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### **Ohio Association of Ambulatory Surgery Centers Legislative Update**

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#### **ABORTION**

Leaders of Protect Choice Ohio (PCO) will begin training volunteers this week to gather the signatures needed to enshrine abortion rights in the Ohio Constitution, the campaign announced Tuesday. Dr. Marcela Azevedo, president of the coalition, said the training represents an important step forward in their drive to place a reproductive freedom amendment on the Nov. 7, 2023 General Election ballot. The first of two virtual training sessions was Thursday, Jan. 19 with the second set for Sunday, Jan. 22 at 7 p.m. Participants must register in advance at <https://protectchoiceohio.com/training> and will receive a secure link to the sessions 24 hours in advance, according to PCO. PCO is on track to submit its amendment to Attorney General Dave Yost in the next few weeks, Azevedo said.

#### **AGRICULTURE**

Gov. Mike DeWine told leaders of Ohio's local fairs Friday that while his administration is looking to update the facilities and feel of the Ohio State Fair, agriculture will remain at the center of the endeavor. DeWine joined Lt. Gov. Jon Husted and the rest of the statewide executive officeholders Friday at the Ohio Fair Managers Association (OFMA) Convention in Columbus. The governor said agriculture will stay "the heart and soul" of the fair, but his administration has ideas for how else to "showcase Ohio" at the annual event, including with science exhibitions from COSI, history programs from the Ohio History Connection, and greater involvement from Ohio State University.

The Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR) Division of Wildlife announced it contributed \$25,000 to Farmers and Hunters Feeding the Hungry (FHFH) to support local foodbanks with donated venison. The organization will use the funding to pay for white-tailed deer harvested by hunters to be processed and distributed to charitable organizations in Ohio. Additional funding will be secured by the organization with a goal to match or exceed the amount provided by the grant. FHFH expects to pay the processing cost for 350 deer with this grant alone, each of which yields approximately 50 pounds of venison and 200 meals.



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### **ARTS, SPORTS AND ENTERTAINMENT**

Statewide advocacy organization Ohio Citizens for the Arts is now known as "CreativeOhio." What started as a volunteer grassroots committee in 1976 advocating to increase public support for the arts in Ohio has grown into an organization dedicated to advocacy, education and workforce development on behalf of its members, according to CreativeOhio (CO).

### **ATTORNEY GENERAL**

Attorney General (AG) Dave Yost announced recently that \$11.77 million in safety grants is available to Ohio schools through his office for the 2023-24 school year. New this year, a limited number of 'Innovation Grants' of up to \$20,000 will be awarded for technology that links schools with law enforcement agencies for improved safety, crime prevention and response. The new innovation grants can be used for one building or multiple buildings within a district. The money is expected to be used for crisis-response technology designed to alert law enforcement of potential safety breaches on school property.

The Ohio AG says all 88 counties are being provided a new Sexual Offender Registration and Notification (SORN) camera system, with roughly two thirds also receiving new computer hardware and software upgrades to track sex offenders. The U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) is funding the SORN improvements with \$384,283 from its Office of Sex Offender Sentencing, Monitoring, Apprehending, Registering and Tracking (SMART).

### **BALLOT ISSUES**

If a requirement for constitutional issues to get 60 percent of the vote in order to pass had been in place over the past 40 years, state bond issues paying for infrastructure, housing, and former Gov. Bob Taft's Third Frontier program would not have passed, according to former Rep. Mike Curtin. Curtin, who is a retired *Columbus Dispatch* editor, highlighted the impact the resolution formerly known as 134-HJR6 (Stewart) would have had on bond issues at a Thursday news conference. Sponsor Rep. Brian Stewart (R-Ashville) has resubmitted the proposal but it has not officially been introduced in resolution form. Curtin said over the many decades bond issues have been put before voters, they have been an indispensable way to pay for state projects, especially because of debt limits in the Ohio Constitution. He said given the historic skepticism of Ohio voters to new debt, getting one approved is already a tall task, requiring bipartisan agreement, cooperation between the business and labor communities, and no organized opposition.



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### **FY22-23 BUDGET**

Gov. Mike DeWine Tuesday announced Ohio's Rainy Day Fund (RDF) has reached a balance never seen before in the fund's history with a cash balance of nearly \$3.5 billion. The Ohio Office of Budget and Management (OBM) transferred \$727 million into the fund to reach the historic number. The fund, which is a reserve balance set aside to protect the state budget from cyclical changes in revenues and expenses that may occur during poor economic times, is capped at 8.5 percent of General Revenue Fund revenues. The transfer into the fund made Tuesday was authorized by the General Assembly in 134-HB45 (West-Roemer).

