



GOVERNMENTAL POLICY GROUP, INC. RH RESOURCES

17 S. High St. - Suite 245 Columbus, Ohio 43215 | (614) 461-9335 | gpgrhr.com

Week in Review

March 24, 2023

CONTENTS

APPALACHIA	2	HIGHER EDUCATION	7
ATTORNEY GENERAL.....	2	HOUSING/HOMELESSNESS.....	7
CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENTS	2	PENSIONS	7
CORRECTIONS	3	PEOPLE	8
EAST PALESTINE DERAILMENT	3	STATE GOVERNMENT	8
EDUCATION.....	3	TECHNOLOGY/AEROSPACE	9
ELECTIONS.....	4	TRANSPORTATION/ INFRASTRUCTURE.....	9
ENVIRONMENT	4	WORKERS' COMPENSATION.....	10
GAMING/GAMBLING.....	5	WORKFORCE.....	10
GENERAL ASSEMBLY	5	LEGISLATIVE ACTIVITY	11
GOVERNOR	6		
HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES.....	6		



APPALACHIA

The DeWine administration announced Monday that four "transformational" projects will receive \$50 million in the first round of the Appalachian Community Grant Program, which will provide a total of \$500 million to support local initiatives revitalizing downtown districts, enhancing quality of life and rebuilding the economies in Ohio's 32 Appalachian counties. The first round projects include the following:

- **Utica Shale Academy of Ohio** will receive up to \$2.35 million to create the Connecting Communities Through Workforce Training project, which will provide residents with a career pathway for in-demand jobs that allow them to earn a sustainable living wage. It will expand services at three training centers and benefit Columbiana, Carroll, Jefferson and Mahoning counties.
- The **city of Athens** will receive up to \$17.7 million to revitalize 80,000 square feet of downtown space with rehabilitation of six historic buildings there and in Coshocton, Logan and Somerset. This is part of the "At Work in Appalachia" project, which will also provide collaborative regional programming through a series of public/private partnerships including creation and expansion of mental health services. It will benefit Coshocton, Hocking, Athens and Perry counties.
- The **Survivor Advocacy Outreach Program** will receive up to \$25.8 million to address social determinants of health challenges in Athens, Glouster, Nelsonville, Gallipolis and Middleport by establishing a mental health drop-in center and advocacy trauma center and expanding four New Leaf Recovery Villages. The program also includes construction of 3D-printed affordable housing, renovation of downtown buildings and infrastructure to increase walkability and establishment of workforce development programs focused on transitional job programs. It will benefit Athens, Gallia and Meigs counties.
- The **Outdoor Recreation Council of Appalachia** will receive up to \$4.18 million for tourism efforts related to nature, heritage and art. Those efforts will also include essential connectivity to workforce development and expanded health care access. The project will benefit Athens, Meigs and Jackson counties.

ATTORNEY GENERAL

American Cancer Society of Ohio. American Cancer Foundation of Columbus. United Way of Ohio. These and similar names sound like nonprofits Ohioans have come to know and support with their hard-earned pay. However, if they donated to them or a half dozen other fake charities, they were defrauded. These sham charities, sued by the Ohio Attorney General's Office, were convicted by the Franklin County Common Pleas Court. Joining fraudsters in the statewide scam, says Attorney General Dave Yost, are knock-off profiteers operating as the American Cancer Society of Cincinnati, American Cancer Society of Cleveland, American Cancer Foundation of Cincinnati, American Cancer Foundation of Cleveland and American Cancer Foundation of Ohio.

CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENTS

Rep. Brian Stewart (R-Ashville) Wednesday fielded questions for nearly an hour and a half from mostly Democrats on the House Constitutional Resolutions Committee on his HJR1, a proposal that would require constitutional amendments gain 60 percent of the vote in order to be adopted. Meanwhile, the Senate Wednesday introduced its own version of the measure -- SJR2 (McColley-

Gavarone), as well as SB92 (McColley-Gavarone) -- which would clear the way for it to go on an August special election ballot even though the Legislature eliminated August special elections last year as a part of 134-HB458 (Hall).

