

## 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

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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

7/1/2021 - **SIGNED BY GOVERNOR**; effective 7/1/21

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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

9/21/2021 - Senate 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**

6/23/2021 - House Commerce and Labor, (Second Hearing)

**HB157**

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

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

**CURRENT STATUS**

6/2/2021 - Referred to Committee Senate Ways and Means

**HB267**

**LIMIT PUBLIC HEALTH ORDERS** (JORDAN K)

To limit the duration of public health orders and to allow the General Assembly to act via concurrent resolution in response to a public health emergency if the Governor or Department of Health does not.

**CURRENT STATUS**

5/4/2021 - Referred to Committee House State and Local Government

**HB275**

**EXPAND POLITICAL SUBDIVISION JOINT PURCHASING AUTHORITY** (LAMPTON B)

To expand political subdivision joint purchasing authority to expressly include purchases for construction services.

**CURRENT STATUS**

5/12/2021 - House Commerce and Labor, (First Hearing)

**HB283**

**EXPAND DISTRACTED DRIVING LAWS** (ABRAMS C, LAMPTON B)

To expand the texting while driving prohibition to a general prohibition against using an electronic wireless communications device while driving, with certain exceptions, and to create data collection requirements based on associated violations of the distracted driving laws.

**CURRENT STATUS**

9/23/2021 - **BILL AMENDED**, House Criminal Justice, (Third Hearing)

## **HB350** PROHIBIT MANDATORY COVID-19 VACCINE *(CUTRONA A)*

To prohibit mandatory COVID-19 vaccinations, requiring proof of COVID-19 vaccination, and certain other actions relating to an individual's COVID-19 vaccination or health status and to declare an emergency.

### **CURRENT STATUS**

6/22/2021 - House Civil Justice, (First Hearing)

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## **HB388** REGARDING VACCINE REFUSAL *(JORDAN K)*

To prohibit taking certain actions against an individual because the individual refuses to be vaccinated against a disease.

### **CURRENT STATUS**

8/12/2021 - Introduced

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## **HB401** EMPLOYER-MANDATED COVID VACCINATION INJURY *(EDWARDS J)*

To exempt an injury or disability caused by an employer-mandated COVID-19 vaccination from the Workers' Compensation Law and to allow the employee to sue the employer for damages.

### **CURRENT STATUS**

8/24/2021 - Introduced

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## **HB435** VACCINE REQUIREMENTS *(CARFAGNA R, SEITZ B)*

To address COVID-19 vaccine requirements for employees and students; to extend certain timelines for qualified civil immunity and expand immunity to include hearing aid dealers and hearing aid fitters; to authorize emergency medical technicians to administer COVID-19 tests; to expressly cover COVID-19 vaccine injuries under the workers' compensation system; and to repeal sections 3792.05, 3792.06, 3792.07, and 3792.08 of the Revised Code on June 30, 2023.

### **CURRENT STATUS**

10/13/2021 - Bills for Third Consideration; (Pending Committee Report)

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## **HB472** POLITICAL SUBDIVISION LIABILITY *(INGRAM C)*

To eliminate certain defenses to political subdivision liability for an employee's negligent operation of a motor vehicle and to reduce damages recoverable against a political subdivision in such actions by the contributory fault of the plaintiff or other parties.

### **CURRENT STATUS**

11/2/2021 - Referred to Committee House Civil Justice

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## **HB477** EXPULSION, TERMINATION BASED ON VACCINATION STATUS *(RICHARDSON T)*

To prevent expulsion from school and termination from employment based on COVID-19 vaccination status.

### **CURRENT STATUS**

11/1/2021 - Introduced

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## **HB481** COVID VACCINE, PASSPORT PROTECTION ACT *(JORDAN K)*

To enact the COVID-19 Vaccination and Passport Protection Act to prohibit schools, institutions of higher education, employers, and places of public accommodation from requiring COVID-19 vaccines or proof of vaccination.

### **CURRENT STATUS**

11/8/2021 - Introduced

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## **HB489** INALIENABLE RIGHTS OF CONSCIENCE ACT *(CLICK G)*

To enact the Inalienable Rights of Conscience Act regarding students and employees who object to certain vaccines and other treatments based on reasons of conscience, including religious convictions.

### **CURRENT STATUS**

11/16/2021 - Introduced

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## **HB491** PAID BEREAVEMENT LEAVE FOR DEATH OF CHILD *(BOYD J, RUSSO A)*

To establish family and medical leave insurance benefits and to require employers to provide an employee with paid bereavement leave on a stillbirth or death of a child.

### **CURRENT STATUS**

11/17/2021 - Referred to Committee House Families, Aging and Human Services

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## **HB498** ADULT USE ACT *(CALLENDER J, FERGUSON R)*

To enact the Ohio Adult Use Act and to levy a tax.