### **CIVIL RIGHTS**

After a break because of COVID-19, the annual Columbus Martin Luther King Jr. Birthday Breakfast again filled a huge Columbus Convention Center exhibition hall Monday for songs and speeches reflecting on the words and deeds of the American civil rights icon. Among those addressing the crowd were U.S. Rep. Joyce Beatty (D-Columbus), Columbus Mayor Andrew Ginther and Council President Shannon Hardin. Newly elected U.S. Sen. J.D. Vance (R-OH) joined the lineup of elected officials speaking at the breakfast for the first time. The keynote speaker for Monday's event was Lawrence Carter, dean of the Martin Luther King International Chapel at Morehouse College in Atlanta.

### **CORONAVIRUS/MONKEYPOX**

The U.S. Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals has upheld a lower court ruling that struck down a federal rule requiring all federal contractors to mandate employees' wear facemasks at work and be vaccinated against COVID-19, a ruling praised by Attorney General Dave Yost. President Joe Biden had ordered the Occupational Safety and Health Administration to issue the rule in September 2021. After the mandate was issued, Ohio, Kentucky, Tennessee and two Ohio sheriff's offices sued the Biden administration, seeking to prevent its enforcement, challenging the executive action on statutory, administrative and constitutional grounds. A district court granted the request in the case, *Kentucky v. Biden*, enjoining the government from enforcing the mandate in the three plaintiff states. The Biden administration appealed to the Sixth Circuit, though the appeals court denied the motion to stay the injunction.

The Ohio Department of Health (ODH) reported the number of new COVID-19 cases continued to drop, falling from 10,188 in the seven days ending Jan. 12 to 7,961 Thursday. Hospitalizations also declined from 646 to 434, and ICU admissions fell from 49 to 27. Deaths ticked up slightly from 106 to 110. Since the pandemic began, there



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have been 3.34 million cases, 135,273 hospitalizations, 14,837 ICU admissions and 41,249 deaths.

### **EDUCATION**

The Senate Education Committee kicked off Tuesday a series of hearings that will likely last through February to vet Republicans' plan to transfer much of the K-12 administrative and policymaking authority to the governor's cabinet. Sen. Bill Reineke (R-Tiffin), sponsor of SB1 and its predecessor, 134-SB178, made a similar pitch Tuesday as he had in the lame duck session, citing lagging test scores, delayed rollouts of key initiatives and a lack of alignment to workforce needs under the oversight of the State Board of Education and state superintendent. They would retain authority over realms like teacher licensure and discipline and school district territory transfers under SB1, but the new Department of Education and Workforce (DEW) he proposes would be run by an appointee of the governor. Reineke emphasized amendments to assuage the concerns of home school families and non-chartered, non-public schools, often referred to as "-08 schools" after the section of Ohio school operating standards under which they are governed. Under SB1, those standards would be codified rather than left to rule. Sen. Andrew Brenner (R-Delaware), chair of the committee, also noted that SB1 is a "clean bill," untethered from some controversial provisions paired with SB178 in lame duck, like restrictions on transgender athletes and on school vaccination policies. Brenner said the next hearing on SB1 will take place Tuesday, Feb. 7, and further hearings are likely each week of February, with the potential for a vote late that month or early in March.

More than two dozen education-workforce partnerships were honored by the state with the 2023 Business-Education Leader Awards for Excellent Business Advisory Councils (BACs), the Ohio Department of Education (ODE) and Lt. Gov. Jon Husted's office announced. All Ohio school districts and educational service centers (ESCs) are required to have BACs, which bring education and business leaders together to collaborate on initiatives that connect education with regional workforce needs. Ohio rates BACs on a four-star scale, based on their implementation of quality practices on collaboration, delineation of key professional skills for future jobs and development of curriculum on those skills, and creation of environments for students to show proficiency in professional and workforce skills for future employment.

ODE is taking nominations for the Teachers of Ohio Representing Character and Heart (TORCH) award, which each year goes to five teachers who model strong personal character and concern for students, colleagues and communities. Information about the award and a link to nominate teachers is available at <https://tinyurl.com/j659s4rc>.

The Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS) has been awarded \$48 million in federal grants over the next three years to support access to quality early



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childhood care and education, Gov. Mike DeWine said Wednesday. The Preschool Development Grant Birth through Five (PDG B-5) comes from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Administration for Children and Families. DeWine noted that the largest group of Ohioans living in poverty are children aged five and under. ODJFS is partnering with the Ohio departments of education; health; mental health and addiction services; Medicaid; and developmental disabilities to administer the grant programs, which will focus on increasing access and family engagement in early childhood care and education and expanding child care for those with special needs, English language learners, and those experiencing homelessness, among other areas.

The Ohio High School Athletic Association (OHSAA) announced a partnership with nonprofit organization Esports Ohio to support and promote its annual state tournament in May. There are currently 250 schools that have teams affiliated with Esports Ohio, according to OHSAA. Esports Ohio was created by teachers to "create a world where electronic sports are embraced as a positive educational and developmental change agent for all students." More information about Esports Ohio can be found at <https://www.esportsohio.org/>.

