

## 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

3/18/2021 - Senate Transportation, (Seventh Hearing)

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#### **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

3/11/2021 - House Finance, (Seventh Hearing)

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#### **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

3/10/2021 - House Ways and Means, (Second Hearing)

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#### **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

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**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**

3/16/2021 - House Ways and Means, (Third Hearing)

**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**

3/9/2021 - House Civil Justice, (First 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**

3/9/2021 - **REPORTED OUT**, Senate Local Government and Elections, (Fourth 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**

3/16/2021 - House Ways and Means, (Fifth Hearing)

**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**

3/2/2021 - Senate Judiciary, (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**

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

**Week in Review**

**ABORTION**

The Ohio law that prohibits abortion after fetal cardiac activity is detected will remain temporarily enjoined until two other abortion-related cases are decided by the U.S. Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals, U.S. District Judge Michael Barrett has ordered. Implementation of the "heartbeat bill," 133-SB23 (Roegner), has been blocked by the court since July 2019.

Ohio Attorney General Dave Yost Monday announced that he has filed a motion in the U.S. Supreme Court that has been joined by 18

other states seeking to prevent President Joe Biden from changing federal regulations to allow federal money to be used to fund abortions.

Abortion would become a felony offense in Ohio if *Roe v. Wade* is overturned by the U.S. Supreme Court under legislation proposed by Sens. Kristina Roegner (R-Hudson) and Sandra O'Brien (R-Rome). The "Human Life Protection Act" would also immediately take effect if a constitutional amendment allowing states to criminalize abortion is passed. Ten other states have enacted similar "trigger" laws, according to the Guttmacher Institute.

## **FY20-21 BUDGET**

The state's revenues continue to exceed estimates with February's coming in \$182.9 million or 10.6 percent over estimates, the Office of Budget and Management (OBM) announced Friday in releasing the preliminary February figures. OBM Director Kimberly Murnieks commented that, "As our February revenues illustrate, Ohio's solid start to our year of recovery continues. COVID-19 cases and hospitalizations are declining while vaccine roll-out ramps up. We must remain vigilant in our efforts to control the pandemic because, as the past year has clearly demonstrated, our economic growth is directly tied to beating COVID."

## **FY22-23 BUDGET**

The General Assembly should reject a provision of Gov. Mike DeWine's executive budget proposal reducing state funding for libraries, representatives of the Ohio Library Council (OLC) told the House Finance Committee during budget testimony on Wednesday. "The Public Library Fund is not a line-item appropriation like the numerous programs and state agencies before you in HB110 (Oelslager). It is in permanent law and is a set percentage of the state's monthly tax receipts that go into the General Revenue Fund (GRF). It ebbs and flows each month depending on state revenues and is currently set in temporary law at 1.7 percent of the GRF for FY21. The as-introduced version of HB110 would reduce state funding to Ohio's public libraries from 1.7 percent to 1.66 percent of the state's GRF," OLC Government and Legal Services Director Jay Smith said, noting that level would be the lowest since FY15.

The House Finance Committee heard a broad array of budget requests at its Thursday hearing on biennial budget bill HB110 (Oelslager) from groups in the areas of human services, education and local government.

## **CORONAVIRUS**

Gov. Mike DeWine announced Friday that the state is working with the federal government to establish a mass vaccination clinic at Cleveland State University (CSU) beginning March 17. State and local officials will additionally set up 11 "permanent" regional locations and four mobile clinics in the "latter part of March," DeWine said, as well as two short-term "pop-up" locations in Columbus and Cincinnati.

Director Stephanie McCloud and Chief Medical Officer Dr. Bruce Vanderhoff of the Ohio Department of Health (ODH) explained in a press conference the administration's thinking on a target of 50 cases per 100,000 people averaged over two weeks as the threshold for lifting pandemic restrictions. Vanderhoff explained why, in Gov. Mike DeWine's thinking, a two-week average for the 50/100K figure is superior to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) one-week average. "We really don't want the noise from random daily variations to confuse the picture," he said. "I'm much more confident in a two-week interval."

