



GOVERNMENTAL POLICY GROUP, INC. RH RESOURCES

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Week in Review

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ADDICTION/SUBSTANCE ABUSE

The DeWine administration opened the application period Wednesday for \$2.3 million in grants from the RecoveryOhio Law Enforcement Fund to be awarded by the Office of Criminal Justice Services (OCJS). "I'm proud of the ongoing efforts of Ohio's drug task forces to stop illegal drug activity in our state," Gov. Mike DeWine said in a statement. "This necessary funding will help cover expenses that these organizations incur while they keep our communities safe and help reduce and prevent drug use in Ohio." RecoveryOhio seeks to increase mental health and substance use awareness, implement age-appropriate prevention education in schools, connect those who need help with treatment, and promote recovery, OCJS said.

AGRICULTURE

The Ohio Environmental Protection Agency (Ohio EPA), Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR) and Ohio Department of Agriculture (ODAg) are all requesting large increases for Gov. Mike DeWine's signature water quality initiative. The directors of all three agencies shared their H2Ohio plans with members of the House Finance Agriculture, Development and Natural Resources Subcommittee on Wednesday. According to the agency Redbook, Ohio EPA is seeking \$31.35 million in both FY24 and FY25, a 213.5 percent increase over the FY23 estimate of \$10 million. The ODNR Redbook says the department is seeking \$53.05 million in both FY24 and FY25, a 112.1 percent increase from the FY23 estimate of \$25.01 million. ODAg's Redbook says the department is asking for \$69.02 million in FY24 and \$69.11 million in FY25, an approximately 40 percent increase from the FY23 estimate of \$49.32 million. Ohio EPA Director Anne Vogel and ODNR Director Mary Mertz said the increases are necessary to continue water infrastructure projects and to support the new H2Ohio Rivers Initiative. Mertz said ODNR and Ohio EPA together are requesting a total of \$58.8 million for the H2Ohio Rivers Initiative.

ATTORNEY GENERAL

Following the March 9 announcement that Larry Householder and Matt Borges had been found guilty, Attorney General (AG) Dave Yost Friday said he is seeking to have the stay lifted in his civil racketeering lawsuit regarding 133-HB6 (Callender-Wilkin) which had been put on hold pending the completion of the federal trial. He noted a resumed discovery process could reveal other defendants who participated "in the corrupt Householder enterprise." Yost said, "Yesterday's guilty verdicts in federal court against Larry Householder and Matt Borges mark only the beginning of accountability regarding HB6. With the federal prosecution complete, the state of Ohio's racketeering lawsuit, which already stopped the implementation of HB6, should now be able to resume. Other wrongdoers in this scandal -- especially and including the First Energy executives who funded the corrupt 'Householder enterprise' -- cannot be permitted to escape scot-free. Money is the oxygen that fuels the fire of corruption. (Of course, it also requires the fuel of a corruptible public servant's heart, and an ignition source - in this case, a piece of gold-plated legislation.)"

AUTOMOBILE INDUSTRY

Honda announced Tuesday it will consolidate two assembly lines at the Marysville Auto Plant as they are retooled for production of electric vehicles (EVs) and EV components, with production of the Accord line transferring to the Indiana Auto Plant as a result. "Stable employment" will be maintained in the changes.

The planned shift in production follows Honda's announcement it would invest \$700 million to retool three plants in Marysville, East Liberty and Anna to make an "EV Hub" in Ohio, along with creation of a Fayette County battery plant that will see investment of \$3.5 billion.

BUDGET – F.Y. 24-25

The "All In for Ohio Coalition," comprising the Ohio Organizing Collaborative (OOG), Policy Matters Ohio and other stakeholders, held a press conference Monday, issuing eight budget demands to Gov. Mike DeWine and the General Assembly as part of its proposed "People's Budget." Priorities include completion of the Fair School Funding Plan, reviving former Gov. George Voinovich's 7.5 percent state income tax, and "citizenship for all," among others.