### **CURRENT STATUS**

12/7/2021 - Referred to Committee House Finance

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## **HB531** COUNTY PROSECUTOR LEGAL SERVICES *(GHANBARI H)*

To allow a county prosecutor to provide legal services to a metropolitan planning organization, regional transportation planning organization, or regional council of governments.

**CURRENT STATUS**

1/12/2022 - Introduced

**HB538 ALLOW VIRTUAL MEETINGS** (KOEHLER K, KELLY B)

To provide temporary authority, expiring July 1, 2022, for members of a public body to meet by means of teleconference or video conference, and to declare an emergency.

**CURRENT STATUS**

1/24/2022 - Introduced

**HCR30 OPPOSE VACCINE MANDATES** (KOEHLER K)

To urge the Congress of the United States to oppose any COVID-19 vaccine mandates made by government entities and to prohibit discrimination based on COVID-19 vaccination status.

**CURRENT STATUS**

10/26/2021 - Referred to Committee House Government Oversight

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

To include emergency service telecommunicators, protective services workers, certain Ohio National Guard members, and certain mental health care providers as individuals whose residential and familial information is exempt from disclosure under the Public Records Law.

**CURRENT STATUS**

6/8/2021 - **SIGNED BY GOVERNOR**; eff. 9/7/21

**SB15 FISCAL OFFICERS-LIABILITY** (WILSON S)

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

**CURRENT STATUS**

11/17/2021 - House State and Local Government, (First Hearing)

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

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

Compensation dividends paid to employers, and to declare an emergency.

🚩 **CURRENT STATUS**

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

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**SB19** **REGARDING PROPERTY TAXATION** (SCHAFFER T)

To modify the law regarding property taxation and sales and use tax.

🚩 **CURRENT STATUS**

1/10/2022 - Senate Appoints Managers; L. Blessing Named as Conference Committee Chair. Other Senate Conferees are T. Schaffer & N. Antonio

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**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)

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**SB56** **INDEMNITY-DESIGN CONTRACTS** (BLESSING III L)

To regulate the use of indemnity provisions in professional design contracts related to public improvements.

🚩 **CURRENT STATUS**

11/16/2021 - **REPORTED OUT AS AMENDED**, House Civil Justice, (Fourth Hearing)

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**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)

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

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

🚩 **CURRENT STATUS**

9/21/2021 - Senate Ways and Means, (First Hearing)

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

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

### 📌 CURRENT STATUS

5/12/2021 - Senate Ways and Means, (First Hearing)

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## SB152 FRAUD, WASTE, ABUSE TASK FORCE *(HOAGLAND F)*

To establish the Fraud, Waste, and Abuse Task Force in the office of the Attorney General and to make an appropriation.

### 📌 CURRENT STATUS

11/9/2021 - Senate Finance, (First Hearing)

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## SB169 PROHIBIT MANDATORY VACCINATIONS *(BRENNER A)*

To prohibit mandatory vaccinations against the coronavirus, to prohibit requiring proof of vaccinations generally, and to declare an emergency.

### 📌 CURRENT STATUS

5/26/2021 - **SUBSTITUTE BILL ACCEPTED**, Senate Health, (First Hearing)

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## SB209 MASK MANDATES *(BRENNER A)*

With regard to mask mandates and facial covering requirements for public schools, state institutions of higher education, and businesses.

### 📌 CURRENT STATUS

9/8/2021 - Referred to Committee Senate General Government Budget

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## SB260 LOCAL PURCHASING AUTHORITY-CONSTRUCTION *(LANG G)*

To expand political subdivision joint purchasing authority to expressly include purchases for construction services.

### 📌 CURRENT STATUS

11/10/2021 - Referred to Committee Senate Local Government and Elections

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## SB261 LAW CHANGES-MEDICAL MARIJUANA *(HUFFMAN S)*

To amend the law related to medical marijuana.

## **CURRENT STATUS**

12/15/2021 - **PASSED BY SENATE**; Vote 26-5



## **Week in Review**

### **AGRICULTURE**

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) has awarded a \$1.5 million grant to Ohio State University's (OSU) Agricultural Technical Institute in Wooster, U.S. Sen. Sherrod Brown (D-OH) announced recently. The funds will allow OSU to partner with the USDA's Midwest Climate Hub and multiple universities to increase adoption of regionally-scalable, climate-smart activities in the Midwest, Brown said.

The Ohio Department of Agriculture (ODAg) now employs seven regional watershed coordinators as required by 133-HB7 (Ghanbari-Patterson), according to ODAg Director Dorothy Pelanda. She said her 133-HB7 team, led by ODAg Administrator Peter McDonough, has been engaging in training sessions with them in recent weeks.