### **ELECTIONS 2024**

Ohio Sen. Matt Dolan (R-Chagrin Falls) officially launched his campaign for U.S Senate Tuesday, saying in a statement: "America's challenges demand the focus of experienced leaders who reject fictional grievances and are ready to do the hard work of getting results to make our future better than the past. The crises confronting our nation today are entirely self-made. The botched withdrawal from Afghanistan emboldened America's adversaries. A failure to adhere to the rule of law has resulted in humanitarian and security crises on our southern border that undermine our national sovereignty and strain law enforcement."

### **ENERGY/UTILITIES**

Ohio Consumers' Counsel (OCC) Bruce Weston announced his retirement after 45 years with the agency, including more than a decade in the top post. He informed the OCC Governing Board of his impending departure on Tuesday. Weston was hired as a legal intern by Ohio's first consumers' counsel, Bill Spratley, in 1978, two years after the agency's creation. Weston rose through the ranks and took over the office in 2011 following the departure of former Consumers' Counsel Janine Migden-Ostrander and OCC's roughly \$5 million budget cut under former Gov. John Kasich. Weston convinced the Legislature to restore \$1.5 million in his first year and secured a smaller increase in the 133rd General Assembly.



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PJM Interconnection says electric generators responsible for Christmas and Hanukkah power outages now face estimated penalties in the billions of dollars. PJM, the 13-state regional transmission organization (RTO) encompassing Ohio, issued a system-wide "call for conservation" on Dec. 23 based on the approach of Winter Storm Elliott which brought heavy snowfall and Arctic temperatures. It hit all areas of the U.S. except parts of the Southwest and produced record Christmas Eve lows in Washington, D.C., Philadelphia and Baltimore. Americans unfamiliar with the term "Polar Vortex" in 2014 now added "bomb cyclone" to their vocabulary. Despite those conditions, the RTO said, "PJM operated reliably throughout winter storm challenges."

The Public Utilities Commission of Ohio (PUCO) Nominating Council Wednesday announced the candidates it will interview on Thursday, Jan. 26 for the Public Utilities Commission of Ohio (PUCO) seat currently held by Beth Trombold. They include John Williams, Christopher Healey, Rep. Mike Skindell (D-Lakewood), June Taylor, former state representative and attorney general candidate Jeffrey Crossman and Stephen Serraino.

The Ohio Power Siting Board (OPSB) issued mixed rulings Thursday on the growth of solar farms in the state. Board members including Chairwoman Jenifer French, who splits duties at the Public Utilities Commission of Ohio (PUCO), shot down a 68 megawatt (MW) solar project slated for 500 acres in Northwest Ohio's Defiance County. "The OPSB found that, based on the unanimous opposition to the project by local governments whose constituents are impacted by the project, the proposed project would fail to serve the 'public interest, convenience, and necessity,' as required by Ohio law," the agency said in a brief statement. Separately, the siting board proposed reducing the required setback of solar panels from adjacent properties lacking residents from 150 feet to only 50 feet.

### **FEDERAL**

U.S. Sen. Sherrod Brown (D-OH) Thursday announced the return of Sarah Benzing as chief of staff and the retirement of Trudy Perkins, communications director and former acting chief of staff. Benzing, who also served as campaign manager for Brown's successful 2012 re-election bid and joined Brown's office as chief of staff in 2015, left the office in early 2022 to serve as executive director of the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee's Independent Expenditure. During that time, Perkins served as the acting chief of staff while continuing to also serve as communications director.



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### **GAMING/GAMBLING**

Sports gambling losers who send hateful messages to college athletes could wind up on the state's involuntary exclusion list, according to Ohio Casino Control Commission (OCCC) Executive Director Matt Schuler. "Dayton Flyers coach Anthony Grant recently used his postgame press conference ... to address hate messages being sent to his players, received in recent days from gamblers upset about their losses. Something similar happened with Ohio State a couple of years ago. It's not something that is overly prevalent, but when it certainly happens, it gets everyone's attention because these are kids that are out playing a game," Schuler said during Wednesday's OCCC meeting. Nobody has been added to the OCCC's involuntary exclusion list since 2014. There are currently 10 individuals on the list, and they are banned from entering casinos in Ohio.

### **GENERAL ASSEMBLY/STATEHOUSE**

Three weeks after the surprise election of Rep. Jason Stephens (R-Kitts Hill) as speaker upended the usual organizational routines of the House, the chamber is set to come back into session to handle "procedural resolutions." The House clerk's office announced a 2 p.m. Tuesday, Jan 24 session for adoption of those resolutions, at the same time converting the planned Wednesday, Jan. 25 session to "if-needed" status.