Office of Budget and Management (OBM) Director Kimberly Murnieks told the House Finance Infrastructure and American Rescue Plan Subcommittee Tuesday that more than \$26 billion in federal funding was allocated to or through the state of Ohio to respond to or recover from the pandemic. She said that most of that funding has been appropriated by the General Assembly over the past three years, and \$19 billion has been fully expended. This answered in part one of the questions subcommittee Chair Rep. Jamie Callender (R-Concord) had identified as the charge for the subcommittee: to determine what is left. Other questions he wants the group to get answered include identifying what restrictions the federal government has placed on the funds, what specifically Gov. Mike DeWine has proposed spending in the FY24-25 budget, and what the subcommittee's preferences are for distributing what is left.

The Ohio Department of Agriculture (ODAg) needs a significant funding increase to better respond to large-scale animal disease outbreaks, according to ODAg Director Brian Baldrige. Baldrige, Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR) Director Mary Mertz and Ohio Environmental Protection Agency (Ohio EPA) Director Anne Vogel all provided budget testimony before the House Finance Subcommittee on Agriculture, Development, and Natural Resources on Wednesday. "In 2022, eight outbreaks of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) across Ohio emphasized the dedication of our animal health staff. ODAg spent \$2 million responding to a single large-scale outbreak in which over 3.7 million layer chickens were depopulated. This prevented the spread of the disease to the 45.8 million chickens in Ohio and 45.6 million chickens in nearby Indiana," Baldrige said. Mertz said the total ODNR budget is \$655.85 million in FY24 (a 6.5 percent increase over FY23) and \$652.54 million in FY25 (a 0.5 percent increase from FY24). The GRF request is \$175 million in FY24 (a 1 percent increase over FY23) and \$171.58 million in FY25 (a 2 percent decrease from FY24). Meanwhile, Vogel said Ohio EPA's budget increase is primarily due to requests involving H2Ohio. The total Ohio EPA budget is \$272.51 million in FY24 (an 11.2 percent increase from FY23) and \$275.55 million in FY25 (a 1.1 percent increase from FY24). The GRF request is \$13.86 million in FY24 (a 51.8 percent increase from FY23) and \$13.91 million in FY25 (a 0.3 percent increase from FY24). According to the agency Redbook, the GRF increase "reflects the budgetary shifting to finance the Auto Emissions E-Check Program fully with GRF."

BUSINESS/CORPORATE

Grove City is now home to the largest and most advanced medical glove manufacturing facility in the U.S., elected officials and American Nitrile executives announced Monday. The company aims to employ 400 people and produce 3.6 billion gloves per year, American Nitrile CEO Jacob Block said during the facility's ribbon cutting ceremony, joined by Gov. Mike DeWine, U.S. Rep. Troy Balderson (R-Zanesville), Sen. Michele Reynolds (R-Columbus), Rep. David Dobos (R-Columbus), Sen. Hearcel Craig (D-Columbus), Sen. Niraj Antani (R-Miamisburg), Sen. George Lang (R-West

Chester), Rep. Jay Edwards (R-Nelsonville) and Rep. Jeff LaRe (R-Canal Winchester). This will help address the medical equipment shortages that Ohio and the country faced during the COVID-19 pandemic.

DISABILITIES

Advocates and entities representing and caring for those with developmental disabilities appeared before the House Finance Subcommittee on Health and Human Services Tuesday to ask lawmakers to approve funds to pay home care professionals more to help address a workforce shortage. Tuesday's hearing opened with HB33 (Edwards) budget testimony from Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities (DODD) Director Kim Hauck, who said her agency's proposed budget would increase by 4 percent in FY24 and 5.2 percent in FY25. The agency's Redbook shows a total budget of \$4.35 billion in FY24 and \$4.58 billion in FY25; \$833 million comes from the General Revenue Fund in FY24, and \$910 million in FY25. Hauck said the availability of direct care workers for Ohioans with disabilities is the most pressing issue in the developmental disabilities system. She said it has struggled to recruit, retain and invest in this essential workforce.

