliant driver's licenses and identification cards, with many driver's licensing agencies still operating at limited capacity."

Mayor Andrew Ginther and the Columbus police union traded criticisms this week as the city presses the U.S. Department of Justice

(DOJ) to conduct a formal review of the department for any racial biases and, if necessary, to bring possible legal action against the Columbus Division of Police.

REDISTRICTING/REAPPORTIONMENT

Senate President Matt Huffman (R-Lima) sat down with reporters Tuesday to outline a proposal to temporarily delay deadlines set in the Ohio Constitution to draw new General Assembly legislative district lines due to a delay in the release of census numbers, but he said any fix would have to be passed by lawmakers within the next week. Huffman said if he can't get buy-in from Democrats, he's not interested in doing it, even though Republicans hold large enough majorities to put something on the ballot on their own. The issue stems from a variety of factors, from deadlines to draw new districts that are specified in the Ohio Constitution, to the delay in data from the census, as well as the constitutional requirement that Ohio lawmakers live in their districts for at least a year before appearing on the ballot.

However, the Ohio Legislative Black Caucus (OLBC) is "deeply concerned" with Huffman's proposed constitutional amendment to push back the deadlines required to draw new legislative districts, the group said Wednesday. OLBC said the potential of reducing or eliminating public hearings and public input on the redistricting process could be a problem.

SECRETARY OF STATE

Secretary of State Frank LaRose told attendees of the Impact Ohio Conference Friday that despite its challenges, 2020 turned out to be the most successful for his office when it comes to running elections and registering new businesses -- two of the main functions the secretary of state oversees. LaRose spoke to the event held through video conference as it kicked off, saying his office broke records in both elections and new businesses.

Secretary of State Frank LaRose announced 19,694 new businesses filed with his office in March, setting a new monthly record. The previous record was set in July 2020 when 18,659 new businesses filed with the secretary of state's office. The March total is a 47 percent increase from March 2020.

STATE GOVERNMENT

The Department of Administrative Services (DAS) recently announced that the James A. Rhodes State Office Tower had earned Energy Star certification for the third year in a row, with the latest designation "due in part to a nearly complete modernization project and other conservation initiatives by DAS." DAS also noted that the office tower, at 41 stories, is the tallest building in downtown Columbus and the tallest building in state government. The energy saving initiatives are expected to result in a 16 percent reduction in energy use.

TECHNOLOGY

The Senate voted unanimously 32-0 to pass broadband expansion bill HB2 (Carfagna-Stewart) on Wednesday, sending the measure back to the House for a concurrence vote. Senate Financial Institutions and Technology Committee Chair Steve Wilson (R-Maineville) spoke in support of the bill on the floor, saying the pandemic has helped everyone understand the need for broadband access across the state.

Ohio has the potential to be a leader in new data privacy legislation, Lt. Gov. Jon Husted said during an inaugural "Tech Policy Summit" hosted by OhioX Thursday, due to the lack of current law in that space. "We have basically no rules about how companies have to treat your data," he said during brief keynote remarks at the virtual event, but legislators are working with the tech industry to develop "good rules" for the future. California and Virginia have passed laws on the topic, Husted continued, but Ohio can be "the model for the future" when Congress will likely develop its own bill.

TRANSPORTATION/INFRASTRUCTURE

Rep. Cindy Abrams (R-Harrison) said Thursday that she is joining with Rep. Brian Lampton (R-Beavercreek) to introduce legislation she said would expand current language regarding texting and driving and would bar individuals from holding electronic devices while driving.

UNEMPLOYMENT COMPENSATION

Fake websites that closely mirror the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services' (ODJFS) website are being used to steal personal and banking information, ODJFS Interim Director Matt Damschroder announced Monday. The addresses of the fake websites are unemployment-ohio-gov.com and ohio-gov.cn, the department said.

The Unemployment Compensation Modernization and Improvement Council heard Thursday an update on public-private partnership efforts to address high claims volume and fraudulent claims, as well as recommendations from Ohioans affected directly by the unemployment crisis.

For the week ending April 24, the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS) reported 21,447 initial unemployment claims to the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL). That number is slightly lower than last week's, when the department reported 22,098. Of the 21,447 initial claims reported this week, about 900 have been flagged for potential fraud, according to ODJFS.

UNIONS

The Department of Administrative Services' (DAS) 2021-2024 labor agreement with the Ohio Civil Service Employees Association

(OCSEA) took effect on Wednesday, April 21, according to a DAS update Monday, following its ratification by union membership and a recent presentation to the Controlling Board. The OCSEA represents approximately 27,000 state employees in eight bargaining units and more than 800 classifications, DAS continued, and the new agreement "contains changes designed to streamline resolution of disputes, increase management flexibility and provide a fair wage increase for employees."

It is the first of five collective bargaining agreements, and DAS said this agreement generally sets the pattern for the negotiations with Service Employees International Union (SEIU) District 1199, the Ohio State Troopers Association, State Council of Professional Educators and State of Ohio Unit 2 Association.

WORKERS' COMPENSATION

Most of the members of the Ohio Bureau of Workers' Compensation (BWC) Board of Directors whose terms expire in June will continue to serve after reappointment by Gov. Mike DeWine, Chair Chan Cochran noted at the outset of Friday's board meeting. Reappointed members include Michael Taylor, who holds the seat designated for a member of the executive committee of the largest statewide labor federation, the Ohio AFL-CIO; Kenneth Haffey, who holds the seat designated for a certified public accountant; and Tracie Sanchez, who holds the seat designated to represent employers with 100 or fewer employees. Their new terms are now extended until June 11, 2024. DeWine appointed David Currier to the seat now held by Frederick Treuhaft, one of two board seats designated for a securities and investment experts.