Senate President Matt Huffman (R-Lima) says he's not yet sure how he'll approach negotiations with members of the House during the 135th General Assembly. House Speaker Stephens had won his position with the votes of 22 Republicans and all 32 Democrats, while 43 Republicans voted for Rep. Derek Merrin (R-Maumee). Merrin and his supporters have since formed a separate caucus, with Merrin as its leader. Following Tuesday's Senate Rules and Reference Committee meeting, Huffman was asked whether he would mainly negotiate with Stephens, Merrin or House Minority Leader Allison Russo (D-Columbus). "In this case, there's sort of this -- can I say 'three-headed monster?' Too late, I already did. ... I'm certainly going to be conversing with everybody, but the speaker -- and the speaker's office -- is a unique position, and I'm going to keep that in mind too," Huffman said. He hasn't met with Stephens as yet but plans to do so in the near future.

Senate Minority Leader Nickie Antonio (D-Lakewood) and her caucus previewed work on health care, housing and criminal justice issues Tuesday as legislative activities begin to ramp up for the 135th General Assembly. While collective caucus priorities are yet to be finalized, senators shared the legislation and issues they'll be looking to tackle individually during a sit-down with Statehouse reporters. In many cases they'll be picking up work started in earlier General Assemblies. Antonio said she'll be taking up familiar legislative proposals, including the Fairness Act, which would add sexual orientation and



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gender identity to workplace and housing discrimination statutes; repeal of Ohio's death penalty; and elimination of the statute of limitations on rape and sexual assault.

Rep. Merrin Wednesday detailed legislation on ethics reform he'd planned to designate as HB1 before his ascent to the speakership was thwarted, saying restoring public trust in government is foundational to the rest of the House's work. Backed by several colleagues who were to serve on his House leadership team or had voted for him over Speaker Stephens, Merrin said ethics laws have been "mostly untouched" for decades. He outlined five major provisions of his proposal including requiring all lobbying income to be reported and sourced directly to clients; requiring nominees for appointment to the Public Utilities Commission of Ohio to disclose income and previous business relationships and ties to entities regulated by the commission, and that of their family members, with the information to be made available publicly before a nominee's name is submitted to the governor for consideration; and prohibiting state elected officials from receiving compensation from serving on corporate boards unless they held the board seat prior to taking office and have ownership in the corporation, and requiring the amounts of compensation to be disclosed, among other items.

In other matters, Merrin said they're still waiting to hear back from Stephens on their call for House rules that will "decentralize" power from the speaker's office. Merrin and Reps. Phil Plummer (R-Dayton) and Brian Stewart (R-Ashville) discussed the push for Stephens to adopt rules that would empower individual House members. Plummer said they have "options" if Stephens won't work with them -- options that Stewart said could include an open fight on the House floor over the rules package.

As someone who enjoys people and problem solving, Al Landis found he missed being a legislator after terming out of the House in 2019. "I continued to follow and be in contact, not just at the state level but the national level with our congressional reps and their liaisons ... I'd still get calls as a county commissioner asking me about things at the state level," the Dover Republican told *Hannah News* during an interview in his office. "My interests really never left Columbus and the work ... it's demanding, and it's something that I felt really comfortable doing. The two things that drive me are the fact that I like people, and I like problem solving," he said. Landis returns to the Statehouse representing the 31st Senate District, encompassing his home county of Tuscarawas plus Muskingum and Wayne counties and parts of Guernsey and Stark counties.

As a self-described "addictive problem solver" with a background in state and local government and nonprofit leadership, Michele Reynolds sought a Senate seat because she felt she was positioned to get things done for her community. Reynolds helped her caucus expand on its already dominant share of seats, defeating first-term Sen. Tina Maharath (D-Canal Winchester), who four years earlier had pulled off a surprising upset against GOP Rep. Anne Gonzales. Reynolds credits the win to a lot of hard work, the ability to





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attract crossover votes from Democrats and Independents and an appeal to New American communities. Policies to support affordable and supportive housing are among her legislative priorities. Incentives for affordable housing, zoning changes to encourage more multi-family housing and more vertical development are some of her ideas.

### GOVERNOR

With Senate Republicans set to launch hearings anew on a recently vetoed proposal to change where Ohioans can challenge state administrative actions in court, Gov. Mike DeWine said Friday he thinks it's possible to find compromise. DeWine used his veto pen sparingly after last month's lame duck session, but he did strike down 134-HB286 (Seitz), which would generally open the doors for Ohioans to challenge state agency actions in any common pleas court, rather than just in Franklin County, where most state government agencies are headquartered. He called the language "simply too broad" when announcing his veto. A modified version of the proposal is now back in SB21, sponsored by Sens. Robert McColley (R-Napoleon) and Michele Reynolds (R-Canal Winchester). In the bill's first hearing in the Senate Judiciary Committee on Tuesday, Democrats stood in for the DeWine administration to challenge the re-introduced version of the legislation. The minority questioned opening appeals of executive agency rulings to the precedent-setting power of 88 county courts rather limiting administrative disputes to the Franklin County Court of Common Pleas. Reynolds commented that the current administrative appeals process gives Franklin County "outsized authority" over other county court jurisdictions.