Gov. Mike DeWine announced vaccine eligibility would expand to those age 50 and up, as well as people with Type 2 diabetes and end-stage renal disease, starting Thursday, March 11. The governor also announced that the state's new centralized vaccine scheduling system website is now live at [gettheshot.coronavirus.ohio.gov](http://gettheshot.coronavirus.ohio.gov). The website will serve as a single location for Ohioans to confirm that they are eligible to be vaccinated, identify nearby providers (within 20 miles) and schedule their vaccine appointments.

The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops recently released a statement saying it is "morally acceptable" for Catholics to receive the Johnson & Johnson vaccine despite its use of cell lines from aborted fetuses in its production, though they encouraged Catholics to choose the other vaccines if possible.

Gov. Mike DeWine declared Tuesday, March 9 a "day of remembrance" to honor the more than 17,500 people who've died of COVID on the one-year anniversary of the first confirmed case in Ohio.

The House approved legislation giving more legislative oversight to state health orders Wednesday and the Senate quickly concurred, sending the bill to Gov. Mike DeWine, who affirmed Thursday his plans to veto it. Senate President Matt Huffman (R-Lima) said he would schedule a veto override vote on SB22 (McColley-Johnson) at the next session after DeWine's veto, and House Speaker Bob Cupp (R-Lima) expressed confidence he had the votes in his chamber despite being short during Wednesday's vote, noting several absent members who support the bill and an override. Ahead of Wednesday's votes, the House State and Local Government Committee accepted a substitute version of the bill incorporating elements of a similar House bill, HB90 (Wiggam-Edwards). DeWine said Thursday he's not sure lawmakers fully contemplated the consequences of recently passed legislation to check executive health powers and reiterated his intention to veto it, though he said there's still discussion to be had on changes that could satisfy their desire for more oversight.

The recently-introduced coronavirus relief bills are necessary to revitalize Ohio's economy and rural communities, representatives of major business and agricultural organizations told the Senate Finance Committee on Tuesday. "Nearly one year removed from the shuttering of dining rooms and patios, Ohio restaurants are just now beginning the path to recovery. While there is more hope amongst Ohio's hospitality community than at any time since the pandemic began, the path back is long and there is no certainty that all of Ohio's hospitality businesses will survive," Ohio Restaurant Association (ORA) External Affairs and Government Relations

Managing Director Tod Bowen said during proponent testimony on SB108 (S. Huffman-Romanchuk), one of the four pandemic relief bills heard by the committee during the meeting, which also included SB109 (Manning-Rulli), SB110 (O'Brien-Wilson) and SB111 (Blessing-Brenner).

The Ohio Department of Health (ODH) announced Wednesday that it has stopped issuing travel advisories for those entering Ohio from states reporting positive COVID-19 testing rates of 15 percent or more. Instead, the department encourages Ohioans to carefully review CDC guidance regarding travel.

Gov. Mike DeWine announced Thursday the loosening of various COVID protocols and looked forward to a summer of "full ballparks," but declined to predict when Ohio will hit his threshold for lifting all health orders and said an all-comers vaccination policy is not imminent. With the expansion Thursday of vaccine eligibility to those age 50 and up, Lt. Gov. Jon Husted got his first dose of the Pfizer vaccine while speaking via video from a public health clinic in his hometown of Montpelier. "The needle in the arm is a lot more pleasant than the swab in the nose," Husted said. County fairs can plan for relatively normal operations, long-term care facilities can offer freer visitation with residents, students have more freedom and can participate in spring sports, and new guidelines are on the way for festivals, parades, graduation ceremonies and proms, DeWine said.