During Wednesday's House hearing, Stewart argued that the amendment is needed to protect Ohio's Constitution from special interests, noting the inclusion of specific land parcels in the document for Ohio casinos, and attempts to alter it for recreational marijuana or to give former House Speaker Larry Householder a much longer term as speaker. He also said that it should be as hard to amend Ohio's Constitution as it is to amend the U.S. Constitution.

CORRECTIONS

The Correctional Institution Inspection Committee (CIIC) reconvened after 18 months Thursday to name Rep. Jean Schmidt (R-Loveland) chair. She assumes that role after nearly two years on the committee. There were no other items on the agenda, though CIIC Executive Director Chris Albanese said outside the meeting that staff is busy inspecting detention facilities within the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction (DRC) and Ohio Department of Youth Services (DYS) systems. CIIC has visited six prisons this year and will inspect its seventh next week. Albanese said prisons and DYS facilities are generally inspected twice a year: once announced and once unannounced.

EAST PALESTINE DERAILMENT

Ohio Department of Public Safety Director Andy Wilson gave the Senate Select Committee on Rail Safety an overview Wednesday of the command structure that gathered information and made key decisions in the immediate aftermath of the Norfolk Southern train derailment in East Palestine. Sen. Bill Reineke (R-Tiffin), chair of the committee, said Wilson was called in to review the command structure at the request of Sen. Frank Hoagland (R-Adena), a Navy SEAL veteran who has focused a lot of his questions on command structure details during the committee's hearings. Wilson said East Palestine Fire Chief Keith Drabick took command of the hazardous materials incident under ORC 37337.80, which gives such responsibility to the local fire chief until he relinquishes it. Drabick has since done so, yielding to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) unified command as the situation shifted from emergency response to cleanup and monitoring.

EDUCATION

Gov. Mike DeWine spoke in three cities Thursday to urge support for his budget proposals on literacy instruction and teacher training, along the way signing an executive order to promote awareness of the importance of reading across state government. He shared the stage at a morning event in Columbus with a former Mississippi education leader who put into practice many of the approaches DeWine's promoting. Several elements of the FY24-25 executive budget proposal seek to spread instruction based on the "science of reading," an approach focused on phonics, phonemic awareness, vocabulary, fluency, comprehension and writing. Those include state support to ensure teachers get training in these instructional methods and to provide districts with high-quality instructional materials aligned to the science of reading. Ohio Department of Education (ODE) Interim Superintendent Stephanie Siddens provided an overview of the proposals and other ODE literacy initiatives following DeWine's morning speech at an event organized by Ohio Excels, a business coalition focused on education and workforce issues.

With three hearings down and another scheduled in the House Primary and Secondary Education Committee on a bill proposing major changes to K-12 governance in Ohio, leadership in the chamber decided to put the companion Senate measure in a different committee. The issue is salient to both committees, according to House leadership. The House Rules and Reference Committee voted to refer SB1 (Reineke) to the House Economic and Workforce Development Committee, which held sponsor testimony on it Tuesday, March 21. The House Primary and Secondary Education Committee, however, has been considering HB12 (Dobos-Jones), which was up for a fourth hearing, also on Tuesday. Both measures were identified as priorities in the respective chambers upon their introduction, and the House and Senate education chairs had kept them closely aligned via adoption of similar amendments over recent weeks of deliberations.

ELECTIONS

Ohio Friday became the latest state to exit a multi-state cooperative data effort, with Secretary of State Frank LaRose saying attempts to "save what could be an unparalleled election integrity service have fallen short." LaRose announced Ohio's resignation from the Electronic Registration Information Center (ERIC) in a letter to the group's board, saying the resignation is effective 91 days from Friday, March 17. Ohio joins Louisiana, Alabama, West Virginia, Missouri and Florida in leaving the organization. He argued that the group "has chosen repeatedly to ignore demands to embrace reforms that would bolster confidence in its performance, encourage growth in its membership, and ensure not only its present stability but also its durability. Rather, you have chosen to double-down on poor strategic decisions, which have only resulted in the transformation of a previously bipartisan organization to one that appears to favor only the interests of one political party. I believe the current actions and inactions of ERIC will effectively set in motion its demise."

