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

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- HB33** **FY24-25 OPERATING BUDGET** (EDWARDS J) To make operating appropriations for the biennium beginning July 1, 2023, and ending June 30, 2025, to levy taxes, and to provide authorization and conditions for the operation of state programs.
Current Status: 3/16/2023 - House Finance Primary and Secondary Education Subcommittee, (Eighth Hearing)
State Bill Page: <https://www.legislature.ohio.gov/legislation/legislation-summary?id=GA135-HB-33>
- HB68** **GENDER SERVICES FOR MINORS** (CLICK G) Regarding gender transition services for minors and to name this act the Ohio Saving Adolescents from Experimentation (SAFE) Act.
Current Status: 2/28/2023 - Referred to Committee House Public Health Policy
State Bill Page: <https://www.legislature.ohio.gov/legislation/legislation-summary?id=GA135-HB-68>
- SB81** **MEDICAL PROFESSIONALS' AUTHORIZED DUTIES** (ROMANCHUK M) To authorize certain clinical nurse specialists, certified nurse-midwives, and certified nurse practitioners to sign documents related to hospital patient admission, treatment, and discharge; and to amend the version of section 4723.431 of the Revised Code that is scheduled to take effect on September 30, 2024, to continue the changes to that section on and after that date.
Current Status: 3/8/2023 - Referred to Committee Senate Health
State Bill Page: <https://www.legislature.ohio.gov/legislation/legislation-summary?id=GA135-SB-81>

Friday, March 10, 2023

ABORTION

Pharmacy giant Walgreens isn't planning to provide the abortion pill in the state of Ohio, Walgreens Executive Vice President Danielle Gray said in a letter to Attorney General (AG) Dave Yost. "Walgreens does not intend to dispense mifepristone within your state and does not intend to ship mifepristone into your state from any of our pharmacies. If this approach changes, we will be sure to notify you," Gray wrote. In early February, Yost and 19 other state attorneys general signed a letter warning Walgreens and CVS against providing mifepristone in their states. The AG's office has not received a letter on this topic from CVS, Yost spokesperson Bethany McCorkle told *Hannah News*.



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ADDICTION/SUBSTANCE ABUSE

The Ohio Department of Public Safety's (DPS) Office of Criminal Justice Services (OCJS) announced the availability of \$1.2 million in federal grants to local governments, state agencies and state institutions of higher education with residential substance use disorder treatment programs. The Residential Substance Use Disorder Treatment Program (RSUDT), formerly the Residential Substance Abuse Treatment grant, helps individuals with addictions to reintegrate into communities by delivering community-based treatment and other broad-based aftercare services. Administered by OCJS, RSUDT assists state and local correctional and detention facilities where inmates are incarcerated long enough for residential treatment, with a particular focus on high-risk offenders. The RSUDT application deadline is Monday, April 3. More information is available at www.ocjs.ohio.gov.

The state has launched new data dashboards to track and report data on overdose deaths and other substance-use related measures for all 88 Ohio counties, Gov. Mike DeWine announced Tuesday. The statewide dashboards were adopted and expanded from dashboards created through the National Institutes of Health-funded HEALing Communities Study -- the largest implementation study ever conducted in addiction research -- aimed at investigating how tools for preventing and treating opioid misuse, opioid use disorder (OUD), and opioid overdose are most effective at the local level. The dashboards report on 55 opioid-related measures including overdose deaths; high-risk prescribing; overdoses treated in emergency departments; naloxone units distributed by Project DAWN; individuals receiving and being continuously enrolled in treatment and EMS events involving naloxone administration. To help communities learn how best to implement the dashboards, RecoveryOhio will offer virtual training and virtual "office hours" over the next several weeks. More information can be found at <https://tinyurl.com/2st2wymk>.

A Franklin County judge said Thursday he will allow open meeting litigation against the OneOhio Recovery Foundation to proceed, writing that in his interpretation the nonprofit appears to be a public body subject to open meeting laws. The foundation was created to oversee distribution of opioid settlement funding. Judge Mark Serrott of Franklin County Common Pleas Court Thursday denied the foundation's motion for judgment on the pleadings, meaning the case can proceed further. "A review of the legal arguments and applicable precedent establish that the foundation is acting as a public body and meets both the statutory criteria of ORC 121.22 and the cases interpreting the statute," he wrote, referencing the open meetings law.



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AGING

Gov. Mike DeWine erred in not appointing frontline workers from Ohio's nursing home industry to a new task force focused on care quality in the sector, some of those workers and their union leadership said Monday. Democratic legislative leaders supported their demand for better representation and their larger call for improved pay and staffing during a Statehouse press conference.