Asked to elaborate on inaugural comments regarding mental health, Gov. DeWine said his forthcoming executive budget proposal will take a "comprehensive approach" that includes improving access, emphasizing the use of school wellness funding for mental health, and increasing the number of providers in the field.

DeWine declined to comment specifically on whether he views Speaker Jason Stephens (R-Kitts Hill) or Rep. Derek Merrin (R-Monclova) as the main point of contact for legislative negotiations in the House this session. Merrin and the bulk of Republican legislators who backed his speakership bid proclaimed themselves the majority Republican caucus after a Statehouse gathering last week. "I try not to get involved in leadership decisions in regard to the Senate or the House, so I don't think I'm going to comment on that today," DeWine said.

DeWine Wednesday announced that Aimee Shadwick will become the new director of RecoveryOhio, the governor's initiative to prevent, reduce, treat and support long-term recovery from mental illness and substance use disorders. Shadwick has been with RecoveryOhio since 2019, including serving as interim director. Previously, she worked at the Franklin County Alcohol, Drug and Mental Health Board. In addition, Felicia King



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becomes the new director of the Governor's Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives. She is a long-time employee of DeWine's, serving in the Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives, most recently as interim director. Previously, she worked for DeWine both in the attorney general's office and in the U.S. Senate

### **HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES**

Bipartisan legislation meant to improve birth outcomes in Ohio by expanding access to doula services for pregnant women failed to make it through the 134th General Assembly, but lawmakers may get a chance to reconsider it this session. Sponsored by former Rep. Erica Crawley, now a Franklin County commissioner, and former Rep. Tom Brinkman, 134-HB142 would have allowed Medicaid coverage for licensed doula services over the next five years. Doulas are labor assistants, though not health care professionals, who provide physical and emotional support throughout a person's pregnancy, labor, and postpartum period. Sen. Catherine Ingram (D-Cincinnati), who crossed over from being in the House last session and serves as co-chair of the Black Maternal Health Caucus, said reintroducing the bill this session will be a priority for her caucus.

### **HIGHER EDUCATION**

Ohio State University (OSU) announced Friday that Dr. John J. Warner will serve as chief executive officer (CEO) of the Wexner Medical Center and executive vice president at Ohio State. Warner will join the university on April 1, pending approval by the Board of Trustees. Warner comes to Ohio State from the University of Texas (UT) Southwestern Medical Center in Dallas, where he has served as CEO of the UT Southwestern Health System, as well as executive vice president for health system affairs, since 2018. Prior to those roles, Warner was CEO of UT Southwestern University Hospitals and Clinics. Currently, he oversees UT Southwestern's clinical enterprise, which includes more than 100,000 inpatient and approximately 4 million outpatient visits annually.

Northeast Ohio Medical University (NEOMED) is set to receive a \$4 million grant to provide training and technical assistance for communities developing or implementing deflection and pre-arrest diversion programs designed to help those with substance use disorder get help and treatment. The Office of Criminal Justice Services (OCJS) is administering the grant for the new initiative through Ohio's portion of American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds. The initiative will support communities that have experienced an increase in violent crime. A new Substance Use Deflection Center of Excellence within NEOMED's existing Criminal Justice Coordinating Center of Excellence will be established to undertake this work. The center will also research ways to improve the effectiveness of deflection and diversion programs.



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Combining satellite technology with machine learning may allow scientists to better track and prepare for climate-induced natural hazards, according to research presented by an Ohio State University (OSU) professor at the annual meeting of the American Geophysical Union. Over the last few decades, rising global temperatures have caused many natural phenomena like hurricanes, snowstorms, floods and wildfires to grow in intensity and frequency. The rapidly increasing number of satellites that orbit the Earth from space offers a greater opportunity to monitor these storms, said C.K Shum, co-author of the study and a professor at the Byrd Polar Research Center and in earth sciences at Ohio State.

A Kent State University program that aims to increase racial and ethnic diversity in the design fields was recently awarded a National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) grant. The university's Cleveland Urban Design Collaborative created "Making Our Own Space" (MOOS), a design/build program for middle and high school students. Since 2015, MOOS has been helping educate youth on design fundamentals, construction, urban systems and community engagement. MOOS serves as an "incubator for design thinkers and problem-solvers," the university said. The NEA announced the Cleveland Urban Design Collaborative will receive a \$30,000 grant to support MOOS. This grant is one of 1,251 Grants for Arts Projects awards totaling nearly \$28.8 million that were announced by the NEA as part of its first round of FY23 grants.