## **CRIME AND PUNISHMENT**

Sens. Teresa Fedor (D-Toledo) and Stephanie Kunze (R-Hilliard) announced they will soon introduce new legislation meant to help victims of human trafficking expunge their criminal records, which often serve as barriers to employment and housing. Fedor said the "Expanding Human Trafficking Justice Act" will remove the predicate offenses required for a victim of human trafficking to qualify for the expungement of their criminal records. Under current law, victims of human trafficking must first be convicted of soliciting, loitering or prostitution before they can apply for expungement of their criminal records.

## **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

The Ohio Development Services Agency's (DSA) BroadbandOhio program announced Wednesday that it had extended the application period for its pilot program to expand high-speed Internet access through Multi-Agency Radio Communications System (MARCS) towers. The deadline for applications is now 5 p.m. on Friday, April 2, rather than the initial end date of Feb. 26. The project focuses on Scioto and Jackson counties in Southeastern Ohio.

Both Ohio Development Services Agency (DSA) Director Lydia Mihalik and JobsOhio President and CEO J.P. Nauseef updated members of the House Economic and Workforce Development Committee Wednesday on their agencies' activities as the inaugural witnesses for the committee. Committee Chair Rep. Jay Edwards (R-Nelsonville) had opened this first meeting of the committee by noting he hopes its work goes beyond that of hearing and responding to bills to being an "incubator" for ideas for moving the state forward. To that end, he invited suggestions for others who might be asked to speak to the committee.

## **EDUCATION**

Ohio Superintendent of Public Instruction Paolo DeMaria and Lt. Gov. Jon Husted announced that the business advisory councils for Cincinnati Public Schools and Columbiana County Schools had been honored as four-star councils, with the Columbiana council recognized for excellence in development of professional skills and building partnerships, while Cincinnati's was honored for coordination of career development experiences.

The Ohio Department of Education (ODE) on Monday debuted a complement to its strategic plan for student learning and development, a report on how to improve experiences and outcomes for students with disabilities. "Each Child Means Each Child" -- a title referencing the overarching strategic plan, "Each Child Our Future" -- sets out a vision with three main facets:

- Get to the problem early.
- Building educator and system capacity.
- Educate for living a good life.

Members of the State Board of Education's (SBOE) Performance and Impact Committee got another look at student enrollment and absenteeism data during their Monday meeting. Heather Boughton, director of research, evaluation and advanced analytics at the Ohio Department of Education (ODE), gave an overview of some of the department's data insights, which showed about a 3 percent decrease in the number of students, grades pre-K through 12, enrolled in public schools between fall 2019 and fall 2020.

Reps. Kyle Koehler (R-Springfield) and Adam Bird (R-Cincinnati) said their HB67 needs the Senate to reinsert an emergency clause which was stripped out by the House, or else the bill will go into effect in June -- too late to have an impact, they told the Senate Primary and Secondary Education Committee Monday. The bill would cancel all state tests for the upcoming 2021-22 school year except the American Government state test for high schoolers and a number of state tests that are federally required: English language arts exams for grades three through high school, math exams for grades three through high school, and science exams for grades five, eight and high school. The sponsors initially sought exemptions from the federally required tests as well, but the U.S. Department of Education did not grant those waivers.

The State Board of Education voted Tuesday to extend pandemic precautions for child care providers by putting them into permanent rule, but with plans to revisit those rules in a few months. State law requires the Ohio Department of Education's (ODE) child care provider regulations to follow those of the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS), which also licenses child care

providers. ODJFS recently embedded pandemic precautions including mask requirements into permanent rule after operating under a series of emergency rules authorized by executive order of Gov. Mike DeWine, prompting ODE to propose that the board follow suit.