ARTS, SPORTS AND ENTERTAINMENT

The latest version of legislation that would prohibit transgender women and girls from participating in women's and girls' sports does not provide specific instructions on how schools are supposed to verify the sexes of student-athletes, Rep. Jena Powell (R-Arcanum) said Wednesday. "We recognize that one size doesn't fit all, so under the bill, individual schools can determine how they best implement this law," Powell told *Hannah News* after the House Higher Education Committee held its first hearing on HB6 (Powell). Powell's previous version of the bill would have required student-athletes whose sex is disputed to undergo health examinations, including of their internal and external reproductive anatomy. The Senate removed the anatomy check and added a birth certificate verification instead during the committee process, but eventually removed the birth certificate provision on the floor and sent it back to the House, where it failed to pass in the last General Assembly. Powell said 18 other states have enacted the "Save Women's Sports Act."

Rhythm and blues singer Keith Sweat and comedian Jeff Dunham are the latest performers to be announced as headliners at the 2023 Ohio State Fair. The Ohio Expo Center & State Fair also announced several free shows, including performances by the All Ohio State Fair Band & Youth Choir and Beatles tribute band 1964 The Tribute. The agency also announced the Sale of Champions Livestock Auction. Each concert ticket purchased in advance includes admission to the Ohio State Fair, giving concertgoers the opportunity to enjoy food, rides, entertainment, agriculture, arts and all other aspects of the Ohio State Fair before attending a show. All concerts take place in the indoor, air-conditioned WCOL Celeste Center. Tickets will be available for purchase at ticketmaster.com/OhioStateFair.

ATTORNEY GENERAL

Ohio Attorney General (AG) Dave Yost is opening two fronts in the battle against human trafficking. As president of the National Association of Attorneys General (NAAG), he is leading a petition urging Congress to force the federally funded Polaris Project to refer National Human Trafficking Hotline (NHTH) tips to state and local law enforcement in



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keeping with its charter. The AG also is partnering with the Mt. Carmel Health System to train health care providers to identify trafficking survivors.

Ohio will soon go live with the National Integrated Ballistic Information Network (NIBIN), an "advanced crime-fighting tool" using digital images of firearm evidence to link unsolved or apparently unrelated cases, Attorney General Dave Yost announced. He says NIBIN, which will interface with the AG's Bureau of Criminal Identification and Investigation (BCII), spans all participating jurisdictions to track guns used in crimes. BCII has been preparing for NIBIN deployment since last year by installing network terminals and hiring and training scientists and technicians to operate the equipment.

BALLOT ISSUES

Attorney General Dave Yost this week rejected the summary of a petition seeking to add a Section 22 to Article I of the Ohio Constitution, an amendment entitled "Protecting Ohioans' Constitutional Rights." The proposed amendment holds a government employer "shall be vicariously liable for injury caused by an act or omission of a government employee who, under color of law, violates a right under the laws or constitution of this state or the United States." In the letter to the petitioners rejecting the summary language, Yost said his office identified omissions and misstatements that, as a whole, would mislead a potential signer as to the actual scope and effect of the proposal.

FY22-23 BUDGET

Surplus tax revenue for FY23 now totals nearly three quarters of a billion dollars after another over-estimate month for collections in February, according to preliminary data from the Office of Budget and Management (OBM). February tax collections exceeded \$2 billion versus expectations of \$1.9 billion, an increase of \$124.1 million or 6.5 percent over estimates. Sales taxes made up the bulk of the additional revenue, coming in \$67.5 million or 7.8 percent ahead of expectations. The non-auto sales tax was up \$54.1 million or 7.3 percent compared to the forecast, while the auto sales tax was up \$13.3 million or 10.5 percent.

FY24-25 BUDGET

In a budget hearing that touched on numerous health and human services topics, witnesses agreed Tuesday on the importance of enacting Gov. Mike DeWine's proposal for a new Department of Children and Youth to unify efforts now spread over several state agencies. "Having various programs that serve the same families under the same leadership will help coordinate these efforts and investments in a way not currently possible today," said Joel Potts, director of the Ohio Job and Family Services Directors Association, in testimony to the House Finance Health and Human Services (HFHHS)



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Subcommittee on HB33 (Edwards). The hearing opened with an overview of the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS) budget proposal from Director Matt Damschroder.

Direct care rate increases proposed by the DeWine administration are laudable but insufficient, advocates for home- and community-based services told the HFHHS subcommittee Wednesday. Meanwhile, nursing facility representatives urged lawmakers to move forward with lame duck intent language resulting from last year's payment commission process and to get the ball rolling before Gov. Mike DeWine's new quality task force delivers its report. "Our request is simple. We are desperately seeking needed rate increases for home- and community-based services," said Lisa Van Lehmden Zidek, board chair of the Ohio Council for Home Care & Hospice (OCHCH), in testimony on HB33. "Our industry and association members face large waiting lists for services and workforce shortages. Ultimately, the worst-case scenario is patients' losing all access to home care services as agencies simply cease providing fiscally unsustainable care for Medicaid patients. Unfortunately, we have seen agencies already taking this route, with more agencies considering this option. This forces Ohioans to either go without care or forced into more expensive care settings," she said.

Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (OhioMHAS) Director Lori Criss and other behavioral health advocates Thursday discussed priorities for the FY24-25 state budget in HB33, lauding what they called a "historic investment" in mental health while acknowledging substantial challenges such as an uptick in demand for services and workforce issues. Criss told the HFHHS subcommittee, "The spotlight on mental illness and addiction has never been as bright as it is now," highlighting that Gov. Mike DeWine has made a priority of addressing the issues. The subcommittee also heard from a number of other industry experts who presented as a panel, including Teresa Lampl of the Ohio Council of Behavioral Health and Family Services Providers; Cheri Walter with the Ohio Association of County Behavioral Health Authorities; Luke Russell with the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) - Ohio; and Tony Coder of the Ohio Suicide Prevention Foundation.

CORONAVIRUS/MONKEYPOX

It has now been three years since the Ohio Department of Health (ODH) reported three Ohioans tested positive for COVID-19 for the first time, though the ability to conduct testing was limited at that time and community spread was almost certainly occurring. Since then, ODH has reported 3.4 million cases, 138,145 hospitalizations, 15,039 ICU admissions and 41,802 deaths as of Thursday. Ohio's vaccination rates are 64.8 percent or 7.6 million started and 60.07 percent or 7.02 million completed, along with 3.98 million people who received first boosters and 1.79 million, second booster shots. There have



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been 1.81 million bivalent vaccinations in Ohio, representing 15.46 percent of the state population.

EAST PALESTINE DERAILMENT

The Ohio Department of Health (ODH) Friday released the results of health assessments completed by East Palestine residents in the wake of the train derailment last month, with nearly three quarters of respondents complaining of headaches and just under two thirds complaining of anxiety. The After Chemical Exposure (ACE) community survey was completed through surveys conducted at the East Palestine Health Assessment Clinic, a partnership between ODH and the Columbiana County Health District, and door-to-door visits conducted by representatives from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).

Ohio leaders weighed in over the weekend after the Saturday afternoon derailment of approximately 20 Norfolk Southern train cars in Springfield. Gov. Mike DeWine tweeted about it that night, saying the incident was not believed to involve hazardous materials. He added that the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency (Ohio EPA), Ohio Emergency Management Agency (Ohio EMA) and Ohio State Highway Patrol (OSHP) were on scene to support first responders, and that U.S. President Joe Biden and U.S. Secretary of Transportation Pete Buttigieg had called him to offer federal assistance regarding the derailment. "No hazardous material was spilled, and there is no threat to the public at this time. A team from the local hazmat has inspected the area twice and the Ohio EPA is on site again today to confirm that no material was released," the Clark County Combined Health District said in a social media post Sunday. Reporting by the *Springfield News Sun* said nearly 20 of 212 cars derailed, including four tankers with non-hazardous materials according to Norfolk Southern. The four tankers were described as having residual amounts of diesel exhaust fluid and polyacrylamide water solution.

U.S. Sen. Sherrod Brown (D-OH) said the Norfolk Southern derailment in East Palestine is an opportunity for bipartisan action -- through the bill co-sponsored by him and U.S. Sen. J.D. Vance (R-OH) -- during a hearing Thursday before the U.S. Senate Environment and Public Works Committee. He also said if the company "had paid a little more attention to safety and a little less attention to its profits," the accident may not have been as bad or may not have happened at all. During Thursday's committee hearing, Vance said Republicans face a choice in their response to East Palestine of doing "the bidding of a massive industry that is in bed with big government" or supporting constituents.

Norfolk Southern President and CEO Alan Shaw testified as well Thursday, pledging to clean the East Palestine site "safely, thoroughly and with urgency" and discussing the long-term removal plan and how state and federal agencies are monitoring air and water



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quality. He said further that the company has committed to reimbursements and investments totaling over \$20 million in Ohio and Pennsylvania, including more than \$3 million to the East Palestine Fire Department.

Gov. DeWine also announced Wednesday that Norfolk Southern had agreed to help improve and expand firefighter training by creating a first responders training center and expanding its Operation Awareness and Response (OAR) program throughout the company's 22-state network including Ohio, Pennsylvania and West Virginia. Four of the 12 scheduled OAR events for 2023 will be in Ohio. The center's location will be decided in partnership with community leaders. Until then, the classes will be held at Norfolk Southern's Moorman Yard in Bellevue starting Wednesday, March 22.