### **ATTORNEY GENERAL**

Ohio Attorney General Dave Yost, along with 38 attorneys general, announced that Navient, one of the nation's largest student loan servicers, has agreed to a \$1.85 billion settlement over allegations that it engaged in predatory practices largely by promising to help borrowers find an affordable repayment option but instead steering financially strapped borrowers into costly long-term repayment plans. The settlement, submitted to the Franklin County Court of Common Pleas as a proposed consent judgement, is subject to court approval. As part of the agreement, Ohio will receive \$5.3 million in restitution payments to be shared among more than 19,800 federal loan borrowers who were affected by Navient's practices between 2009 and 2017. Additionally, more than 3,500 Ohio borrowers will receive a combined \$81.8 million in cancellation of private loan debt.

A bipartisan coalition of 42 states and territories co-led by Ohio Attorney General Dave Yost is calling on the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to preserve states' authority to enforce their consumer protection laws in the sale of over-the-counter hearing aids. The FDA is currently considering a proposal that would allow a new category of over-the-counter hearing aids to be sold directly to consumers without a medical exam or fitting by an audiologist.

### **CORONAVIRUS**

More than 400 Ohio National Guard (ONG) members will be relocating as hospitalizations continue to increase in Southern and Western Ohio, Adjutant General John Harris and Ohio Department of Health (ODH) Director Dr. Bruce Vanderhoff announced Thursday. Vanderhoff said hospitalizations have decreased significantly in the northern part of the state, and the stress is now being felt the most in Regions 3, 6 and 7. He also emphasized that overall COVID-19 case and hospitalization numbers are still extremely high statewide, with Thursday seeing a record high of 21,664 new cases.

In addition, ODH reported 508 hospitalizations and 39 ICU admissions in its Thursday update. The latest 21-day averages are 22,161 cases, 368 hospitalizations and 33 ICU admissions. There have been 2.46 million cases, 103,914 hospitalizations, 12,425 ICU admissions and 31,245 deaths in total. Since Jan. 1, 2022 ODH has reported 443,708 cases, 7,471 hospitalizations, 676 ICU admissions and 1,798 deaths. January holds the record for most cases reported, with December 2021 second at 325,878.

### **EDUCATION**

The Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT) is now taking applications for its Safe Routes to School grant program, which provides \$4 million annually for infrastructure such as pedestrian and bicycle crossing improvements, new or improved sidewalks and bike racks, and non-infrastructure activities such as walk to school days, bike rodeos, public awareness campaigns or educational programs. Eligible applicants include local governments, school districts, health districts, park districts or key nonprofit partners involved in advancing safe routes to school in your community. ODOT will make awards on a competitive basis to projects that have been identified in a plan or to applicants requesting School Travel Plan development assistance.

Electronic Classroom of Tomorrow (ECOT) founder William Lager will still have to face civil charges that he held an illegal interest in contracts between the school and other companies also affiliated with him, after the judge in the case rejected his attorney's assertion that the state failed to provide support for its claims. More than a year ago, in September 2020, Lager's attorneys asked Judge Kimberly Cocroft of Franklin County Common Pleas Court to call a hearing on their assertion of a defense under Rule 12(B)(6) of Ohio's Rules of Civil Procedure, arguing that the attorney general's office failed to state a claim upon which relief can be granted.

The Ohio Department of Education said Tuesday that the state will nominate two paraprofessionals from Northeast and Southwest Ohio to compete for a national award created to recognize classified employees in schools. Andrea Beeman, who works with special

education students in Maple Heights City Schools in Cuyahoga County, and Phil Tudor, who works with special education students in Goshen Local Schools in Clermont County, are Ohio's nominees for the national Recognizing Inspirational School Employees (RISE) award.

The Ohio Facilities Construction Commission (OFCC) announced that nine Ohio schools recently achieved LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) Green Building Certification, bringing the state's number of certified schools to 382 -- the most of any state in the country. OFCC, which oversees capital projects undertaken by the state and manages Ohio's school facility programs, explained it uses the U.S. Green Building Council's (USGBC) LEED for Schools system as a tool to design, construct, and operate buildings to maximize occupant health and productivity, use fewer resources, reduce waste and negative environmental impacts, and decrease life cycle costs.

Teacher hiring already could not keep pace with job openings before the pandemic, but COVID-19 exacerbated that trend, according to the National Education Association (NEA). NEA, national affiliate of Ohio's largest teachers union, the Ohio Education Association (OEA), held a video conference

Thursday to discuss educator shortages and potential solutions.

The 12th annual National School Choice Week will kick off Monday, Jan. 24 with plans for over 1,100 events in Ohio and over 26,000 activities nationally, according to campaign organizers. The week-long series of events were held mostly online last year, but activities will return to in-person in 2022. Events in

Ohio include, among others, a K-8 school fair in the metro Toledo area on Saturday, Jan. 29 and a bowling and pizza party for online school families in Cuyahoga County on Friday, Jan. 28.

## **ELECTIONS**

Rank the Vote Ohio announced it will be hosting online events on Sunday, Jan. 23, to educate Ohioans about ranked choice voting (RCV) as part of a national effort. The events are part of National Ranked Choice Voting Day. The group and its national associates argue that ranked choice voting, which allows voters to rank their choices so that an instant runoff can be used to guarantee winners have the

support of a majority, will help heal deep divisions in politics. Ranked choice voting is currently being used in dozens of cities across the nation and in two states -- Maine and Alaska.