EAST PALESTINE DERAILMENT

Attorney General Dave Yost Tuesday announced that he filed a 58-count, 106-page lawsuit against Norfolk Southern over the Feb. 3 train derailment in East Palestine. Yost said the complaint, filed in the Northern District of Ohio, looks to hold the rail operator responsible for its actions over the derailment, which he said released more than one million gallons of hazardous chemicals and endangered the lives of the residents of the Eastern Ohio community. Yost said the lawsuit alleges violations of the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act (CERCLA), Ohio's hazardous waste law, Ohio's water pollution control law, Ohio's solid waste law, Ohio's air pollution control law, common law negligence, common law public nuisance, and common law trespass.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

JobsOhio President and CEO J.P. Nauseef discussed the economic development nonprofit's strategies for innovation with the House Technology and Innovation Committee Wednesday, saying it centers on three elements of innovation districts, research and development (R&D) and JobsOhio's growth capital fund. Nauseef also credited the Legislature's passage of megaproject provisions in attracting Intel, Honda, Ford and Medpace projects, and said JobsOhio is having "active discussions" on 16 potential megaprojects that are in the pipeline for this year. He explained how the strategy was meant to address deficiencies Ohio faced, as it was 37th in STEM degree growth rate and last among 17 peer states for venture capital investment. The innovation districts in Cincinnati, Cleveland and Columbus will be "nationally competitive" through a \$300 million investment by JobsOhio over 10 years. That should lead to over 60,000 new jobs, 47,500 new STEM degrees and \$9 billion in economic impact. JobsOhio worked with the Brookings Institute to plan those investments.

ECONOMY

The Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS) said Friday the unemployment rate dropped to 4 percent in January, down from a revised 4.1 percent in December 2022. ODJFS will release data for February on March 24. Meanwhile, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reported its February unemployment numbers on Friday as well, with nonfarm employment rising by 311,000.

The unemployment rate nationally edged up to 3.6 percent and the number of unemployed persons rose to 5.9 million with "little net movement since early 2022." The number of workers unemployed in Ohio in January was 229,000, down from 236,000 in December. The January unemployment rate for Ohio decreased 0.1 percent from 4.1 percent in January 2022. The U.S. unemployment rate for January 2023 was 3.4 percent, down from 3.5 percent in December 2022, and down from 4.0 percent in January 2022.

EDUCATION

The much-discussed teacher workforce shortage is a complex problem with wide variation by region, grade band and content area and with incomplete data on causes, Ohio Department of Education (ODE) officials told the State Board of Education Tuesday. Interim Superintendent Stephanie Siddens turned her monthly board presentation over to department staff for a review of teacher workforce data and trends with Aly DeAngelo, senior executive director of the Center for Performance and Impact, saying the state doesn't have teacher position vacancy data, so the department is unable to tell how long it takes schools to fill positions and whether they are ending certain course offerings for lack of available employees.

State Board of Education (SBOE) members spent the bulk of their Tuesday meeting discussing legislation that would overhaul Ohio's education systems, debating the proposal with Sen. Andrew Brenner (R-Delaware) and hearing from Rep. Sean Brennan (D-Parma). SB1 (Reineke), and its companion bill HB12 (Jones-Dobos), would move most education policymaking authority into the governor's cabinet and away from the board. Brenner told members the General Assembly plans to act on SB1 or HB12 by June 30, and said that if that legislation hasn't passed by then, then "probably nothing will happen." Brennan, a freshman lawmaker who sits on the House Primary and Secondary Education Committee, kicked off the Tuesday meeting by introducing himself to members and telling them he is their "advocate" in the debate over the legislation.

The Ohio Department of Education (ODE) alerted senators Tuesday to the state's literacy "crisis" as measured by the 40 percent of third-graders who lack proficiency in English language arts. Director Melissa Weber-Mayrer of ODE's Office of Approaches to Teaching and Professional Learning summarized current literacy policies in Ohio, including the Third Grade Reading Guarantee, dyslexia supports and administrative rules for phonics instruction, supported in part by Ohio's \$42 million, four-year Comprehensive Literacy State Development (CLSD) Grant from the U.S. Department of Education (USDOE). "Ohio's vision is for all learners to acquire the knowledge and skills to become proficient readers," she said of the department's state literacy plan.