The Ohio Department of Transportation is hoping a proposed \$125 million funding pool in the state budget could bring in about \$400 million from the recent federal infrastructure law to eliminate at-grade railroad crossings, agency leaders told the Senate Select Committee on Rail Safety Wednesday. The committee led off Wednesday's hearing, its second, with remarks from Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT) Director Jack Marchbanks, Ohio Rail Development Commission Executive Director Matt Dietrich and Tom Corey, deputy director for ODOT's District 11, which includes Columbiana County where the East Palestine derailment occurred.

Dr. Bruce Vanderhoff, director of the Ohio Department of Health (ODH), also testified before the select committee on his agency's response, including the establishment of a health clinic and ODH's role in air and water testing. Vanderhoff said ODH is encouraged by initial findings on water tests, and was expecting those results based on what geologists predicted, but the agency is now working to determine the pace of ongoing tests, which will last "for years and years."

ECONOMY

The state of Ohio had the nation's 12th highest increase in weekly jobless, according to financial advisory website WalletHub. New York's (ranked 1) jobless claims increased the most, while the District of Columbia's (51) increased the least. Among Ohio's (12) neighbors, Kentucky (2) had the highest increase in the past week, followed by Indiana (16), Pennsylvania (20), West Virginia (39) and Michigan (44). The Buckeye State performed better on the increase in jobless claims per 100,000 people in the labor force, coming in at 47.



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EDUCATION

The Ohio Education Association (OEA), the state's largest teachers union, recently released a list of legislative priorities for lawmakers to consider as they work on Gov. Mike DeWine's executive budget proposal. Priority OEA issues for this General Assembly include the following:

- Fully funding the Fair School Funding Plan.
- Alleviating school staffing shortages.
- Ending the expansion of private school voucher programs.
- Repealing mandatory student retention under the Third Grade Reading Guarantee.
- Supporting student and staff wellbeing.
- Protecting the voice of educators by supporting unions and defending collective bargaining rights.

Proponents of consolidating K-12 governance powers in the executive branch cited policy alignment and a greater focus on career-technical education (CTE) as reasons to make the change in testimony Tuesday to the House Primary and Secondary Education Committee. The committee heard from several proponents for HB12 (Dobos-Jones) which would move most powers of the State Board of Education and state superintendent to a new department of Education and Workforce (DEW), led by a gubernatorial appointee. The similar Senate proposal, SB1 (Reineke), passed the other chamber last week. The committee adopted two amendments at Tuesday's hearing. One, pulled at last week's hearing for running afoul of timely filing rules, sets specific qualifications for the proposed deputy director positions established in the bill. The other includes technical corrections identified by the Legislative Service Commission. Both amendments were accepted without objection or discussion. Former Rep. Rick Carfagna, now with the Ohio Chamber of Commerce, led off testimony, citing falling student test scores and a workforce shortage as justification for the change.

ENERGY/UTILITIES

Chairwoman Jenifer French of the Public Utilities Commission of Ohio (PUCO) provided senators a brief overview of the agency and the Ohio Power Siting Board's (OPSB) sister operations Tuesday and took questions on some of their key concerns. While the commission oversees electric, natural gas, water/sewer and landline telephone service, French told the Senate Energy and Public Utilities Committee, it does not



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regulate municipal aggregation and utility co-ops, fuel oil and propane, Internet and cable TV, or cellphone service, except for interconnection agreements between cellular companies.

PUCO seeks "to assure all residential and business consumers access to adequate, safe and reliable utility services at fair prices, while facilitating an environment that provides competitive choices," she said. Its authority also extends to commercial trucking, rail crossings and hazardous material (HAZMAT) transport by road and rail, said French, with the agency employing a dozen HAZMAT inspectors.

Testimony before the House Public Utilities Committee Wednesday indicated the General Assembly would have to consider changes to Ohio's "used and useful" standard for utility infrastructure to get ahead of the many businesses looking to locate or relocate in the state. Much of that development will require new electric transmission facilities, AES Ohio said, though independent municipal power companies told the committee all utility customers suffer from uncontrolled transmission projects that can have the further, unintended consequence of discouraging commercial investment due to unpredictable rate increases. Vice President Tom Raga of AES U.S. Utilities in Arlington, VA, which includes now AES Ohio (formerly DP&L) and AES Indiana, said its West-Central Ohio territory now covers 6,000 square miles in 24 counties and serves 525,000 customers -- soon to expand with the construction of Honda Motor Co. and LG Energy Solutions' electric vehicle (EV) battery plant in Fayette County.

ENVIRONMENT

The results of a summer heating mapping campaign in Columbus found temperatures can vary up to 13 degrees at the same time of day across the city. Urban areas with less tree coverage experience greater temperatures. The report was released by Sustainable Columbus, part of the city's Department of Public Utilities, in partnership with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Association (NOAA) and CAPA Strategies. According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA), "heat islands" are urbanized areas that experience higher temperatures than outlying areas. Structures such as buildings, roads and other infrastructure absorb and re-emit the sun's heat more than natural landscapes such as forests and water bodies. Urban areas, where these structures are highly concentrated and greenery is limited become "islands" of higher temperatures relative to outlying areas.