## **ELECTIONS 2022**

Rep. Emilia Sykes (D-Akron) officially launched her campaign for Congress Tuesday, a move that was expected after Sykes stepped down as minority leader late last year. Sykes said in a statement that she will fight for opportunity for every Northeast Ohioan -- although in precisely which district awaits the redrawing of the congressional lines.

Jim Obergefell, namesake of the litigation that struck down Ohio's and other states' same-sex marriage bans, said Tuesday he'll be a Democratic candidate for the House district including his hometown of Sandusky. His announcement came on the same day the Ohio Redistricting Commission reconvened to respond to the Ohio Supreme Court's invalidation of new General Assembly district maps. Obergefell said the physical and political geography will not affect his decision. Sandusky is now in the 89th House District, covering Erie and Ottawa counties. Rep. D.J. Swearingen (R-Huron) is the incumbent. Republicans have held the district since defeating former Ohio Democratic Party Chairman Chris Redfern in 2014.

U.S. Senate candidate and state Sen. Matt Dolan (R-Chagrin Falls) launched his first television ad of his campaign this week. A spot titled "Cold War," the ad focuses on the threat of the Chinese Communist Party to Ohio and America, along with Dolan's priorities in the U.S. Senate. Dolan's campaign said the commercial will run statewide on broadcast, cable and digital platforms, and is part of an initial \$1.7 million ad buy.

After saying last year that he was exploring a run for the General Assembly, conservative activist and attorney and Knox County resident Scott Pullins officially launched his campaign Wednesday. He said his first action as a legislator would be to sponsor a constitutional amendment to throw out Ohio's new process for redistricting.

Republican gubernatorial candidate Joe Blystone has filed a lawsuit in Franklin County Court of Common Pleas seeking to block an Ohio Elections Commission hearing on a complaint filed by Blystone's former campaign manager Sarah Chambers alleging the candidate had not been properly reporting contributions. Specifically, the complaint alleges that the campaign had taken in "vast amounts of cash" that had not been reported, such as donations made at events where a bucket had been passed around for attendees to put cash into, and that some of those contributions violated campaign finance law maximums.

The following endorsements were made over the week:

- The re-election campaign of Gov. Mike DeWine and Lt. Gov. Jon Husted announced the endorsements of Butler County Sheriff Richard Jones; Butler County Prosecutor Michael Gmoser; Butler County Commissioners Donald Dixon, T.C. Rogers and Cindy Carpenter; Hamilton County Republican Party Chairman Alex Triantafyllou; former Hamilton County Treasurer Charlie Winburn; Hamilton County Prosecutor Joe Deters; Green Township Trustees Triffon Callos and Tony Rosiello; Highland County Auditor Bill Fawley; Springfield Township Trustee Kristie Dukes Davis; Blue Ash Councilman Lee

Czerwonka; Clermont County Republican Party Chairman Greg Simpson; Warren County Recorder Linda Oda; Wilmington Mayor John Stanforth; Adams County Prosecutor David Kelley; and Ohio College Republican Chairman Taylor Armstrong.

- The gubernatorial campaign of Jim Renacci announced the endorsement of Ohio Value Voters.

## **ENERGY**

Ohio could be among the "top states" for utility scale solar development in future decades, according to a release and report by the Chambers for Innovation and Clean Energy (CICE). The report examined the "significant impact" of clean energy industries on the state's economy, finding Ohio is "well on its way" to a "cleaner, stronger economy with onshore wind, solar and battery storage." It also said there is "potential for a thriving electric vehicle industry and the first offshore wind project in the Great Lakes."

With corporations' use of renewables growing, the state has an opportunity to provide "good paying careers, steady income for landowners and reliable income for communities across the state" through these industries, according to CICE.

The Ohio Power Siting Board (OPSB) Thursday approved an application filed by Union Ridge Solar, LLC to construct a solar-powered electric generating facility in Licking County. The board also approved an application filed by American Transmission Systems Inc. (ATSI) to construct the Beaver-Wellington Transmission Line Project in Lorain County.

## **FEDERAL**

U.S. Sen. Rob Portman (R-OH) spent Monday in Ukraine as part of a bipartisan congressional delegation where they met with President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and other officials. He was joined by U.S. Sens. Jeanne Shaheen (D-NH), Chris Murphy (D-CT), Kevin Cramer (R-ND), Amy Klobuchar (D-MN), Roger Wicker (R-MS) and Richard Blumenthal (D-CT). Portman previously told reporters he was concerned about potential Russian action against Ukraine and has been active on providing military support to the country. He also co-founded and co-chairs the Senate Ukraine Caucus.