Opponents of HB123 (Fraizer-Cross) told the House Ways and Means Committee Tuesday that they thought the bill would disrupt the balance between incentivizing development and providing needed educational resources as a result of its changes to community reinvestment area (CRA) provisions. Katie Johnson, appearing on behalf of the Ohio Association of School Business Officials, acknowledged the role of CRAs and other economic development tools but said they must be "implemented carefully" to protect school districts and their students. She was joined by Kevin Miller of the Buckeye Association of School Administrators (BASA) and Will Schwartz of the Ohio School Boards Association (OSBA).

Reps. Don Jones (R-Freeport) and Phil Robinson (D-Solon) announced Wednesday legislation to improve the school report card system, saying in a release that HB200 shifts the system from "flawed metrics and punitive measures" to "a document that schools, parents and communities can understand and use to properly assist when making improvements to a school."

The Ohio Department of Commerce's Division of Financial Institutions announced Wednesday that it had begun accepting applications for FY22 financial literacy grants, which total \$75,000 and are awarded to organizations that provide virtual programs on the knowledge and skills needed to make responsible financial decisions.

## **ELECTIONS**

Ohio Secretary of State Frank LaRose said Friday that he'd found additional cases where Rep. Larry Householder (R-Glenford) allegedly accepted campaign contributions beyond state limits as set in Ohio law during the 2020 primary election period. The findings were forwarded to the Ohio Elections Commission.

## **ELECTIONS 2022**

Television personality Geraldo Rivera, 77, Wednesday floated the possibility he would run for the U.S. Senate in 2022, seeking the Republican nomination for the open seat from Ohio currently held by U.S. Sen. Rob Portman (R-OH). Thursday, however, he changed his mind, saying he reached the decision after talking with his wife, Erica.

The following endorsements were made over the week:

- The Service Employees International Union and the Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union endorsed Nina Turner for Congress.
- U.S. Sen. Mike Lee (R-UT) endorsed Josh Mandel for U.S. Senate

## **EMPLOYMENT/UNEMPLOYMENT**

The U.S. unemployment rate was "little changed" at 6.2 percent in February, according to the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS). Non-farm payroll employment increased by 379,000, BLS said in a news release, and the labor market continued to reflect effects of the pandemic.

Lt. Gov. Jon Husted and InnovateOhio, in partnership with the Governor's Office of Workforce Transformation and the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services, Monday unveiled what they called a "fully redesigned, more accessible OhioMeansJobs.com website for Ohio jobseekers and employers."

For the week ending Feb. 27, the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS) reported 120,446 initial unemployment claims to the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL). ODJFS experienced technical difficulties last week and could not release the numbers on Thursday, March 4 as originally scheduled, ODJFS spokesperson Tom Betti told *Hannah News*. The total number of claims reported during that weekly time period is higher than the previous week's total, which was 101,825. ODJFS said potentially fraudulent claims are likely inflating the numbers from the most recent week and previous weeks.

The Unemployment Compensation Modernization and Improvement Council heard testimony from Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS) Deputy Director Julie Smith and business community representatives Thursday. Both Smith and the business witnesses noted the difficulties that ODJFS staff have faced in handling unemployment claims during the pandemic.

For the week ending March 6, the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS) reported 128,161 initial unemployment claims to the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL). That number is higher than last week's, when ODJFS reported 120,446. ODJFS said potentially fraudulent claims are likely inflating the totals from this week and recent weeks.

## **ENERGY/UTILITIES**

The House Wednesday overwhelmingly passed legislation that repeals portions of 133-HB6 (Callender-Wilkin) as legislators said there is more to do when addressing the controversial legislation at the heart of a federal bribery case. Among the "yes" votes on HB128 (Hoops-Stein) were the original sponsors of HB6 -- Reps. Jamie Callender (R-Concord) and Shane Wilkin (R-Hillsboro) -- and Rep. Larry Householder (R-Glenford), who faces indictment on federal charges alleging corruption related to the passage of the bill. While Householder was not mentioned by name during the debate, his presence in the chamber was alluded to in at least two floor speeches. In the House Public Utilities Committee a day earlier, HB128 saw a string of efforts by Rep. Laura Lanese (R-Grove City) and Democrats to amend other language into the bill.