FEDERAL

U.S. Sen. Sherrod Brown (D-OH) Wednesday discussed his recently introduced legislation that would repeal two provisions in the Social Security Act to make sure public sector workers and their families receive their Social Security benefits. Brown



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reintroduced the Social Security Fairness Act with U.S. Sen. Susan Collins (R-ME). The bill would repeal the 1983 Windfall Elimination Provision (WEP), which reduces the Social Security benefits of workers who receive pensions from a federal, state or local government for employment not covered by Social Security; and the 1977 Government Pension Offset (GPO), which reduces Social Security spousal benefits for spouses, widows and widowers whose spouses receive pensions from a federal, state or local government, according to Brown's office. The two statutes significantly reduced benefits for nearly 3 million Americans, including 241,755 Ohioans, according to Brown's office, many of whom are teachers, police officers and state, county and local government workers.

GAMING/GAMBLING

The state's four casinos and seven racinos raked in significantly more revenue in January 2023 than January 2022, according to data provided by the Ohio Casino Control Commission (OCCC) and Ohio Lottery Commission (OLC). Ohio's casinos made \$86.1 million in January 2023, up from \$75.6 million in January 2022. The racinos earned \$110.8 million in January 2023, up from \$95.6 million in January 2022.

FanDuel, which is the mobile management services provider for Belterra Park Cincinnati, led the way in handle (gross receipts) and taxable revenue. FanDuel took more than \$494.2 million in bets during the month, and reported \$103.2 million in taxable revenue. Meanwhile, Hard Rock Cincinnati led the way in handle and taxable revenue for brick-and-mortar sportsbooks. The facility reported \$4.4 million in handle and \$793,000 in taxable revenue.

GENERAL ASSEMBLY/STATEHOUSE

Youth who are 14- or 15-years-old would be allowed to work until 9 p.m. during the school year under legislation passed by the Senate on Wednesday. The bill, SB30 (Schaffer), passed on a party-line vote of 25-7 as did the companion resolution, SCR2 (Schaffer) which urges Congress to make changes to the Fair Labor Standards Act to allow children under 16 to work between 7 p.m. and 9 p.m. during the school year.

SB17 (Wilson) also passed the Senate on Wednesday by a vote of 31-1. It would require the State Board of Education to incorporate free market capitalism concepts into the standards and model curriculum for financial literacy classes in high school. The lone "no" vote came from Sen. Paula Hicks-Hudson (D-Toledo).

The Joint Committee on Agency Rule Review (JCARR) Monday did not object to proposed rules from the State Fire Marshal addressing the use of consumer fireworks after parties had worked out some differences. The rules, which were based on 134-



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HB172 (Baldrige-O'Brien) and include provisions such as standards for the display and selling of fireworks, had been issued last year but pulled by the agency after JCARR received concern from a distributor. The State Fire Marshal's office filed the revised rules earlier this year.

Multiple construction groups raised concerns to the Senate Government Oversight Committee Wednesday that SB23 (Lang) -- which expands political subdivisions' joint purchasing authority to expressly include purchases for construction services -- could hurt local construction businesses and help out-of-state ones. Andrea Ashley, vice president of government relations at the Associated General Contractors (AGC) of Ohio, said cooperative purchasing agreements for construction services would undermine the principles AGC of Ohio supports regarding "open, competitive and transparent public procurement laws and processes." She added that Ohio construction employers are primarily small businesses that work in specific regions of the state, and said construction services and purchasing related supplies were "completely different processes" that should not be commingled.

In other legislative action, the Senate Ways and Means Committee reported out SB43 (Brenner) which modifies the homestead exemption for the surviving spouse of a disabled veteran; and the Senate Government Oversight Committee reported out SB24 (Roegner) which designates April as "Sikh Awareness Month"; and SB42 (T. Johnson-S. Huffman) which adopts the 1905 Wright Flyer III as the state airplane.

HIGHER EDUCATION

Ohio Dominican University (ODU) President Connie Gallaher recently appointed Shonna Riedlinger to serve as the university's provost. The appointment was effective immediately. Riedlinger most recently served as acting vice president for academic affairs, a role to which she was appointed in November 2022.

INSURANCE

The Ohio Department of Insurance (ODI) saved or recovered \$57 million for the state's insurance consumers last year, director Judith L. French announced Monday during National Consumer Protection Week, March 5-11. The savings are a result of staff resolving coverage disputes, outlining suitable coverage options, and identifying financial assistance programs for Ohioans. According to ODI, the department is a consumer protection agency that regulates the Ohio insurance industry, which is one of the largest in the world. French urges Ohioans to utilize the department's free and unbiased information and services.