Voting for military and overseas Ohioans has begun for the Tuesday, May 2 primary election, Secretary of State Frank LaRose said. On Friday, March 17, county boards of elections sent Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act (UOCAVA) ballots to servicemembers stationed abroad and to Ohioans working overseas. The deadline for Ohioans to register to vote is Monday, April 3, and early voting for all voters begins Tuesday, April 4.

The state should not hold a special election in August to vote on a measure making it more difficult to approve amendments to the Ohio Constitution, House Speaker Jason Stephens (R-Kitts Hill) said Thursday. "We just voted to not have those anymore," Stephens told reporters after session, referring to 134-HB458 (Hall). "The county election officials I've talked to are not interested in having it," Stephens continued. "I'm frankly not interested in having an election in August, because of the cost to the taxpayers." Ohio Association of Election Officials Executive Director Aaron Ockerman told *Hannah News* that his organization hasn't yet taken a formal position on SB92 (McColley-Gavarone), which would appropriate \$20 million for an August special election in 2023. "We have long supported the elimination of August special elections for local political subdivisions, but honestly have never had a conversation about a bill like SB92," Ockerman said.

ENVIRONMENT

"Fix a Leak Week," which concludes Sunday, March 26, has been held by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (USEPA) WaterSense program as an annual reminder to check household plumbing and irrigation systems for water loss, the Public Utilities Commission of Ohio (PUCO), Ohio Environmental Agency (EPA) and Ohio Department of Insurance (ODI) said in a joint announcement. One out of every 10 homes nationwide wastes up to 90 gallons of water due to leaks,

the agencies said, and the average leak can cost a household nearly 10,000 gallons every year, or the same as 300 loads of laundry.

Many of the 21 witnesses who testified Tuesday before the House Finance Agriculture, Development and Natural Resources Subcommittee urged continued funding of the brownfields program at a \$500 million level. Jason Warner of the Greater Ohio Policy Center touted the success of the program in the current biennium with the assessment and cleanup of brownfields and the demolition of dilapidated commercial and residential buildings in 87 of Ohio's 88 counties. However, he noted, 125 projects were granted assessment dollars in the current biennium but "without additional funding, these 125 projects will likely remain contaminated and unable to move into productive economic engines."

GAMING/GAMBLING

Calls to Ohio's Problem Gambling Helpline increased 227 percent from January 2022 to January 2023, according to state officials and responsible gambling advocates. That data point is one of several included in the "State of Problem Gambling in 2023" report from Ohio for Responsible Gambling, a state initiative run by the Ohio Casino Control Commission (OCCC), Ohio Lottery Commission (OLC), Ohio State Racing Commission (OSRC) and Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (OhioMHAS). While the increase is attributed to sports betting legalization becoming effective in January 2023, the report notes that some of the increase was due to the major marketing push to raise awareness about the Problem Gambling Helpline. Additionally, some bettors called the helpline because they were confused about ads offering "free" money after bets are placed, the report says.

The Ohio Casino Control Commission (OCCC) has ordered BetMGM to pay \$150,000 for sports gambling advertising violations. The company is also required to ensure that its personnel and affiliate marketers are properly trained in all laws, policies and procedures relevant to advertising and promoting sports betting in the state of Ohio. "BetMGM, or its affiliate marketer, ran sports gaming advertisements without a conspicuous message designed to prevent problem gambling and provide information on how to access resources related to problem gambling, including an approved helpline," OCCC said in its final order, noting that is a violation of both the Ohio Revised Code (ORC) and Ohio Administrative Code (OAC).

GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Congress should pass legislation requiring railroad companies to inform state and local governments when trains carrying hazardous materials are traveling through their jurisdictions, according to a resolution passed by the House on Thursday. Lawmakers voted 94-1 to approve HR33, a bipartisan measure sponsored by Reps. Monica Robb Blasdel (R-Columbiana) and Lauren McNally (D-Youngstown). Rep. Bill Dean (R-Xenia) was the only "no" vote.