For the first time, the Ohio Air Quality Development Authority (OAQDA) has approved bond financing to support a utility-scale solar

project. OAQDA authorized up to \$70 million in bond financing to assist Aurora Solar LLC with the installation of a large solar electric system in Van Wert County, according to a news release from the agency.

The Public Utilities Commission of Ohio (PUCO) responded to recent FirstEnergy disclosures Wednesday by widening the state's audit of company payments to vendors and consultants and their possible illegal charge-off to consumers in support of 133-HB6's (Callender-Wilkin) nuclear bailout, profit guarantees, and coal subsidies benefitting all four of Ohio's electric utilities, including FirstEnergy.

FirstEnergy has named its acting CEO, Steven Strah, to the permanent position and added him to its board of directors. Strah has served as interim chief since last October and, since May 2020, as company president, a position he continues to hold.

Environmental, education and health care leaders discussed a new study on energy waste reduction Thursday, saying that greater investments in the field could generate billions in savings and create thousands of jobs. Speakers also noted that the House had voted Wednesday on legislation repealing parts of 133-HB6 (Callender-Wilkin) and its effects on energy issues. The study was conducted by energy research firm Gabel Associates and released Thursday by national sustainability nonprofit Ceres, E2, the Environmental Law & Policy Center, Natural Resources Defense Council, Ohio Environmental Council (OEC) and the Ohio Hospital Association (OHA).

## **ENVIRONMENT**

Cleanup of the Krejci Dump site in Cuyahoga Valley National Park (CVNP) is complete and the site is fully restored, the National Park Service (NPS) announced. In a multi-year cleanup process, NPS worked in close coordination with Ford Motor Company to recontour and revegetate the site with native grasses and wildflowers, re-establish natural wetlands and restore important wildlife habitat, according to a news release from CVNP. Implementation of those restoration efforts was largely completed in 2014. Since that time, NPS has closely monitored the restoration to ensure its success and long-term effectiveness, CVNP said.

The state Controlling Board approved a decreased funding request of \$13.3 million for Gov. Mike DeWine's H2Ohio water quality program Monday, removing \$700,000 from the Ohio Department of Natural Resources' (ODNR) original proposal. The administration is pursuing H2Ohio remediation in east-central and western Lake Erie and along the Ohio River. (See *The Hannah Report*, 3/5/21.) The removal of a Seneca County site and a \$200,000 decrease in lake-area remediation leaves 44 projects statewide and \$27.7 million in total funding for FY21.

## **GAMING/GAMBLING**

Professional sports teams should be allowed to financially benefit directly from a legalized sports betting system in Ohio, representatives from the Cincinnati Reds and FC Cincinnati told the Senate Select Committee on Gaming on Wednesday.

While revenues at Ohio's four casinos and seven racinos are improving following the removal of the DeWine administration's coronavirus-related curfew, February 2021's numbers are still lower than those from February 2020.

## **GENERAL ASSEMBLY/STATEHOUSE**

*Hannah News'* interview series with freshman lawmakers featured Rep. Gary Click (R-Vickery), who made a point of saying he is merely one resident among many in Sandusky County and part of Seneca County. "I'm here representing the common man, understanding what people face on a daily basis. There's not an elite bone in my body. I'm not better than anyone else and I'm fortunate to be here," Click said.

In addition to passage of partial HB6 repeal measure HB128 (Hoops-Stein) and health order override measures SB22 (McColley-Johnson), Wednesday's House session saw passage of HB29 (Wiggam-Miller), regarding veteran ID cards; and HB41 (Lanese-Liston), exemption from disclosure the personal information of certain mental health providers.