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JUDICIAL

Former House Speaker Larry Householder and former Ohio Republican Party Chair Matt Borges are facing up to 20 years in prison after they were convicted of racketeering charges in federal court Thursday. Prosecutors had charged that Householder was involved in a bribery scheme with FirstEnergy to help him retake the speaker's dais and pass a billion-dollar bailout of nuclear power plants in the state. Borges was accused of bribing a political operative involved in the repeal efforts of that legislation -- 133-HB6 (Callender-Wilkin). Householder argued in court that the bill was a good piece of legislation, which is why he supported it.

The Ohio Supreme Court says aspiring attorneys saw one of their most successful bar exams in February, at least in administrative terms. The Court administered the bar exam to 359 law graduates representing 43 Ohio counties and 15 states. Test results will be released on Friday, April 28 at 8 a.m., and successful examinees meeting all other requirements will be sworn in at the bar admissions ceremony on Monday, May 15 at Columbus' Palace Theatre.

Ohio has rolled out a new online tool to support those caring for children of relatives and family friends. Ohio Legal Help, with funding from the Ohio Supreme Court and the federal Court Improvement Grant, has developed an interactive webpage to help kinship caregivers navigate complex topics affecting displaced children and caretakers. Topics include understanding the judicial process, enrolling children in school, getting medical care, and other benefits. The online tool also offers a step-by-step process for caregivers to develop their own action plan, including benefits and resources available to the child.

LOBBYISTS

The Ohio Association of Independent Colleges and Universities of Ohio (AICUO) has appointed Lauren Reid as director of legislative affairs, effective March 1, the association said. As director, Reid will work alongside Executive Vice President of Operations and Government Relations Emily Tully on AICUO's legislative efforts.

Ohio Insurance Agents (OIA) Association, Inc. hired John Z. Wells as government affairs manager at the end of February. Wells has over five years of experience working in public policy and politics. Most recently, he served in the Ohio Senate as senior legislative aide for Sen. Steve Wilson (R-Maineville). Wells also worked in the Michigan House of Representatives and for the Michigan Republican Party.

Campaign fundraiser and strategist Lauren Diaz is joining Shumaker Advisors as director of government affairs, the firm announced Thursday. Previously, Diaz worked extensively in political fundraising for members of the Ohio House, including several



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former House speakers. She has also assisted with several judiciary campaigns, including that of Ohio Supreme Court Chief Justice Sharon Kennedy.

MARIJUANA/HEMP

The Senate General Government Committee should not pass Ohio Medical Marijuana Control Program (MMCP) overhaul bill SB9 (Schuring-S. Huffman) in its current form, members of the Ohio Medical Cannabis Industry Association (OMCIA) said Monday. "We strongly oppose SB9," OMCIA Executive Director Matt Close said during a virtual press conference. "It's about economics 101. It's supply and demand. This is simply a massive marijuana expansion bill." Close said lawmakers shouldn't create more MMCP licenses or increase the allowable cannabis cultivation space at this time.

A wide range of organizations testified against medical marijuana overhaul bill SB9 (Schuring-S. Huffman) on Tuesday, including the Ohio Prosecuting Attorneys Association (OPAA). Jefferson County Prosecutor Jane Hanlin told the Senate General Government Committee that OPAA is opposed to numerous provisions of the legislation, including language stripping oversight authority from the Ohio Board of Pharmacy (OBP) and granting more power to the Ohio Department of Commerce (DOC). "Marijuana remains a Schedule I controlled substance and should therefore remain subject to oversight by the state board of pharmacy," she said.

MEDICAID/MEDICAID REFORM

Technology problems for the intermediaries who help Medicaid providers translate their service data into claims are prompting the Ohio Department of Medicaid (ODM) to offer bridge payments to providers for up to three months. ODM is also allowing the intermediaries, known as trading partners, to submit claims directly to the managed care plans rather than through the Ohio Medicaid Enterprise System (OMES).

ODM designed the contingency plan for potential bridge payments ahead of the Feb. 1 launch of the revamped managed care system, a lesson learned from the troubled Kasich-era behavioral health redesign. ODM Director Maureen Corcoran told the Senate Medicaid Committee recently the agency had plans at the ready if necessary. Matt Stearmer, chief data officer for ODM, told senators at the time that trading partners were experiencing a wide range of failure rates for submitting transactions, from a fraction of a percent to more than 25 percent.

NATURAL RESOURCES

The Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR) Division of Forestry recently approved grant funding for 77 projects totaling \$491,883 for fire departments in rural



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areas of Ohio through the Volunteer Fire Assistance (VFA) Grant Program. VFA grants are open to fire departments within the ODNR Forestry Wildfire Protection Areas that serve communities with populations of less than 10,000 people. These VFA grant funds are provided to ODNR Forestry by the USDA Forest Service.