Lawmakers should prioritize updating salary data underlying the new school funding formula over accelerating phase-in from six to four years, architects of the formula told a House budget subcommittee Tuesday. "What if we were to take and fully phase in the formula in this General Assembly? Would you welcome this? Take us all the way to 100 percent?" asked Rep. Tracy Richardson (R-Marysville), chair of the House Finance Primary and Secondary Education Subcommittee, referencing the expressed interest of some House members. Rep. Jay Edwards (R-Nelsonville), chair of the full House Finance Committee, said an accelerated phase-in was under consideration at the outset of budget deliberations. Ryan Pendleton, executive director of the North Coast Shared Services Alliance and former treasurer of Akron Public Schools, said using updated salary and other cost input data would do more to keep the state and local share calculations in balance and prevent outsize reliance on caps and guarantees, which he described as key to ensuring the durability of the formula. Pendleton testified alongside Perrysburg Schools Superintendent Thomas Hosler and Chardon Schools Superintendent Michael Hanlon Jr.; all three are members of

the workgroup that devised the formula under the leadership of former Speaker Bob Cupp (R-Lima) and former Rep. John Patterson (D-Jefferson).

ELECTIONS

Secretary of State Frank LaRose sent a letter to the executive director of a multi-state cooperative threatening to end Ohio's participation in the compact that shares voting and motor vehicle registration records to help root out voter fraud after conservatives criticized the effort. Three states - Florida, Missouri and West Virginia -- announced they were pulling out of the Electronic Registration Information Center (ERIC) earlier, and LaRose told ERIC officials that Ohio could follow if changes are not made. In his letter, LaRose said from its inception, the organization "has maintained questionable ties to ex-officio board members with highly partisan reputations." He said that while most of the states had "tolerated this association, the ongoing presence and influence of these polarizing figures has become a distraction, if not a deterrent, to long overdue reforms" to ERIC's governing documents.

U.S. Reps. Greg Landsman (D-Cincinnati), Emilia Sykes (D-Akron) and Marcy Kaptur (D-Toledo) are on the list of 37 Democrats congressional Republicans said they will target in the 2024 election cycle. Landsman and Sykes were elected to their first terms in November, while Kaptur, the longest-serving woman in Congress, was re-elected after her district was redrawn to be more competitive.

Hamilton County Court of Common Pleas Judge Megan Shanahan Wednesday announced she's running for a seat on the Ohio Supreme Court in 2024, though she did not indicate which seat she will seek.

Democratic Justices Melody Stewart and Michael Donnelly will be up for re-election. Republican Justice Joe Deters, who was appointed by Gov. Mike DeWine, also must run to retain his seat. "The Ohio Supreme Court needs more justices that put the constitution above politics," Shanahan said. "I'm running for Supreme Court because I have the experience and background to keep Ohio communities safe and thriving."

The following endorsements were made over the week:

- EMILYs List endorsed U.S. Rep. Emilia Sykes (D-Akron) for re-election.

GENERAL ASSEMBLY

The House announced Thursday a few revisions to its session schedule for the first half of 2023. The chamber scheduled an additional session for 11 a.m. Thursday, March 23. In addition, if-needed sessions were added for the following dates:

- Tuesday, March 28
- Wednesday, May 31
- Wednesday, June 7

Freshman Rep. Dave Dobos (R-Columbus) told *Hannah News* that he plans to zero in on economic growth, workforce development, and quality K-12 education. Dobos is a former Columbus City

Schools Board of Education member and president who now runs an educational products and services company.

GOVERNOR

Bills signed by the governor include the following:

SB10 INTERNAL REVENUE CODE CHANGES (BLESSING III L) To amend section 5701.11 of the Revised Code and to amend Sections 225.12, 265.10, 265.20, and 701.10 of H.B. 45 of the 134th General Assembly to expressly incorporate changes in the Internal Revenue Code since Feb. 17, 2022, into Ohio law, to make changes to the Emergency Rental Assistance program, to revise an existing earmark, to modify the requirements for a temporary arts economic relief grant program, and to declare an emergency. EFF. 3/15/23.