Portman then discussed the situation in Ukraine at length during a press call Wednesday as well as offering his thoughts on the future of the Senate filibuster, federal elections legislation and bills on U.S. semiconductor production. Portman said he was encouraged by the "sense of unity" he saw among the bipartisan group of senators, who also met with Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and four cabinet members. He added that this "crisis" could affect other countries in Eastern Europe and should be of concern to the global community as well, calling it "unbelievable" that Russia is "taking over the land of other countries with brute force."

U.S. Sen. Sherrod Brown (D-OH) gave more details on how funding from the federal Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act will be distributed to local governments in a news conference Wednesday.

President Joe Biden signed the bipartisan legislation in November of last year. Ohio is expected to receive nearly \$10 billion for infrastructure improvements including about \$483 million over the next five years to make improvements to some of Ohio's more than 3,000 bridges statewide. Brown said the Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT) has already received \$96.7 million in bridge funding. He explained most of the federal funding will flow through ODOT, which he said already has priority projects in mind, while other funds may be given directly to communities through grants.

Federal usurpation of states' powers and growth of the national debt are so bad as to require updates to the U.S. Constitution to restrain Congress and presidential administrations, former U.S. Sen. and presidential candidate Rick Santorum of Pennsylvania said Wednesday to lead off a hearing where a slew of witnesses urged pursuit of an Article V convention. Ohio would be the 16th state to apply for a convention if it passes HJR1 (McClain-Reidel), which calls for such a convention to "impose fiscal restraints on the federal government, limit the power and jurisdiction of the federal government, and limit the terms of office for its officials and members of Congress." The House State and Local Government Committee took proponent testimony after hearing from the sponsors, Reps. Craig Riedel (R-Defiance) and Riordan McClain (R-Upper Sandusky), in October.

The Internal Revenue Service (IRS) recently issued the 2022 optional standard mileage rates used to calculate the deductible costs of operating an automobile for business, charitable, medical or moving purposes. Beginning Jan. 1, 2022, the standard mileage rates for the use of a car, van, pickup or panel trucks, is as follows:

- 58.5 cents per mile driven for business use. This is a 2.5 cent increase from 2021.
- 18 cents per mile driven for medical or moving purposes for qualified active-duty members of the Armed Forces, up 2 cents from the rate in 2021.
- 14 cents per mile driven in service of charitable organizations. This rate, according to the IRS, is set by law and remains unchanged from 2021.

## **GENERAL ASSEMBLY/STATEHOUSE**

Sen. Sandra Williams (D-Cleveland) is among five applicants for the Ohio House seat vacated by former Rep. Stephanie Howse (D-Cleveland), now a member of Cleveland City Council. Williams is term-limited for her Senate seat, and previously held the 11th District seat until being term-limited in 2014. She ran for Cleveland mayor in 2021. The other applicants are Darnell Brewer, a health-related program coordinator; Shayla Davis, a former Garfield Heights City Council member; Michael Seals, a union and political field organizer; and Chad Stephens, a grassroots organizing coordinator.

Ohio Legislative Black Caucus (OLBC) President Rep. Thomas E. West (D-Canton) and OLBC First Vice President Rep. Catherine Ingram

(D-Cincinnati) announced Tuesday the hiring of John Meacham as the organization's new executive director. In that role, he oversees the daily operations of OLBC and works with its executive board to accomplish goals and objectives identified by members. He replaces Tony Bishop, who is now working with the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee (DCCC) at the federal level.

## **GUNS**

Unintentional shooting deaths by children rose 31 percent nationally from the start of pandemic -- March through December 2020 -- compared to the same period in 2019, and Ohio also saw a significant jump, according to new data from research advocacy group Everytown for Gun Safety. It shows that in 2020 alone, at least 125 toddlers and pre-kindergarteners ages five and under shot themselves or someone else. Boys made up the overwhelming majority of those both involved in and affected by unintentional shootings: 83 percent of shooters were boys, and 76 percent of victims were boys and men. In total, 2020 saw 142 deaths and 242 injuries as a result of accidental child shootings. In Ohio alone, there were 26 unintentional shootings by children in 2020 resulting in nine deaths and 17 injuries. In 2019, Ohio had 18 unintentional shootings by children; 2018 had 17; 2017 had 17; 2016 had 13; and 2015 had 29.

The U.S. Transportation Security Administration (TSA) said Tuesday that the number of guns stopped at airports increased in 2021, passing the national record set in 2019. The TSA also noted an increase in firearms caught at Ohio airport checkpoints, including 43 at the Cleveland Hopkins International Airport and 33 at John Glenn Columbus International Airport. There were also five at the Columbus-area Rickenbacker International Airport and four each at the Akron-Canton and Dayton airports. Nationally, the TSA stopped 5,972 firearms, passing the 2019 record of 4,432. The TSA said 86 percent of firearms caught in 2021 were loaded, and these represent "an unnecessary risk and an expensive mistake" for passengers who did not follow packing guidance.