NEWS MEDIA

Ann Fisher, the host of "All Sides with Ann Fisher," will retire from daily journalism on Friday, May 26, according to WOSU Public Media. Fisher joined WOSU in 2009 and has hosted the daily public-affairs talk show designed to touch upon all sides of the issues and events that shape life in Central Ohio. Prior to that, she worked in newspapers, covering politics, public affairs, culture, media and business over her career.

NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS

The Center for Community Solutions (CCS) Monday released three sets of fact sheets covering all of Ohio as well as the new House and Senate districts. Among statewide findings, CCS found that people 35 to 64 years old were the leading age group at 38.5 percent, followed by 18-34 at 22.1 percent; 65 and older at 17 percent; five to 17 at 16.5 percent; and under five at 5.9 percent. Whites made up the lead group in racial demographics at 79.6 percent, with Blacks at 12.3 percent, "two or more races" at 4.3 percent and Asians at 2.4 percent. Hispanic/Latino of any race was listed under a separate ethnicity section, making up 4.1 percent. In education, 32.6 percent had a high school diploma or equivalent, 29.7 percent had a bachelor's degree and 28.8 percent had an associate's degree or some college. Those with less than a high school diploma made up 8.9 percent.

The Columbus Metropolitan Club (CMC) Wednesday announced Sophia Fifner as the next president and CEO, effective Monday, May 1. Fifner will succeed Jane Scott, who retires on Wednesday, May 31, after serving in the position since September 2003. "It's always a challenge to fill the shoes of an executive that has been in place and successful as long as Jane has," Hannah News Service President and CMC Search Committee Chair Steve Marks said in a statement, "but Sophia brings a significant portfolio of experiences, as well as positive energy and enthusiasm to this role. We're confident she will be an exceptional leader for us and will be able to build on CMC's strengths to continue its important mission in Columbus." Fifner joins CMC from NiSource, where she served as director of corporate social responsibility and executive director of the NiSource Charitable Foundation. Prior to that, Fifner served as a community relations chief for the city of Columbus.



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PENSIONS

Special scrutiny of the State Teachers Retirement System (STRS) found no misdeeds but plenty of room to improve the transparency of operations -- problems that played a big role in the complaints that sparked his inquiry, Auditor Keith Faber (R-Celina) told the Ohio Retirement Study Council (ORSC) Thursday in reviewing the major conclusions of his special audit of STRS. His audit was launched in part in response to a report commissioned by the Ohio Retired Teachers Association (ORTA), which has been highly critical of the system and its executive director, William Neville. Faber said while he's not in the business of setting policy as auditor, the review led him to flag several issues for the General Assembly and the trustee boards of the state pension systems to consider. Among them are whether it's prudent to pay bonuses to investment staff, something for which STRS routinely draws criticisms. However, he noted, those STRS' bonuses have been properly paid according to system policy.

PEOPLE

Chad Aldis, vice president for Ohio policy at the Fordham Institute, will take over next week as head of the Iowa Department of Education, Iowa Gov. Kim Reynolds' office announced. He is an Iowa native and attended school there. "Chad is the type of leader we need at this pivotal time for Iowa's education system," Reynolds said in a statement. "His unique perspective will help lead reform within the department and across our schools so that every Iowa student -- regardless of what school they attend -- receives a quality education that prepares them to be successful in life."

Ohio is remembering the former state representative and senator who led the reclamation of Ohio strip mines and championed conservation as Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR) director under Gov. Bob Taft. Sam Speck, who served the House from 1971 to 1976 and the Senate from 1976 to 1984 and led Muskingum University from 1987 until his ODNR appointment in 1999, died Wednesday, March 1 at the age of 86.

POLITICS

Secretary of State Frank LaRose, U.S. Sen. J.D. Vance, U.S. Rep. Jim Jordan (R-Urbana) and Attorney General Dave Yost were among the Ohio politicians who made appearances at the Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC), which ran through Saturday, March 4. LaRose, who is considering a U.S. Senate run in 2024, appeared on a panel titled "They Stole It from Us Legally," where he touted how Ohio elections run, using his oft-repeated line that Ohio runs elections so transparently and well that even the loser knows they lost on election night.



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PUBLIC SAFETY

The Public Utilities Commission of Ohio (PUCO) opened the application period Thursday for hazardous materials training grants to educational institutions and local governments. Qualified HAZMAT training includes the following:

- First responder awareness, operations and technicians, highway response specialists, incident commanders and tank car specialists.
- Intermodal hazardous materials training.
- Incident response exercises.
- Rail HAZMAT response, including rail/highway incident training.
- Hazardous materials planning and survey studies.