### **HOUSING/HOMELESSNESS**

On a single night in January 2022, there were 10,654 people experiencing homelessness in Ohio, just a slight dip from 2020, when 10,655 people were homeless, according to a report released in late 2022 by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). The numbers were released as a part of HUD's 2022 Annual Homelessness Assessment Report to Congress. The report found 46,213 people were experiencing homelessness on a single night in January 2022 in the Midwest, while there was a national total of 582,462 people homeless. Overall, HUD said the number of people experiencing homelessness in the Midwest region, defined as Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio and Wisconsin, dropped by 3.3 percent since 2020, while nationally there was a 0.3 percent increase.

### **HUMAN SERVICES**

The Office of Criminal Justice Services (OCJS) is now accepting grant applications for federal funding of emergency shelter and support services for domestic violence victims and their dependents. Grants support the establishment, maintenance and expansion of programs and projects at community-based, nonprofit groups such as preventing incidents of family, domestic and dating violence and providing immediate shelter,



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support and service access to community-based programs for victims of family, domestic or dating violence and their dependents, among other uses.

### **JUDICIAL**

The Ohio Supreme Court ruled unanimously Tuesday that Attorney General Dave Yost's effort to recover a \$4.3 million "bribe" to former Public Utilities Commission of Ohio (PUCO) chairman and FirstEnergy lobbyist Sam Randazzo is indeed a matter of "public or great general interest" to Ohioans. That is the baseline for appeals to the Court, which accepted all of the AG's legal arguments including that Randazzo's debt to the state could triple to \$12.9 million before any punitive damages. In *State v. FirstEnergy, et al.*, Yost is appealing a unanimous decision by the 10th Appellate District overturning a trial judge's "attachment" or freeze of \$8 million in Randazzo assets without notice to the embattled lobbyist, otherwise known as an ex parte ruling. Tenth District Judges Laurel Beatty Blunt and Mike Mentel, both Democrats, and Judge William Klatt, a Republican, said the AG had not proved Randazzo was likely to divert funds in the trial's early stages to evade responsibility for conflicts of interest in pushing FirstEnergy subsidy 133-HB6 (Callender-Wilkin).

With the federal trial on corruption charges related to the passage of nuclear bailout bill 133-HB6 (Callender-Wilkin) for former House Speaker Larry Householder and former Ohio Republican Party Chair Matt Borges set to get underway Friday, the former prosecutor who announced those charges said he hopes more state and federal prosecutors will look at dark money groups. David DeVillers, the former U.S. attorney for the Southern District of Ohio, spoke at a Columbus Metropolitan Club (CMC) panel Wednesday about so called "dark money" in politics, where certain groups do not have to disclose their donors. DeVillers said those groups, mainly 501(c)(4) groups, are breeding grounds for money laundering.

### **LOBBYISTS**

The Inter-University Council of Ohio (IUC) announced Nicole "Niki" Clum will serve as vice president of government relations, effective Monday, Jan. 30. Clum replaces Mike Suver, who held the role for 16 years and is now serving as the IUC's vice president of operations. Clum goes to the IUC from the Office of the Ohio Public Defender where, for the last five and half years, she was both the legislative policy manager and a licensed attorney. Prior to that, she served as an assistant city prosecutor for the city of Delaware, and an assistant county prosecutor for Union County.

Former Director Mike Haugh of the Ohio Consumers' Counsel (OCC) Analytical Department is now senior fellow with R Street Consultants. Haugh was seen often in the 134th General Assembly delivering legislative testimony on behalf of OCC. Outside the



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agency, he has worked as a wholesale energy trader and in regulatory and government affairs for retail energy suppliers. He holds a bachelor's in business administration from Ohio State University.

### **MARIJUANA/HEMP**

The State Medical Board of Ohio (SMBO) received 10 petitions for potential new qualifying conditions under the Ohio Medical Marijuana Control Program (MMCP) during the 2022 petition period. The SMBO Medical Marijuana Committee is scheduled to meet Wednesday, Feb. 8 to decide which petitions to consider. A final vote on new qualifying conditions is expected to occur in Summer 2023. Those 10 petitions seek the inclusion of the following eight conditions:

- Autism spectrum disorder
- Bipolar 2: depression/anxiety
- Chronic migraine
- Uterine cancer
- Anxiety
- Irritable bowel syndrome (IBS)
- Obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD)
- DDD, neuropathy, depression

The Senate General Government Committee won't waste any time moving medical marijuana program expansion bill SB9 (S. Huffman-Schuring), Chair Sen. Michael Rulli (R-Salem) said Tuesday. "This is a subject I know really well. ... We're going to be very efficient with this committee, and we will move very rapidly. So if there are concerns by the greater public, you should reach out to your office probably sooner than later," Rulli said. SB9 is similar to 134-SB261 (S. Huffman), which passed the Senate but stalled in the House. Sen. Steve Huffman (R-Tipp City) told *Hannah News* that the main difference between SB9 and 134-SB261 is the addition of a Medical Marijuana Oversight Commission to oversee the Division of Marijuana Control in the Ohio Department of Commerce (DOC).