## **HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES**

Two Ohio hospitals are set to receive over \$4.2 million in federal funding in an effort to improve the retention of health care workers and to respond to staffing needs, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) announced Thursday. HHS is dispersing the funds, which are available through the Biden administration's American Rescue Plan (ARP), through the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA). They are part of \$103 million to be awarded nationwide over three years in an effort to better promote mental health in the health workforce. In Ohio, Northeast Ohio Medical University in Rootstown and the Research Institute at Nationwide Children's Hospital in Columbus will each receive just over \$2 million over the course of three years.

## **HIGHER EDUCATION**

College of Wooster President Sarah Bolton is leaving her position at the end of the academic year, the college announced recently. Bolton is set to become the next president of Whitman College in Walla Walla, WA. Bolton joined Wooster in 2016 and is the first woman and first physicist to serve in the permanent role of president.

Cleveland State University (CSU) has selected Richard Schoephoerster as the next dean of the Washkewicz College of Engineering, effective Monday, Feb. 14. He is currently the dean of the Graduate College and Research at Arkansas Tech University in Russellville, AR.

The Central Ohio Technical College (COTC) and Ohio State University (OSU) at Newark announced the appointment of Brianna Davis Johnson as the institutions' first chief diversity officer and diversity, equity and inclusion director. The new position is shared by the two institutions.

## **JUDICIAL**

The Supreme Court of Ohio is now accepting applications to increase access to justice for low-income Ohioans through its Civil Justice Program Fund. This program, which has awarded nearly \$1.6 million to legal aid efforts since it began in 2017, provides grants for legal assistance in civil matters, such as housing and health care. The fund supports the services provided by Ohio's legal aid groups to supply additional staff and resources.

## **LOBBYISTS**

The Ohio Cable and Telecommunications Association (OCTA) announced Tuesday that it is changing its name to "OCTA - Ohio's Broadband and Cable Association," saying that this "better aligns with the evolution of the industry and the scope of the association's membership." Executive Director David Koren said, "Our mission to represent our members in the Ohio General Assembly, Public Utilities Commission of Ohio (PUCO), Congress and the courts does not change nor will our familiar name: OCTA."

## **MEDICAID/MEDICAID REFORM**

Auditor of State Keith Faber announced that the Ohio Department of Medicaid (ODM) failed to recoup more than \$118.5 million in erroneous duplicate payments or improper payments for managed care of prison inmates and deceased Ohioans from July 1, 2017 through June 30, 2020. The bulk of that, almost \$101 million, was Medicaid payments for people who were incarcerated in Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction (DRC) facilities and not eligible for managed care services. The auditor's review also found an estimated \$14.5 million in duplicate payments for residents with multiple identification numbers in ODM systems and nearly \$3.4 million in payments for deceased Ohioans.

## **NATURAL RESOURCES**

Sixteen prescribed fire projects in 13 counties will be made possible through the Prescribed Fire Supplies, Tools, Education and

Personal Protective Equipment (STEP) grant program, according to the Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR). ODNR Division of Forestry Chief Dan Balsler said, "We are pleased that these communities will now have these additional tools to utilize in an important forest management technique." STEP grants totaling \$40,773 have been awarded to land management agencies in Butler, Clermont, Cuyahoga, Erie, Franklin, Hancock, Hardin, Lucas, Montgomery, Muskingum, Portage, Summit and Wood counties.

People in and around Pike County will soon have a new place to learn how to stay safe on the water.

ODNR announced the construction of a new Boater Education Center at Lake White State Park.

Ohio hunters completed the 2022 muzzleloader season with 12,141 deer checked from Saturday, Jan. 8 to Tuesday, Jan. 11, according to the ODNR Division of Wildlife. That number is above average. Over the past three years, an average of 11,501 deer were taken with a muzzleloader during the same four-day period, ODNR said. The top 10 counties for deer harvested during the 2022 muzzleloader season include the following: Coshocton (467), Tuscarawas (455), Guernsey (386), Ashtabula (363), Muskingum (356), Knox (344), Meigs (338), Carroll (322), Licking (316) and Harrison (301).

## **OHIO HISTORY**

The Ohio Department of Development (DOD) recently awarded \$36,177,724 in Ohio Historic Preservation Tax Credits for the rehabilitation of 27 historic buildings. Together, the projects are expected to leverage approximately \$478 million in private investments in 10 communities. "Giving these buildings new life preserves Ohio's past and provides economic opportunity for the future," said Gov. Mike DeWine in making the announcement. "By preserving parts of our past, we are also enhancing the quality of life in our downtowns and neighborhoods."

## **PEOPLE**

The Solid Waste Authority of Central Ohio (SWACO) announced that Executive Director Ty Marsh will retire on March 31, concluding over eight years leading the organization. According to the organization, his tenure has seen the district achieve a recycling rate of 51 percent, "far exceeding the national average." Marsh was previously chief of staff to Columbus Mayor Michael Coleman and led the Columbus Chamber of Commerce as president and CEO from 2004 to 2010. He also served as executive assistant to former Speaker Vern Riffe.