Appointments made during the week include the following:

- Ann M. Frangos of Westlake (Cuyahoga County) reappointed to the Cuyahoga Community College Board of Trustees for a term beginning March 10, 2023, and ending Oct. 12, 2027.
- Darryl D. Mehaffie of Greenville (Darke County) reappointed to the Edison State Community College Board of Trustees for a term beginning March 10, 2023, and ending Jan. 17, 2029.
- Carlton K. Ingram of Youngstown (Mahoning County) and Lois E. Thornton of Youngstown (Mahoning County) to the Eastern Gateway Community College Board of Trustees for terms beginning March 10, 2023, and ending Oct. 16, 2024 and Oct. 16, 2027, respectively.
- Gary W. Cates of West Chester (Butler County) reappointed to the Midwestern Higher Education Compact Commission for a term beginning March 10, 2023, and ending Jan. 8, 2027.
- Joel L. King Jr. of Gahanna (Franklin County), Paul M. Booth of Cincinnati (Hamilton County) and Christina Rodriguez of Toledo (Lucas County) reappointed to the Ohio Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday Commission for terms beginning March 10, 2023, and ending Dec. 30, 2025.
- Amy L. Kramb of Dublin (Franklin County), Doreen N. Uhas-Sauer of Columbus (Franklin County) and Clyde E. Henry of Orient (Madison County) reappointed to the Ohio Historic Site Preservation Advisory Board for terms beginning March 10, 2023, and ending Jan. 14, 2026.
- Karen S. Stewart-Linkhart of Xenia (Greene County) and Paul P. Mechling, II of Pierpont (Ashtabula County) reappointed to the Wildlife Council for terms beginning March 10, 2023, and ending Jan. 31, 2027.
- Daniel A. Yaussy of Sunbury (Delaware County), Koral A. Clum of Dover (Tuscarawas County) and Eric L. Roush of Amanda (Fairfield County) reappointed to the Forestry Advisory Council for terms beginning March 10, 2023, and ending Feb. 27, 2027.
- Gregory S. Barney of Tipp City (Montgomery County) reappointed to the Board of Building Standards for a term beginning March 10, 2023, and ending Oct. 13, 2026.
- David Kirk of Loveland (Hamilton County) to the Ohio Architects Board for a term beginning March 10, 2023, and ending Oct. 2, 2027.

- Mark B. Malone of Lima (Allen County) reappointed to the Banking Commission for a term beginning March 10, 2023, and ending Jan. 31, 2027.
- Erin L. Keels of Columbus (Franklin County) reappointed to the Board of Nursing for a term beginning March 10, 2023, and ending Dec. 31, 2026.
- Wendy K. Jennings of Defiance (Defiance County) and Jacqueline W. Wynn of Grandview Heights (Franklin County) to the State Board of Psychology for terms beginning March 10, 2023, and ending Oct. 4, 2023 and Oct. 4, 2026, respectively.
- Mary Ross-Dolen of Bexley (Franklin County) to the Ethics Commission for a term beginning March 10, 2023, and ending Jan. 1, 2029.
- Todd C. Beresford of Moreland Hills (Cuyahoga County) to the Self-Insuring Employers Evaluation Board for a term beginning March 10, 2023, and ending August 22, 2024.
- Kimberly G. Allison of Columbus (Franklin County) to the Board of Tax Appeals for a term beginning March 22, 2023, and ending Feb. 8, 2029.
- Bruce T. Hale of Akron (Summit County) reappointed to the Ohio Board of Motor Vehicle Repair for a term beginning March 10, 2023, and ending Jan. 1, 2026.
- Robb Mitchell of Dublin (Franklin County), Joshua T. Fox of Miamisburg (Montgomery County) and Jason M. Hunt of Columbus (Franklin County) reappointed to the Motor Vehicle Dealers Board for terms beginning March 10, 2023, and ending Oct. 4, 2025.
- David P. Viola of Minerva (Stark County) appointed and Mark L. Marchetta, Sr. of Hopedale (Harrison County) and Dudley H.A. Wright, II of Westerville (Franklin County) reappointed to the State Board of Emergency Medical, Fire, and Transportation Services, all for terms beginning March 10, 2023, and ending Nov. 12, 2025.
- Kevin E. Smith of Findlay (Hancock County) appointed and Michael H. Fitchet of Conneaut (Ashtabula County) reappointed to the State Emergency Response Commission for terms beginning March 10, 2023, and ending Jan. 13, 2025.
- Richard S. Fambro of Powell (Delaware County) to the Ohio Organized Crime Investigations Commission for a term beginning March 10, 2023, and ending Sept. 3, 2025.
- Robert Chabali of Springboro (Warren County) to the Ohio Peace Officer Training Commission for a term beginning March 10, 2023, and ending Sept. 20, 2025.