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The Ohio Board of Pharmacy (OBP) awarded the 62nd dispensary certificate of operation under the MMCP. OBP issued the operating license to Uplift, located at 101 Mercy Blvd. in Mount Orab.

### **NATURAL RESOURCES**

The Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR) will host the 57th Annual Winter Hike at Hocking Hills State Park Saturday, Jan. 21. Naturalists from the department will take visitors on a six-mile hike beginning at Upper Falls/Old Man's Cave through Lower Falls and Cedar Falls and ending at Ash Cave. ODNR officers, park naturalists, and other staff will be stationed along the entire route to assist hikers and answer questions. The event is free and open to the public. It has a rolling start from 9 a.m. to 11 a.m. Hikers should meet at the Visitors Center.

The ODNR Division of Geological Survey has awarded research grants to three earth science students at Ohio colleges and universities: Ian Forsythe and Cody Kessler, both at the University of Cincinnati, and Elizabeth Coffey at Miami University. Each student will receive \$2,500 to support their research projects.

The National Park Service announced it has purchased 198 acres of the 213-acre former Brandywine Golf Course property from the Conservancy for Cuyahoga Valley National Park (CVNP). The land purchase in the heart of CVNP is an important part of the park's long-term plan for improved public access and habitat restoration in the area, CVNP said. The remaining 15 acres of the property is retained by the Conservancy for CVNP.

The ODNR Division of Forestry is asking for the public's help to keep invasive pests out of Ohio's forests by reporting sightings of hemlock woolly adelgids (HWA), insects that can threaten hemlock forests. "These insects have been found in 20 Ohio counties and can be devastating to eastern hemlock trees," Forest Health Program Manager Tom Macy said. "By increasing statewide reporting of this pest, we can take better action to control it."

The Ohio Wildlife Council heard proposals on the 2023-24 small game, waterfowl, and wild turkey hunting seasons. Proposed 2023-24 dates are similar to current hunting seasons. No changes were proposed for daily and season limits. Proposals on white-tailed deer hunting will be heard at the Ohio Wildlife Council's next meeting on Wednesday, Feb. 8. A complete list of proposed rule changes and proposed hunting and trapping seasons dates for 2023-24 are available at <http://wildohio.gov>. Everyone who would like to comment on Division of Wildlife proposals can do so online at <http://wildohio.gov> from Feb. 10-March 8.



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Winter weather brings an influx of birding prospects to the Buckeye State, according to the ODNR Division of Wildlife. Some of Ohio's breeding birds migrate out of the state during the winter, but cold weather drives other species here. Snow buntings, Lapland longspurs, dark-eyed juncos, short-eared owls and pine siskins are among the species that are found in winter. Resident birds such as cardinals, screech-owls, woodpeckers and many hawks remain in Ohio year-round.

### PEOPLE

The Ohio Hospital Association (OHA) announced the hiring of Emma Cardone of Columbus as director of advocacy. OHA said as a member of the advocacy team she will be responsible for leading federal relations for the association and supporting local government affairs. Cardone recently served as director of coalitions and stakeholder relations for the DeWine administration and was legislative liaison for the Ohio Department of Medicaid. In these roles she supported the coordination and management of a variety of health care initiatives for the administration and ODM including the COVID-19 pandemic, Medicaid managed care procurement, Medicaid reforms and education and workforce projects. She earned a bachelor's degree in political science from the University of Dayton.

Ohioans to Stop Executions announced the appointment of Allison Cohen as its new executive director. Cohen has worked for over a decade as an advocate for criminal justice reform and the abolition of the death penalty. She previously worked as director of communications for this group, where she helped to shape the organization's media strategy, messaging, and advancing its legislative agenda.

Leah Hetrick has been named director of legal education and member engagement for the Ohio Farm Bureau. Prior to joining the Ohio Farm Bureau, Hetrick worked for Ohio Secretary of State Frank LaRose as a chief legal assistant.

### POLITICS

Cameron Sagester has been appointed as executive director of the Ohio Republican Party, a spokesman for the party confirmed. Sagester has spent much of the past decade in Ohio politics. He was a partner at Hometown Strategies, a political and public affairs consulting firm based in Cincinnati. During his time with Hometown Strategies, he worked on a number of campaigns, including Ohio Supreme Court Justice Pat DeWine's campaign for re-election, Liz Keating's successful election as a Republican to the Cincinnati City Council, and other state legislative and local campaigns throughout Ohio, Kentucky and Indiana.