In addition to concurrence on health order override measure SB22 (McColley-Johnson), legislation that would require most state agencies to reduce the number of regulatory restrictions contained in their administrative rules by 30 percent by June 30, 2025 passed the Senate by a vote of 25-8 on Wednesday. All Republicans voted in favor of SB9 (McColley-Roegner), while all Democrats opposed the bill. The chamber also passed SB27 (Hottinger), regarding public employee deferred compensation.

In other legislative action, House Civil Justice Committee reported out HB132 (Hillyer-Jones), regarding storage facilities and towing; House Health Committee reported out SB5 (Roegner), to enter Ohio into the Physical Therapy Licensure Compact and SB7 (Roegner), to enter Ohio into the Occupational Therapy Licensure Compact; House State and Local Government Committee reported out HB89 (Wiggam), regarding the duty to notify law enforcement of a concealed handgun and HB87 (Stephens-John), regarding county utility supply contracts; House Transportation and Public Safety Committee reported out HB21 (Koehler), regarding organ donation, HB30 (Wiggam-Kick), regarding slow-moving vehicles, HR13 (Sheehy), urging Michigan to keep Enbridge Line 5 operating, and road naming and license plate bills HB26 (Richardson), HB84 (Jones), HB102 (Holmes), HB119 (Sweeney-Holmes), HB104 (Stein), HB131 (Brinkman) and HB85 (Jones); Senate Local Government and Elections Committee reported out SB20 (Hackett), regarding county utility supply contracts and SB15 (Wilson), regarding fiscal officer liability; Senate Veterans and Public Safety Committee reported out SB59 (Schaffer), regarding disposal of war relics; House Commerce and Labor Committee reported out HB76 (Oelslager), the Industrial Commission budget.

## **GUNS**

Ohio saw a 78 percent spike in new concealed carry licenses in 2020 -- its largest percentage increase ever -- led by

Columbus/Franklin County in absolute numbers and followed in order by Lake and Greene counties. The state issued 96,892 new concealed handgun permits last year, the most since 2016 in absolute numbers for a virtual all-time tie with 2013 for second place, according to the Ohio attorney general's latest concealed carry report.

## **HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES**

The working group reviewing how the State Medical Board of Ohio (SMBO) handled its investigation of Dr. Richard Strauss offered its closing report to Gov. Mike DeWine Wednesday, according to a release from the Ohio Department of Public Safety (ODPS). The group's initial report and recommendations led to the SMBO conducting a review of all sexual assault allegations against physicians and other licensed medical personnel that were investigated and closed without action over the past 25 years, the release said, resulting in identification of 1,254 closed cases and 91 that are being reexamined as active investigations.

Ohio Attorney General Dave Yost Thursday announced his office has filed a lawsuit against Centene Corp., alleging the health-care company engaged in "an elaborate scheme to maximize company profits at the expense of the Ohio Department of Medicaid (ODM) and the state of Ohio." Yost's office said the lawsuit alleges that Centene subsidiary Buckeye Health Plan utilized a web of subcontractors for the provision of pharmacy benefits in order to misrepresent pharmacy costs, resulting in millions of dollars of overpayments by ODM.

## **HIGHER EDUCATION**

Universities across Ohio have begun announcing plans for returns to in-person class this fall as well as plans for in-person spring commencements amid the rollout of the COVID-19 vaccine.

Gregory Postel was named the 18th president of University of Toledo (UT) during a special Board of Trustees meeting this week. Additionally, Youngstown State University (YSU) extended the contract of President Jim Tressel.

A student at Bowling Green State University (BGSU) has died after an alleged hazing incident involving alcohol. In wake of the death, lawmakers have expressed renewed interest in anti-hazing and bullying legislation. BGSU President Rodney Rogers announced Sunday that Stone Foltz, a 20-year-old sophomore from Delaware, OH, had passed away. Foltz reportedly drank "a copious amount of alcohol" at an off-campus event Thursday evening organized by the BGSU chapter of Pi Kappa Alpha fraternity. Foltz was a new fraternity pledge.