Rep. Mary Lightbody (D-Westerville) has been elected chair of the Ohio Democratic Women's Legislative Caucus (ODWLC) for the 135th General Assembly. The full executive committee also includes vice chair Rep. Munira Yasin Abdullahi (D-Columbus); policy chair Rep. Michele Grim (D-Toledo); secretary Rep. Lauren McNally (D-Youngstown); and treasurer Rep. Rachel Baker (D-Cincinnati).

In other legislative action, the House Criminal Justice Committee reported out HB50 (Humphrey-Seitz) which addresses collateral sanctions on housing; the House Health Provider Services Committee reported out HB22 (Schmidt-Hall) which deals with stroke care data; the House Transportation Committee reported out highway naming bills HB75 (Lampton-Dean) and HB81 (Robb Blasdel-Jones); the House Homeland Security Committee reported out HB29 (Humphrey-Brewer) which revises laws governing driver's license suspensions for failure to pay child support; and the Senate Health Committee reported out SB34 (Schaffer) which designates July Sarcoma Awareness Month.

GOVERNOR

Gov. Mike DeWine appointed David Henry to the Clinton County Municipal Court, succeeding the late Judge Michael Daugherty. Henry will be on the primary ballot in May. Recently working as a prosecutor or solicitor in Wilmington, Blanchester and Sabina, Henry has practiced law in the public sector since 1999, including working as a prosecutor in Miami County Municipal Court, as law director of Xenia, assistant prosecutor in Clinton and Highland counties and then as deputy director of professional standards in the attorney general's office under DeWine.

HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

State government support could make pro football player Damar Hamlin's recovery from on-field cardiac arrest in Cincinnati a more commonplace outcome rather than a miracle, a Cincinnati doctor told a House budget subcommittee Tuesday. Among numerous witnesses testifying to the House Finance Health and Human Services Subcommittee was Dr. Justin Benoit, a University of Cincinnati physician and chair of the Ohio Cardiac Arrest Registry to Enhance Survival (CARES). Benoit explained Ohio CARES works to collect and analyze data to help to ensure strong links in what the American Heart Association calls the "chain of survival" than enables a person to recover -- a bystander who recognizes the signs of cardiac arrest and starts CPR, another person who goes to find an AED, the first responders who arrive at the scene. Benoit said the organization covers about 46 percent of Ohioans now thanks to private donations and state support for data software, but is requesting help in the state budget to reach the entire population. A \$300,000 annual budget would allow the hiring of part-time paramedic coordinators to enroll organizations, a full-time statistician and a full-time director, support software costs and help the organization teach "Resuscitation Academies."

Much of the testimony Wednesday before the House Finance Health and Human Services Subcommittee on the proposed budget in HB33 (Edwards) addressed the difficulty of finding direct service providers (DSPs), starting with the day's second witness, Justin Martin, and then his mother, Jackie Martin. With a mixture of passion and anger, Justin Martin described what it is like to be solely dependent on someone else, describing for the subcommittee a time when he had a "well-paid team of direct support professionals" so he "could get up and go to bed whenever I needed to. I could make plans with friends on the spur of the moment rather than four weeks in advance or never -- I could go out to eat, go to the movie theater, attend meetings and classes and internships regardless of when or where they were. My world, which used to be colorless and narrow, was now impossibly wide and impossibly bright."

HIGHER EDUCATION

Sens. Jerry Cirino (R-Kirtland) and Catherine Ingram (D-Cincinnati), chair and ranking member, respectively on the Senate Workforce and Higher Education Committee, Wednesday previewed the debate around legislation that would make significant changes to operations at Ohio's public colleges and universities. In the first hearing on his SB83, Committee Chair Cirino said the legislation is "all about students" and is a "much needed course correction for our institutions of higher learning. ... This course correction is needed now so that we do not end up with institutions that are more focused on social engineering rather than true intellectual diversity of thought and the teaching of useful analytical skills," he said. The bill prohibits mandatory programs or training courses on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) topics at state institutions of higher education. Among other notable requirements in the bill are the following:

- Prohibits college faculty from striking in contract disputes.
- Requires that state colleges and universities "seek out intellectual diversity in invited speakers."
- Requires state institutions to post a complete list of all speaker fees, honoraria, and other emoluments in excess of \$500 prominently on their websites.
- Requires state colleges and universities to adopt a policy affirming they will not endorse, comment on, or take action as an institution on "current public policy controversies or controversial beliefs or policies."
- Requires state colleges and universities to adopt a policy affirming they will not aid or abet activities such as boycotts, disinvestments, or sanctions.