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The ethics package announced Wednesday by Rep. Derek Merrin (R-Maumee) and his allies should have been proposed a long time ago, Ohio Democratic Party Chair (ODP) Chair Elizabeth Walters said Thursday. "It is not in any way surprising that they've waited until this last minute," Walters said during a press conference, noting that former House Speaker Larry Householder's (R-Glenford) trial is scheduled to begin in the coming days. "I am hopeful that this means that ethics in the Statehouse will change, but especially because of the timing and especially because they've had plenty of time up until now to work on it, I'll reserve my judgement and remain skeptical that they mean any of it," she said.

### **PUBLIC SAFETY**

The Ohio Emergency Management Agency (EMA) announced it is now accepting applications for the Ohio Safe Room Rebate Program. The deadline to apply is Monday, Feb. 20, 2023 at 5 p.m. The Ohio Safe Room Rebate Program provides a rebate to homeowners of up to 75 percent of the cost to install or construct a safe room -- up to a maximum of \$4,875 to homeowners selected for the program. The rebate program will use a computerized random selection process to select names. A safe room is an extreme-wind shelter or space that provides protection to people during a tornado or high wind event. Safe rooms can be constructed/installed in one of several places in the home, including in the basement, beneath a concrete slab-on-grade foundation or garage floor, or in an interior room on the first floor. A safe room may also be buried in the yard or be a stand-alone structure near the home.

### **TECHNOLOGY/AEROSPACE**

The Ohio Third Frontier Commission Tuesday approved \$200,000 in grants to support two companies in raising funds and getting institution-owned technology to the marketplace more quickly. The grants are part of the Technology Validation and Start-up Fund. The companies are the Research Institute at Nationwide Children's Hospital (RINCH), in the city of Columbus (Franklin County) and Smart Response Technologies, in the city of Lebanon (Warren County). Both will receive \$100,000.

The Ohio Academic Resources Network (OARnet) -- which will be updated to support an increase from 100 gigabits per second (Gbps) to 400 -- recently marked its 35th anniversary, according to the Ohio Department of Administrative Services (DAS). The increased speed would make it one of the first statewide networks at that level, according to OARnet. The network helped supply "increased bandwidth and critical connections" during the pandemic and currently focuses on providing vulnerable clients with additional cybersecurity options.





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### **TRANSPORTATION/INFRASTRUCTURE**

The Ohio Turnpike and Infrastructure Commission Tuesday discussed safety among other topics during its monthly meeting in the wake of a deadly multi-vehicle crash in Erie County on Dec. 23 that involved more than 50 vehicles and killed four. The incident occurred at about 12:30 p.m. in the midst of winter storms moving through the state that dropped the temperature to below zero and iced over roads ahead of the holiday. It closed the turnpike in both directions while the crash was cleaned up; the Ohio State Highway Patrol is still investigating it. Members of the commission complimented the work of the patrol, first responders, and turnpike workers for their actions in response to the crash.

DriveOhio announced this week that it will be testing automated vehicles on rural roadways in Central and Southeast Ohio as part of its Rural Automated Driving System (ADS) project, which the agency said will begin two deployments to gather data that will help define future technology needs. DriveOhio said that while most automated driving systems have been tested in urban areas, there's still research needed on how the vehicles operate in rural areas when navigating around curves, over hills, and in and out of shaded areas.

### **UNEMPLOYMENT COMPENSATION**

The state of Ohio still ranks near the bottom of the U.S. for new unemployment claims, according to financial advisory website WalletHub. Ohio ranked 43 in states where jobless claims decreased the most week-over-week, with "1" being the best and "51" being the worst. Tennessee ranked 1, while Kentucky ranked 51. Michigan ranked the highest among Ohio's neighbors at 11, followed by Pennsylvania (25), Indiana (33) and West Virginia (34).

### **VETERANS**

The Ohio High School Athletic Association (OHSAA) has announced that Friday, Jan. 27 and Saturday, Jan. 28 will be recognized as "Military Appreciation Night" across Ohio during athletic contests at OHSAA member schools. Some schools already observed Military Appreciation Night earlier this season, and OHSAA offers its support throughout the school year for schools to show appreciation to the men and women who have served in the military. Schools that do not have home athletic contests those two days can hold Military Appreciation Night the following week.



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**WORKFORCE**

Lt. Gov. Jon Husted announced Friday the state's Broadband and 5G Sector Partnership will be supported with \$12 million in grant funding as it seeks to implement a workforce training strategy. That includes \$9 million in QUEST funding from the U.S. Department of Labor to create regional nodes using the JobsOhio six-region map of the state, providing local communities with resources. Husted added that more details will be made available when the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS) posts an RFP on March 1 to select lead entities in the regions. The remaining \$3 million comes through the U.S. Economic Development Administration's (EDA) Good Jobs Challenge program and will support partnership operations in 2024, including \$300,000 for equipment helping new programs.

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