A new study by Ohio State University researchers found that strict environmental regulations push multinational corporations to move polluting facilities to other countries with lax regulations rather than reduce carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gas emissions. Itzhak Ben-David, co-author of the study and professor of finance at Ohio State's Fisher College of Business, said the strict environmental policies lead to "carbon leakage to other nations."

## **HOUSING/HOMELESSNESS**

U.S. Rep. Marcia Fudge (D-Warrensville Heights) was confirmed as the next secretary of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Wednesday in a bipartisan 66-34 vote, making her only the third woman to lead the agency and first Black woman to lead the agency since 1979. She has represented the 11th House District in Congress in 2008 after the sudden death of Stephanie Tubbs Jones.

## **INSURANCE**

As part of National Consumer Protection Week, the Ohio Department of Insurance (ODI) highlighted the savings it has helped Ohio insurance consumers receive or recover in 2020. ODI Director Judith French said consumers saved \$37 million last year as department staff resolved insurance coverage and claim disputes, outlined suitable insurance options and identified financial assistance programs.

The Senate Insurance Committee voted unanimously to approve the nomination of Judith French as director of the Ohio Department of Insurance (ODI) Wednesday, following brief comments by her and questions from Sen. Cecil Thomas (D-Cincinnati). Chair Bob Hackett (R-London) said that he was "extremely pleased" by the nomination and called her well-qualified ahead of the vote as well.

## **JUDICIAL**

The Ohio Supreme Court says it will continue remote oral arguments until at least June 30 due to COVID-19. The Court has been holding oral arguments by videoconference since April 7, 2020 after Chief Justice Maureen O'Connor announced the accommodation in light of the public health emergency.

Marion County Common Pleas Court Judge Jason Warner will not be returning to the bench after the court he used to serve convicted him and his wife in a hit-and-run accident last June that injured a teen left at the scene. Judge Warner was found guilty of complicity to leaving the scene of an accident, a fourth-degree felony, and complicity to tampering with evidence, a third-degree felony. Julia Warner was convicted of the same crimes in addition to two counts of misdemeanor negligent assault. Retired Summit County Judge Patricia Cosgrove heard the case and delivered the verdict.

Twelfth District Judge Stephen Powell, past chair of the Ohio Judicial Conference (OJC) and former chief judge of the Ohio Court of Appeals Association, has been named president of the Council of Chief Judges of the State Courts of Appeal. Operating under the National Center for State Courts, the council appoints chief judges and chief justices of the nation's appellate courts and seeks to promote "uniformity and efficiency" and justice in their ranks.



A professor at the University of Kentucky Thursday spent more than an hour outlining what he said were the deficiencies in Ohio's current judicial election system to the House Government Oversight Committee, including that judges elected in nonpartisan elections are more political in making their decisions. Testifying as a proponent of HB149 (Stewart-Swearingen), Travis Taylor said research has suggested that when elected through a nonpartisan election, a judge will want to make sure he is well known enough to get re-elected, and will more likely follow the popular opinion of the community.

### **MARIJUANA/HEMP**

After more than a year of inaction, the Ohio Department of Commerce (DOC) must decide whether to permit an Akron-based medical marijuana cultivator to expand its operations, the Ohio Supreme Court ruled Thursday. In a *per curiam* opinion, the majority ruled that DOC's Medical Marijuana Control Program (MMCP) did not have the right to take no action on the cultivator's application. The Court granted a writ of mandamus to Fire Rock Ltd., which asked the Court to instruct the department to make a ruling on its application.

### **MEDICAID/MEDICAID REFORM**

The U.S. Supreme Court removed from its oral argument calendar two cases on Medicaid work requirements, as the Biden administration is requesting that justices vacate appellate rulings in the cases and remand the issue back to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).

### **NATURAL RESOURCES**

More than 81,000 rainbow trout will be released into 67 public lakes and ponds in 2021, according to the Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR) Division of Wildlife. The state was to begin stocking them in Adams Lake in Adams County this week, ODNR said in a news release.

The Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR) is announcing a request for proposals (RFP) supporting the DeWine administration's plan to decommission 200 "orphan" oil and gas wells this year for a 33 percent increase over 2020.

### **PEOPLE**

Former Ohio Senate President Larry Obhof (R-Medina) is joining the law firm of Shumaker as a partner in the firm's litigation practice.

The Ohio Children's Alliance announced this week that Sarah LaTourette will serve as its first chief advocacy officer. In this new position, she will oversee advocacy and member services for the statewide child advocacy organization. Previously, LaTourette served as the Ohio Family and Children First Director in Gov. Mike DeWine's administration. In this role she oversaw county Family and Children First collaborations, statewide multi-system youth initiatives, and led family focused policy initiatives.

Groundwork Ohio announced Monday that it had hired three new staff members as it "ramps up" advocacy efforts in support of prenatal and early childhood programs. They include Director of Policy and Advocacy Melissa Bacon, Director of Communications and Stakeholder Engagement Chelsea Kiene and Operations Manager Ali Yogmour.

### **PUBLIC SAFETY**

The DeWine administration announced a long list of first-time community-police certifications Tuesday totaling 14 separate law enforcement agencies. Jurisdictions new to compliance with state policing standards include Lima Police Department and University of Dayton Department of Public Safety, which now have adopted best practices for use of force, including deadly force, and agency recruitment and hiring -- the first two of nine standards promulgated by the Ohio Community-Police Collaborative Advisory Board and administered by the Ohio Department of Public Safety's (ODPS) Office of Criminal Justice Services (OCJS).

### **STATE GOVERNMENT**

The Joint Committee on Agency Rule Review (JCARR) held its second quick meeting of the year Monday, as all rules on the regular and no change agendas cleared the panel without questions from legislators or any public comment.

### **TAXATION**

The House Ways and Means Committee heard opponent and interested party testimony Wednesday on HB157 (Jordan-Edwards), legislation that would modify the municipal income withholding rules for COVID-19-related work-from-home employees. The two sponsors had previously testified before the committee Tuesday. Ohio Municipal League Executive Director Kent Scarrett spoke against the bill, saying it would cause a "sudden repeal" of Section 29 in 133-HB197 (Powell-Merrin), which instructed municipalities to continue withholding income tax at the place of work during the pandemic state of emergency and for 30 days after its conclusion despite the work from home shift.

The Buckeye Institute announced Thursday that it has filed a new lawsuit challenging municipal tax collection for Ohioans who are working remotely. The new lawsuit challenges the tax policy for Oregon and Toledo, and was filed on behalf of Joel and Summer Curcio of Springfield Township, and Chris Ackerman of Walbridge. It is the fourth case the group has filed, previously challenging the tax collection by other municipalities, including in Columbus and Cincinnati.

### **TRANSPORTATION/INFRASTRUCTURE**

Transit systems are launching new services to meet workforce and health care needs and drawing down substantial federal grants thanks to last transportation budget's funding bump, but those efforts are in jeopardy without continuation in the new budget, local

officials told the Senate Transportation Committee Wednesday.

#### **TREASURER OF STATE**

Ohio Treasurer Robert Sprague is one of 30 elected officials nationwide chosen by the Hunt Institute to participate in the Hunt-Kean Leadership Fellowship program, his office said Tuesday. According to the treasurer's office, participants are identified by the Hunt Institute as, "senior-level political leaders who have the knowledge, skill, and will to be effective, equity-minded education policymakers at the state level."

#### **VETERANS**

Members of the House Armed Services and Veterans Affairs Committee heard from Deborah Ashenhurst, director of the Ohio Department of Veteran Services (DVS), and Mike Strahle of Eye of Freedom, an interactive traveling veteran memorial, during their Wednesday meeting.

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