Applications must be submitted by Wednesday, May 31 at tinyurl.com/2bwrtabx.

The Ohio Department of Public Safety's (DPS) Office of Criminal Justice Services (OCJS) added Blanchester police in Clinton to the 600-plus agencies certified under the Ohio Collaborative Community-Police Advisory Board's minimum standards. OCJS also recertified police for Lodi (Medina County), Metropolitan Park District of the Toledo Area (Lucas), Morrow (Warren), West Liberty (Logan) and Wright State University (Greene) based on a revolving, three- to four-year cycle. The 606 agencies engaged in certification employ 29,470 peace officers representing nearly 87 percent of their peers, including most metropolitan areas.

Four former law enforcement officers who sit on the House Homeland Security Committee Wednesday raised a variety of concerns with HB84, legislation from Reps. Steve Demetriou (R-Chagrin Falls) and Josh Williams (R-Oregon) which would lower the minimum age for appointment as a police officer from 21 to 18, over the course of "the hour and nine minutes" debate during the bill's first hearing. Concerns began with Ranking Member Cecil Thomas (D-Cincinnati), a former Cincinnati police officer, who raised a number of issues about the age and the level of maturity an 18-year-old would bring to the job despite the sponsors' statements that if these individuals can fight in the military, they should be able to come home and protect their community. Rep. Cindy Abrams (R-Harrison), also a former Cincinnati police officer, raised concerns about the effect hiring younger officers will have on the Ohio Police & Fire Pension System when 18-year-olds retire after 30 years at age 48. She said there are already issues with sustaining that pension system -- for which the General Assembly is responsible -- when this bill will exacerbate the gap between retirement and eligibility for Medicare. Others



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questioning reducing the age were former Ohio State Highway Patrol trooper and now Rep. Kevin Miller (R-Newark) and former Montgomery County sheriff and now Rep. Phil Plummer (R-Dayton).

RELIGION

Fourteen House members signed on to a letter recently to the East Knox Schools Board of Education urging its members to resist calls from the Freedom from Religion Foundation (FFRF) to cease the practice of opening board meetings with a prayer. Rep. Gary Click (R-Vickery) spearheaded the letter joined by Rep. Darrel Kick (R-Loudonville), who represents the district, and several other House members, saying they are part of a new Ohio Legislative Prayer Caucus. Click chairs the new group, which is "being organized even as I send you this note," he wrote. The lawmakers encouraged the board "to resist the intimidation tactics of a vocal minority intent on stifling free speech and the freedom of religious expression."

TRANSPORTATION/INFRASTRUCTURE

Provisions addressing force account limits and rail safety added by the House to HB23 (Edwards), the transportation budget, drew testimony and questions in the Senate Transportation Committee Wednesday. An increase to force accounts, the limits on projects that counties and townships have before they must be competitively bid out, have been requested by local governments for several sessions, including during the transportation budget debate in both chambers in this session. Before passing out HB23, the House added a floor amendment that replaces force account limits with scope of work limits for county engineers with regard to road, highway, bridge and culvert projects, thereby requiring competitive bidding when the size of the project exceeds the statutory parameters, but authorizing the county to do the work if the project is within those parameters. The amendment also specifies the parameters for work that may be conducted by a county without competitive bidding.

Testifying in support of the change, Ohio Contractors Association President Chris Runyan said this concept for defining limitations is a "major paradigm shift from the current way of doing business," noting that the Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT) adopted something similar eight years ago. He said when the subjectivity of dollars is no longer in the equation for defining work limitation, factors such as inflation and force account assessment forms are no longer factors. He said the controversies related to defining caps through dollar amounts are now moot in favor of caps that are narrowly defined and easily auditable.



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URBAN REVITALIZATION

The Ohio Department of Development (DOD) announced Tuesday it was awarding \$17.5 million to rehabilitate and restore eight historic buildings, expected to leverage approximately \$118 million in private investment for those projects. The awards are part of the Ohio Historic Preservation Tax Credit Program, and come in addition to \$64.1 million awarded in December 2022. This brings the totals for the 29th round of the program to \$81.69 million supporting 60 projects in 21 communities. The awards follow an evaluation of scoring procedures for the round based on language in 134-SB225 (Schuring).

VETERANS

The House Armed Services and Veterans Affairs Committee Tuesday heard a brief presentation from Matt Castor with USA Cares Veteran & Family Support System, a veterans service organization with chapters in Ohio and throughout the county. The nonprofit group, which was formed about 20 years ago, is focused on preventing veteran suicides, Castor said. While the organization initially focused on assisting returning veterans with visible injuries, such as a missing limb, the group has since pivoted to focusing on "those invisible injuries" such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). He told committee members about 22 military members or veterans die by suicide every day.

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