HOUSING/HOMELESSNESS

Institutional investors who buy up numerous single-family homes in cash are pushing the dream of home ownership even further out of reach for many Ohioans, housing advocates told the Senate Ways and Means Committee on Wednesday. Port of Greater Cincinnati Development Authority Executive Vice President Philip Denning and Cuyahoga County Vacant and Abandoned Property Action Council Chair Frank Ford testified in favor of SB76 (Blessing-Antonio), which would impose a tax on any landlord who owns 50 or more single, two-family or three-family houses in a single county, among other provisions. "Our attention to investor activity in Hamilton County came out of a conversation with the city of Cincinnati's code enforcement professionals to identify the most irresponsible landlords and property owners. Using these entities as a starting point, we completed months of rigorous research to uncover that over 4,000 single-family homes in Hamilton County had been purchased by just five institutional investors since 2013," Denning said.

PENSIONS

Ohio retirement systems are facing losses from their holdings in banks involved in a recent crisis that triggered federal intervention, although the effects are very small in proportion to the state pension assets. In a recent statement, State Teachers Retirement System (STRS) acknowledged holdings in Silicon Valley Bank (SVB), recently taken over by the federal government because of its imminent failure. As of Wednesday, March 8, STRS had 102,000 shares worth about \$27 million. As a stock listed in the S&P 500 and Russell 3000 indices of major companies, SVB was held by many public

pension funds, STRS said. STRS noted that this holding represents 0.03 percent of its total holdings. As of the end of FY22, STRS held nearly \$89 billion in assets, making it the second largest Ohio retirement system.

Ohio's five public employee pension funds appeared before the House Pensions Committee during its first hearing, giving lawmakers an overview of their functions and operations and taking questions. Committee Chair Bob Young (R-Green) said he wanted to give members a "high level" view of the funds.

PEOPLE

The Ohio CDC Association (OCDCA) announced that it has selected Torey Hollingsworth as its new executive director. The association said Hollingsworth brings to the OCDCA more than a decade of experience in community advocacy, having most recently served as the director of the Office of the Dayton City Commission, where she managed the policy work and support staff for the city's elected leadership. Hollingsworth will succeed the current executive director, Nate Coffman, effective Monday, April 3.

McKinley Strategies recently announced that Mike Peppel has been named its manager of government affairs. Peppel comes to the firm after serving four years as senior legislative aide to Sen. Michael Rulli (R-Salem). As an aide to Rulli he was responsible for crafting and aiding in the introduction of nearly 50 bills, 20 of which were enacted into law. Peppel also staffed the Senate Small Business and Economic Opportunity Committee as well as the General Government Committee.

Ohio Department of Administrative Services (DAS) Director Kathleen Madden has appointed a new chief information officer (CIO) and chief information security officer (CISO), the department announced Monday. Anupam Srivastava is serving as CIO, where he is expected to utilize his IT background and state government expertise. He previously served as CISO for DAS. Holly Drake is the new CISO, and now leads the DAS Office of Information Security and Privacy. Previously, Drake served as deputy cybersecurity strategic adviser for CyberOhio in Gov. Mike DeWine's office.

The Ohio Health Care Association (OHCA) announced it has contracted with Dr. Jessica Coleman as consulting medical director. She will consult with association staff on clinical issues concerning regulations, reimbursement, operations and advocacy efforts.