GREAT LAKES

The Ohio Lake Erie Commission (OLEC) is accepting proposals until Monday, April 17 for Lake Erie Protection Fund grants for coastal wetlands and invasive species data that would be used in the next Lake Erie Quality Index (LEQI). Grants of up to \$50,000 will be considered during the grant cycle, OLEC said. The request for proposals, application materials, and guidance for the Lake Erie Protection Fund Grant are available at <https://tinyurl.com/cpdmhau5>.

HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

Witnesses from out of state were drawn to Ohio Wednesday to testify in support of HB49 (Ferguson-Barhorst) -- legislation that addresses transparency requirements for hospital prices -- in the House Insurance Committee. Among Wednesday's witnesses were the former majority leader for the Colorado House of Representatives, Daneya Esgar, and the former director of the State and School Employee Health Benefits Programs for the state of New Jersey, Chris Deacon. Esgar talked about how Colorado passed legislation similar to HB49 last year -- legislation sponsored by her, a Democrat, and Colorado House Minority Leader Patrick Neville. She, as did other witnesses, explained that while there is federal law requiring price transparency by hospitals, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) is not doing a good job -- from their perspectives -- of enforcing it. Thus it falls to states to enact transparency requirements.

HIGHER EDUCATION

Sen. Jerry Cirino (R-Kirtland) Wednesday announced a comprehensive bill addressing higher education in the state of Ohio that includes provisions ranging from training of board of trustees members to a ban on faculty strikes. Cirino said he believes the state has made strides on access and affordability and his bill seeks to address the equality side. He said SB83 is designed to ensure the very best performances of Ohio's institutions of higher education. He argued that diversity of thought at campuses is not being addressed and in some ways is being punished.

HOUSING/HOMELESSNESS

House Republicans' affordable housing priority bill includes \$500 million in low-income housing tax credits, Rep. Gail Pavliga (R-Atwater) said Tuesday. The House Economic and Workforce Development Committee accepted a substitute version of HB3 (Pavliga-McNally), replacing the placeholder language. Discussing the bill with the committee, Pavliga said HB3 would essentially allow for \$50 million a year in tax credits for up to 10 years. She said the program lasts six years, but the tax credits can be awarded over 10 years depending on when construction starts on the projects.

New data released Thursday by housing advocates show that the state's affordable housing shortage grew significantly more acute over the past year. The Coalition on Homelessness and Housing in Ohio (COHHIO) and the National Low Income Housing Coalition (NLIHC) jointly released the latest housing gap report, which showed a deficit of about 270,000 rental units that are affordable and available to the 448,000 extremely low-income households in Ohio. That equates to only 40 affordable units for every 100 households. The housing advocates said steep rent increases in recent years have fallen especially hard on the lowest income Ohioans. The shortage of affordable and available housing has grown 6 percent worse since the 2022 report was released last year.

JUDICIAL

Ohio attorneys will see their first fee hike since 2007 this year, effective Saturday, July 1, followed by a second increase in 2025. The current biennial registration fee of \$350 will increase to \$400 for 2023-2025 and \$450 for 2025-2027. Late fees will double from \$50 to \$100. Starting July 1, moreover, the Ohio attorney registration process will be completed entirely online, including an electronic bar license storable on phones for easy access or printed out as needed. Since the last attorney fee increase 16 years ago, cost savings by the Ohio Supreme Court's Office of Attorney Services have extended the originally projected 10-year window for an additional six years.

The Ohio Criminal Sentencing Commission's (OCSC) draft recommendations for sentencing reform say it will take more than criminal justice omnibus 134-SB288 (Manning) to ensure equitable sentencing of similarly charged defendants. The 12 proposals call for mandatory minimum prison terms, increased judicial discretion and expanded indefinite sentencing -- the latter opposed by state and county public defenders and by the Ohio Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers (OACDL). OCSC reviewed the draft, "Felony Sentencing in Ohio: Then, Now, and Now What?" but could not vote on specific recommendations due to the lack of a quorum from members attending remotely. The document says a "modified and modernized rehabilitative model, utilizing indeterminate sentences, probation and parole, would best promote the objectives of the purposes and principles of sentencing."