Prevent Blindness, Ohio Affiliate (PBO) announced recently that Amy Pulles succeeded former President and CEO Sherry Williams, who retired at the beginning of the year. Pulles moved up from vice president of the organization. In addition, David Monder was promoted to vice president of programs and government affairs at the organization.

Former WCMH reporter Adrienne Robbins has joined Strategic Public Partners (SPP) as director of communications, the firm announced Wednesday. SPP said Robbins will specialize in media relations "and will bring a unique perspective to SPP's diverse range of clients."

## **POLITICS**

Leaders of the state political parties came together to discuss their outlooks for the 2022 political season Friday. Ohio Republican Party Chair Bob Paduchik and Ohio Democratic Party Chair Elizabeth Walters, both of whom took the helm of their respective parties in early 2021, participated in a City Club of Cleveland forum. Despite the wide partisan gap between the pair, both predicted Ohio's local and state election this year would be heavily influenced by national politics. Paduchik predicted issues like rising inflation and the continuing toll of the COVID-19 pandemic would swing voters' favor in the GOP's direction, while Walters argued spending bills and other resources approved from the Biden administration would aid Democrats come election time. On the state side, Walters said Democrats plan to emphasize the 133-HB6 (Callender-Wilkin) scandal and highlight efforts to increase accountability.

The Republican State Leadership Committee (RSLC) this week announced the 2022 executive committee for its Republican Legislative Campaign Committee (RLCC), the group's largest caucus and a national organization devoted to electing Republican state legislative leaders. The executive committee includes Ohio Senate President Matt Huffman (R-Lima) and Ohio Senate President Pro Tempore Jay Hottinger (R-Newark).

## **POVERTY**

Just under 423,000 Ohio children lived in poverty in 2020, representing a child poverty rate of 16.8 percent, according to recently released data from the U.S. Census Bureau. The Center for Community Solutions (CCS) said Ohio's 2020 child poverty rate was the lowest figure since the 2000 decennial census, which reported the share of children who lived in poverty in 1999. The data come from the Census Bureau's 2020 American Community Survey (ACS) 1-Year Experimental Data. In an analysis of that data, CCS writes that ACS 1-year estimates always carry some amount of uncertainty, but explains that COVID-19 disrupted data collection in 2020 in ways that may have undercounted low-income households.

## **PUBLIC SAFETY**

The 38 graduates from the Ohio State Highway Patrol (OSHP) Training Academy's 145th Basic Peace Officer Class have received their training certificates. They will assume duties as peace officers for 17 Ohio agencies, including local police departments, county sheriff's offices, the Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR) Division of Parks and Watercraft and the OSHP's Ohio Investigative Unit.

The Ohio Office of Criminal Justice Services (OCJS) announced Thursday that three law enforcement agencies recently completed the

Ohio Collaborative recertification process and another two were certified as well. According to OCJS, there are now 550 agencies that are certified, and 14 in the process of becoming certified by meeting standards for the use of force, including deadly force, and agency recruitment and hiring. Additionally, more than 29,898 officers (representing over 86 percent of all law enforcement officers in Ohio, including most of Ohio's metropolitan areas) are employed by an agency that is involved in some form of the certification process.

### **REDISTRICTING/REAPPORTIONMENT**

The Ohio Supreme Court followed its 4-3 decision striking down the recently redrawn legislative district map with another 4-3 decision last week invalidating the congressional map approved by the Legislature in SB258 (McColley). The opinion found that the congressional map violated the partisan gerrymandering prohibitions contained in the Ohio Constitution. The Supreme Court went on to order the General Assembly to pass a new map for Ohio's 15 congressional districts that complies with the Ohio Constitution within the timeline required by Article XIX, Section 3(B)(1). That section gives the General Assembly 30 days to pass a constitutional plan. If it fails to do so, map-drawing goes to a reconstituted Ohio Redistricting Commission to adopt "a congressional district plan in accordance with the provisions of this constitution that are then valid ...." In Friday's 4-3 decision, Chief Justice Maureen O'Connor was again the swing vote.

Newly-chosen House Minority Leader Allison Russo (D-Columbus) announced Friday afternoon that she appointed herself to the newly reconstituted Ohio Redistricting Commission following the Wednesday, Jan. 12 ruling from the Ohio Supreme Court striking down the previous state legislative map. Her predecessor as leader, Rep. Emilia Sykes (D-Akron), served on the previous incarnation of the group.