The funeral for Paul Coleman, who served as the assistant director of the Ohio Department of Public Welfare and then director of the Governor's Office of Recovery Services in the Celeste administration, was held Friday, March 24. Coleman, 79, died Saturday, March 11 of heart failure. Coleman also served as president and CEO of Maryhaven, a behavioral health services provider specializing in addiction recovery in Columbus, for 25 years before retiring in 2016.

STATE GOVERNMENT

The Ohio Controlling Board Monday approved all but two requests that were before it during Monday's meeting, with both of those requests being deferred by the agency. The deferral of one of those requests, coming from the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS) and proposing to spend more than \$20 million to support early childhood services, was praised by two of the board members, who said they appreciated the deferral. The other deferred item was a request from Cleveland State University regarding a \$296,000 roof replacement contract. Among the items

approved during Monday's meeting was a request by the Ohio Attorney General's Office to spend more than \$3 million on the appointment of 24 firms as special counsel for 18 state clients.

TECHNOLOGY/AEROSPACE

Ohio higher education leaders discussed what they are doing to address the growing national demand for pilots with the House Aviation and Aerospace Committee Tuesday. The committee also heard from Ohio University (OU) and Baldwin Wallace University (BW) officials and Ohio State University (OSU) students. Bowling Green State University (BGSU) President Rodney Rogers discussed the history of the university's aviation program, which began in 1978 and has experienced "tremendous growth" since then, particularly in recent years. It was ranked the fourth-best program in the country by *Flying Magazine* and conducted over 10,000 flights in 2022, with more than 11,000 expected this year.

TRANSPORTATION/INFRASTRUCTURE

The \$13.5 billion transportation budget is headed to conference committee after it cleared the Senate Thursday morning with a unanimous vote but then the House subsequently did not concur with the Senate changes. Sen. Stephanie Kunze (R-Hilliard), the chair of the Senate Transportation Committee, highlighted the provisions and changes made by the Senate to HB23 (Edwards), the transportation budget. She said it makes a historic investment in Ohio's future and recognizes the need for a solid statewide transportation infrastructure. She said the bill is a product of bipartisan work from the entire transportation committee. The bill passed on a 30-0 vote. The House did not concur with the Senate's amendments by a vote of 16-79. Those voting to concur were Reps. Tim Barhorst (R-Fort Loramie), Adam Bird (R-Cincinnati), Bill Dean (R-Xenia), Ron Ferguson (R-Wintersville), Jennifer Gross (R-West Chester), Marilyn John (R-Shelby), Darrell Kick (R-Loudonville), Angela King (R-Celina), Beth Lear (R-Galena), Scott Lipps (R-Franklin), Susan Manchester (R-Lakeview), Riordan McClain (R-Nevada), Jena Powell (R-Arcanum), Reginald Stoltzfus (R-Minerva), Scott Wiggam (R-Wooster) and Bernard Willis (R-Springfield). Senate President Matt Huffman told reporters that among the items he expects to hash out in conference committee are the \$1 billion Rural Highway Fund that was added by the House and removed by the Senate, and the force accounts issue.

The Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT) kicked off the 2023 construction season this week, saying it expects to invest a record \$2.5 billion into more than 1,000 projects this year. ODOT said about 95 cents of every dollar spent this year is being invested back into preserving existing roads and bridges.

With the Ohio Turnpike's modernized toll collection system expected to go live in July 2023, Ohio Turnpike and Infrastructure Commission (OTIC) General Counsel Jennifer Monty Rieker discussed the agency's plan for collecting unpaid tolls. "There will be those that travel the turnpike and inadvertently or mistakenly use the E-ZPass lanes when they do not have a valid E-ZPass account," Monty Rieker said during Monday's commission meeting. There will be a \$10 threshold for sending the first invoice, she said, noting the total administrative cost related to invoicing is approximately \$3.77, not including postage and costs for internal staff.

Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT) Director Jack Marchbanks discussed the department's work with the House Transportation Committee Tuesday, detailing the funding and usage of Ohio's roadway system and saying the state's "location at the crossroads of America" was a major component to Intel, Ford and Honda's decisions to invest in Ohio manufacturing. The network of

roads, bridges and highways are Ohio's "most valuable physical asset" at \$116 billion in total value, according to Marchbanks, and it has the sixth-highest number of vehicle miles traveled. He said the freight system transported goods worth over \$1 trillion in 2018, and Ohio's active rail line mileage is fourth-largest in the country. While traffic deaths have increased 14 percent since 2010, Marchbanks added that serious injuries decreased by 29 percent and total crashes decreased by 18 percent. ODOT's two largest revenue sources are state and federal gas taxes, he explained, and total funding is around \$1.8 billion in federal funds and \$1.5 billion in state funds. That is divided, with \$970 million to operations costs such as payroll, debt service, land and buildings, equipment, snow and ice service and maintenance. The capital expenses for pavements, bridges, safety efforts and local programs cost \$2.33 billion.

The Ohio Rail Development Commission (ORDC) Thursday voted unanimously to authorize ORDC staff to apply for federal funding to study expanding Amtrak service on two proposed corridors through the state. The action comes after Gov. Mike DeWine last month directed ORDC to seek the funding to study expanding passenger rail service in the state. ORDC Secretary/Treasurer Megan McClory told the commission that applications for the first step in expanding passenger service are due on Monday, March 27. Under a program through the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) funded by the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, states can seek funding in three phases to expand passenger rail. The first phase, which she said would give states \$500,000 per corridor in seed money to start studying expanding passenger rail, is 100 percent federally funded, with no state match required.

The Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT) said this week that it is now accepting public comments on the Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) for 2024 to 2027. The program identifies the multi-modal transportation improvement projects that are scheduled for some phase of implementation throughout the state over the next four years. The draft documents will be available for public review and comment online during the review period through Monday, April 10, 2023. The documents can be found at www.transportation.ohio.gov/programs/stip. Any comments concerning the Statewide Transportation Improvement Program may be submitted online, by email to Natasha Turner at Natasha.Turner@dot.ohio.gov, or postal mail to Deputy Director Tim McDonald, Division of Planning, Ohio Department of Transportation Mail Stop # 3260 1980 West Broad Street Columbus, Ohio 43223. Written comments must be received by the close of business on Monday, April 10, 2023.

WORKERS' COMPENSATION

The House Insurance Committee voted unanimously to report out the Bureau of Workers' Compensation (BWC) budget, HB31 (Edwards), Wednesday with an amendment that changes the name back to BWC instead of the Department of Workforce Insurance and Safety. BWC Administrator/CEO John Logue had previously testified in support of the change as better reflecting the agency's work and aligned with other state departments. Ranking Member Jessica Miranda (D-Cincinnati) had questioned the practicality and cost, which Logue said would be around \$1 million.

WORKFORCE

Lt. Gov. Jon Husted announced Monday that 345 employers were approved for funding in the January round of TechCred, which will enable Ohioans to earn 4,237 tech-focused credentials. It is the 18th round of the program and manufacturing was again at the top of industries which applied. Husted's office also noted the 19th round is currently open and will close at 3 p.m. on Friday, March 31.

LEGISLATIVE ACTIVITY

HOUSE

ADOPTED BY HOUSE

HR33 TRAINS - HAZARDOUS MATERIALS (Rep. Monica Robb Blasdel, Rep. Lauren McNally) To urge the United States Congress to pass legislation requiring railroad companies to inform local and state government officials when trains carrying potentially hazardous materials travel through their respective jurisdictions.

Amended on Floor, Resolution Vote 94-1

CONSIDERATION OF SENATE AMENDMENTS

HB23 TRANSPORTATION BUDGET (Rep. Jay Edwards) To make appropriations for programs related to transportation for the biennium beginning July 1, 2023, and ending June 30, 2025, and to provide authorization and conditions for the operation of those programs.

House Does Not Concur, Vote 16-79

SENATE

PASSED BY SENATE

HB23 TRANSPORTATION BUDGET (Rep. Jay Edwards) To make appropriations for programs related to transportation for the biennium beginning July 1, 2023, and ending June 30, 2025, and to provide authorization and conditions for the operation of those programs.

Vote 30-0