MARIJUANA/HEMP

The Ohio Board of Pharmacy awarded dispensary certificates of operation to Nectar Medical Cannabis Dispensary, located at 1011 Main St. in Bowling Green, and to the Ohio Cannabis Company, located at 17043 County Highway 113 in Harpster. There are now 68 dispensaries legally operating under the Ohio Medical Marijuana Control Program.

MEDICAID/MEDICAID REFORM

Ohio is not among the vast majority of states who'll face difficulty drawing down additional federal money because of increased federal scrutiny of readiness to resume Medicaid eligibility redeterminations after the pandemic hiatus, Ohio Department of Medicaid Director Maureen Corcoran told the Joint Medicaid Oversight Committee (JMOC) Wednesday. ODM started work on the redeterminations Feb. 1, anticipating the first round of ineligible people will be removed in the April-May timeframe. Corcoran reviewed again Wednesday the timelines for completing determinations, projecting an 18-month process to complete the full review of all 3.6 million enrollees, given the deliberate steps ODM and counties must undertake to contact people and their right to appeal removal from the program. In assessing states' readiness, the federal Centers for Medicaid Services (CMS) has been engaging states in the lead up to resumption of eligibility. "... just in the last couple of days we've learned that, or we've been told, that Ohio does not have any barriers or any procedural concerns that CMS has. However, there are more than 40 states that do, and those 40 states then will not be allowed to draw down federal money beginning April 1," Corcoran said.

Corcoran said in House budget testimony Thursday the agency is trying to achieve an average \$16 hourly wage for direct care workers in its budget proposal while trying to prevent shifting among care sectors based on wage differentials, but acknowledged the discussion in prior hearings about the need for much greater increases. "I am not going to pretend that \$16 an hour is adequate," she told the House Finance Health and Human Services Subcommittee. "It represents historic increases in rates. It was something that the governor felt very strongly about, but he was also clear in introducing it that it was subject to further discussion with the General Assembly." Corcoran said the administration is also trying to make it easier for providers to work across systems, so a person could more easily care for both a person with developmental disabilities and a senior citizen in their community, for example.

NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS

The Ohio Oil and Gas Energy Education Program (OOGEEP) announced Monday that it is changing its name after a quarter century to the Ohio Natural Energy Institute (ONEI) to reflect the "future of energy education." ONEI says community members, stakeholders and industry supporters all contributed to the discussion of its future, with the new name better representing the "vast Ohio natural resources."

PEOPLE

National law firm Shumaker -- which has offices in Ohio and three other states -- announced Tuesday that it had hired Mark Usellis to serve as chief growth and strategy officer. Usellis has over 20 years of experience working with law firms as a chief marketing officer, chief strategy officer and consultant. He also has 13 years in public affairs as a legislative director on Capitol Hill, public affairs director for a large telecommunications company and a consultant for a global public affairs firm. He most recently was chief operating officer and interim CEO at an international reforestation NGO going through a leadership and business model transition.

The Ohio Manufacturers' Association (OMA) announced that James Lee had joined its staff as director of public policy services, after working at the Ohio Department of Development and serving as legislative aide to Rep. Sharon Ray (R-Wadsworth). OMA further noted Lee has family ties to a manufacturing business and graduated from the University of Dayton with a bachelor's degree in political science. He previously participated in the Ohio Legislative Service Commission Fellowship Program.

The Ohio Business Roundtable (OBRT) announced Wednesday it had promoted Alexandra Denney to vice president of communications and government relations, along with the selection of Nikki Cooper as director of government relations and Grace Cook as administrative and events coordinator.