The Ohio Redistricting Commission held its first meeting to redraw the legislative district map per the directive from the Ohio Supreme Court on Tuesday with a second meeting on Thursday. At that session,

legislative Democrats and Republicans exchanged counteroffers on redrawing the lines for Franklin and Hamilton counties, but the two sides continued to be at odds on how closely to adhere to proportionality in the final maps. Sen. Vern Sykes (D-Akron) said that the commission has decided to work through negotiations by taking a regional approach, and while they have a tentative understanding on that approach, they have not made a final decision on any map. The clock is ticking, though the final deadline is still in dispute. Auditor of State Keith Faber, a commission member, said Ohio Supreme Court rules allow a deadline that falls on a Saturday to be continued until the following Monday, but the legislative commission members said they believe the deadline is just before midnight on Saturday, Jan. 22 and were working toward that goal. This time around, all commission members have access to the map-drawing software and staff of all are participating in the discussions. Sen. Vern Sykes (D-Akron) and Speaker of the House Bob Cupp (R-Lima) are co-chairs. At Tuesday's meeting, Secretary of State Frank LaRose, a member of the commission, told his colleagues that time is of the essence, with election deadlines fast approaching. He said it isn't just the filing deadline that could be problematic for county boards of elections, but a number of administrative deadlines as well.

### **STATE GOVERNMENT**

The Ohio Department of Commerce Division of Financial Institutions announced that it and financial regulatory agencies from 41 other states reached settlements with 441 mortgage loan originators nationwide who deceptively claimed to have completed annual continuing education as required under state and federal law.

### **STUDIES/POLLS**

Central Ohio alone sends nearly one million pounds of food waste to landfills every single day, according to the Solid Waste Authority of Central Ohio. However, recent research from Ohio State University (OSU) aims to improve strategies for reducing food waste. The study suggested that explaining the value of misshapen vegetables -- that they are just as healthful as any other vegetable and buying them helps reduce food waste - could help improve sales of "ugly" produce.

### **TAXATION**

The state of Ohio would benefit from eliminating the Commercial Activity Tax (CAT), representatives from the Tax Foundation and Americans for Prosperity (AFP) told the House Ways and Means Committee on Tuesday. During interested party testimony on CAT repeal bill HB234 (Gross-McClain), Tax Foundation senior policy analyst Ulrik Boesen said gross receipts taxes are "non-neutral and economically destructive" despite the low rate and broad base of Ohio's CAT.

### **TRANSPORTATION/INFRASTRUCTURE**

Saying electric vehicle (EV) adoption nearly doubled in Ohio during 2021, the Citizens Utility Board (CUB) of Ohio offered eight recommendations Tuesday on how the state can maximize consumer benefits from mass adoption of EVs over the next 10 years. The recommendations are part of a 28-page report.

They include a statewide process bringing together stakeholders "to develop a common vision for the future of EVs in Ohio," developing online tools to provide accurate information on EVs and launching outreach programs to educate the public about their benefits to "all consumers." The recommendations also call for incentivizing EV use with lower electricity rates for off-peak and overnight home charging; developing pilot programs to reduce costs and power grid stress; enacting "sensible public charging policies and consumer protections;" providing targeted and equitable programs that make both new and used EVs more affordable; and promoting e-buses and initiatives such as low-cost EV sharing for residents with low or moderate incomes.

The Ohio Rail Development Commission (ORDC) approved a grant for a Clark County project and discussed rail crossing safety as its state action plan on the issue is due to the Public Utilities Commission of Ohio (PUCO) next month. The sole resolution at Wednesday's meeting approved a \$525,768 grant for a project requested by the Indiana and Ohio Railway to improve a switching station in Tremont City in Clark County.

#### **TREASURER OF STATE**

The State Treasury Asset Reserve (STAR) of Ohio has once again received Standard & Poor's (S&P) highest rating of AAAm, Ohio Treasurer Robert Sprague announced. This marks "the 28th consecutive year that the long-standing investment pool has earned the top rating," his office noted. "For nearly three decades, STAR Ohio has been a trusted option for local governments to invest and safeguard public dollars," Sprague said. STAR Ohio is an investment pool that allows government subdivisions -- from municipalities to school districts -- to invest in high-grade, short-term securities while offering safety, penalty-free liquidity, and comparatively higher yields. More than 1,700 entities currently participate in the program, and there are nearly 2,800 accounts across the state.

#### **UTILITIES**

The Public Utilities Commission of Ohio (PUCO) released Friday the new audit report for FirstEnergy Ohio's utilities' distribution modernization rider (DMR), after ordering it in late December 2020 due to allegations on the passage of 133-HB6 (Callender-Wilkin). The audit report was prepared by Daymark Energy Advisors and examined whether revenues collected by the utilities from the rider DMR were used for the stated purpose of supporting grid modernization investments. The utilities collected \$457.7 million between Jan. 1, 2017 and July 2, 2019.

#### **WORKERS' COMPENSATION**

The Bureau of Workers' Compensation (BWC) announced that registration has opened for its Ohio Safety Congress & Expo, which will be held virtually on Wednesday, March 9 and Thursday, March 10. It is free for Ohio employers and their employees, and offers more than 40 "live broadcast and on-demand sessions for success in business strategies, innovation and technology, governance and compliance, workers' compensation and professional development," according to BWC. There will also be a digital Expo Marketplace hosting over 30 exhibitors.