PUBLIC SAFETY

The Ohio State Highway Patrol said that as St. Patrick's Day celebrations take place this week throughout the state, it will be working with local law enforcement to crack down on impaired drivers as part of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration's Buzzed Driving is Drunk Driving campaign. During the last five years, impaired driving accounted for 219 crashes with 128 injuries on St. Patrick's Day, according to the patrol. Of those impaired driving crashes, seven were fatal, resulting in 10 deaths. Additionally, the patrol made 545 OVI arrests on St. Patrick's Day from 2018 to 2022.

TAXATION

The House Ways and Means Committee heard warnings Tuesday of costs to homeowners and revenue losses to local governments from the income and property tax overhaul in HB1, while also getting a history lesson on decades old statutory mechanisms to control property tax inflation. Tuesday's committee hearing was dedicated to opponent testimony on HB1 (Matthews), a sweeping proposal to cut income taxes and pair repeal of state property tax subsidies with a reduction in the proportion of property value to which tax rates are applied. But the meeting led off with a presentation by Sam Benham, division chief of taxation and economic development for the

Legislative Service Commission (LSC), who spoke about property tax reduction factors related to 111-HB920, adopted in 1976 and then updated following a 1980 constitutional amendment to create different classes of property. Chair Bill Roemer (R-Richfield) said he'd invited LSC to provide the background information after questions about HB920 arose in prior hearings.

TECHNOLOGY/AEROSPACE

The Ohio Department of Development (DOD) recently launched statewide stakeholder engagement efforts supporting updates to the state broadband strategy and development of a "comprehensive plan to close the digital divide," with events planned around the state. BrodbandOhio, a division of DOD, was awarded \$5 million through the federal Broadband Equity, Access and Deployment (BEAD) program to conduct this outreach as a first step toward full allocation of federal funds through the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act. The input will be "vital" in creation of a five-year action plan to obtain all available funding through the BEAD program, the release noted. More information is available at <https://tinyurl.com/yarmwas8>.

TRANSPORTATION/INFRASTRUCTURE

The Senate Transportation Committee Wednesday unveiled its version of HB23 (Edwards), the transportation budget, adding to rail safety provisions adopted by the House while removing the \$1 billion General Revenue Fund appropriation for a new Rural Highway Fund. In announcing the changes, committee Chair Sen. Stephanie Kunze (R-Hilliard) said the fund was removed because it appeared it would only apply to a dozen projects in the state, and suggested it could be worked out further through the biennial budget process. The new version retains the House-added rail safety provisions, including two-man crews for freight trains and the notification of crew of wayside detector errors. It also added new provisions including requiring wayside detectors to be generally installed 10 to 15 miles apart and requiring the Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT) and the Public Utilities Commission of Ohio (PUCO) to oversee proper installation.

Complaining of what they said was a rushed process and lack of legislative scrutiny of rail safety provisions added to the transportation budget, HB23 (Edwards), by the House and Senate, representatives of the freight rail industry told the Senate Transportation Committee Thursday that those provisions will impose significant costs on the mostly small operators in the state. Art Arnold of the Ohio Railroad Association and Brendan Keener, manager of Midwest & Bluegrass Rail, which owns and operates short line railroads in Franklin, Madison, Mahoning, and Columbiana counties, appeared before the committee as interested parties.

If Ohio decides to move forward with expanding Amtrak service in Ohio, it could take at least five years before service begins, a representative of Amtrak told a panel at the Columbus Metropolitan Club this week. Arun Rao, director of network development for Amtrak, was featured on a panel discussing potential expansion in the state of Amtrak's passenger rail service. Currently, the service only runs late night routes into Cleveland and Cincinnati, and Central Ohio has been without service for almost 40 years. HB23 (Edwards), the transportation budget, includes a provision allowing the state to use federal money to study a potential expansion of Amtrak service.

WORKERS' COMPENSATION

Bureau of Workers' Compensation (BWC) Administrator/CEO John Logue highlighted the in-person return of BWC's Safety Congress and Expo in his remarks to the BWC board Friday. The event was

held from Wednesday through Friday at the Greater Columbus Convention Center and had been virtual during the pandemic. Logue said there were over 7,000 registered attendees and 200 exhibitor booths this year. Logue further noted the BWC Medical and Health Symposium will be held Thursday, May 4 to Saturday, May 6. It is a virtual event this year, with more information available at <https://tinyurl.com/v9upptsz>.