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Week in Review

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As a service to the clients and friends of Governmental Policy Group, Inc. and RH Resources we would like to extend the following weekly update of events happening around Capitol Square.

AFFORDABLE CARE ACT

Detailing their concerns over a possible return to a pre-Affordable Care Act (ACA) landscape, health care advocates and Ohioans with pre-existing conditions spoke in favor of HB390 (Crossman-Clites) before the House Insurance Committee on Tuesday. The bill would codify provisions of the landmark act, which could be eliminated due to pending federal litigation.

ATTORNEY GENERAL

The Ohio Attorney General's Office announced a series of indictments following the bust of an organized theft ring operating in four counties in Northeast Ohio. The Property Crimes Task Force, housed within the Ohio Organized Crime Investigations Commission and led by the Cleveland Division of Police, said the investigation led to 116 felony counts against seven individuals. They include racketeering influenced and corrupt organizations (RICO) charges, grand theft, theft, aggravated theft, conspiracy, breaking and entering, vandalism and receiving stolen property.

Ohio Attorney General Dave Yost and his Michigan counterpart, Dana Nessel, are leading the national call on Congress to pass U.S. Sen. Rob Portman's (R-OH) legislation to permanently classify deadly fentanyl-related compounds as Schedule I drugs, defined as having no accepted medical use and a high potential for abuse. In a letter this week to Chairman Lindsey Graham (R-SC) and Ranking Minority Member Dianne Feinstein (D-CA) of the Senate Judiciary Committee, Yost, Nessel and 54 other attorneys general note that the Drug Enforcement Agency's (DEA) temporary order from 2018 classifying fentanyl-related substances as Schedule I drugs will expire on Feb. 6, 2020 without codification in permanent law.

CORRECTIONS

Executive Director Charlie Adams of the Correctional Institution Inspection Committee (CIIC) lauded the relationship the committee has had with the Department of Rehabilitation and Correction (DRC) and the correctional institutions as she presented the biennial report to the committee on Tuesday. She also outlined more positive feedback from inmates for most of the institutions during the 132nd General Assembly. Top areas of concern in the report were supervision, staff accountability, health care, inmate relations, grievance procedures and the rules infraction board.

The Ohio Criminal Sentencing Commission (OCSC) quashed a data request submitted by attorney and director Doug Berman of the Ohio State University's Drug Enforcement & Policy Center and supported by Sen. Bill Seitz (R-Cincinnati) and other lawmakers Thursday to examine the use of homicide charges in accidental drug deaths and whether the practice helps or hurts the opioid epidemic and overall public safety.

CRIME AND PUNISHMENT

Co-Chairwoman Rep. Diane Grendell (R-Chesterland) of the House Criminal Justice Criminal Sentencing Subcommittee framed Tuesday's continued discussion of sentencing reforms with a dire assessment of criminal justice in Ohio. "Something is wrong. The prisons are full, and there doesn't appear to be any deterrent to crime these days," Grendell said at a committee meeting scheduled for testimony from the Buckeye Institute, ACLU of Ohio, Policy Matters Ohio and Ohio Public Defender's Office.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Gov. Mike DeWine's administration announced Monday the approval of assistance for 13 projects expected to create 1,275 new jobs and retain 1,657 jobs statewide. During its monthly meeting, the Ohio Tax Credit Authority (TCA) reviewed economic development proposals brought by JobsOhio and its regional partners. The projects are expected to collectively result in more than \$88 million in new payroll and spur more than \$295 million in investments across Ohio.

EDUCATION

The Ohio Education Association's Representative Assembly voted unanimously over the weekend to recommend an overhaul of the state report card system that ends A-F grading in favor of a dashboard of academic indicators, complemented by information about school districts and the programs they offer students. The association, Ohio's largest teachers' union, said its recommended format would be compliant with the Every Student Succeeds Act, the federal law that speaks to state school accountability measures.

A U.S. District Court recently tentatively approved a settlement agreement in a class action lawsuit over special education services. *Doe v. Ohio*, filed in federal court in 1993 as part of another education-related lawsuit, addresses the level of resources Ohio schools, and specifically 11 districts, provide to give students special education and related services in the least restrictive environment. Those districts are Akron, Canton, Cleveland, Cincinnati, Columbus, Dayton, East Cleveland, Lima, Zanesville and Toledo.

After an informal agreement in court was reached a month ago to prevent replacement of the elected Youngstown City Schools Board of Education with mayoral appointees, a Mahoning County court recently followed through with a formal injunction order. Mayor Jamael Tito Brown, who supported the order, is barred from appointing replacements for board members until further notice, with Visiting Judge Thomas Pokorny scheduling a status conference on the matter for Thursday, April 9, 2020.

School management groups are circulating recommendations for supplemental funding and eligibility changes to address a substantial increase in the number of buildings in which students qualify for EdChoice vouchers. The State Board of Education voted Tuesday to endorse a subset of the groups' proposals, and several Northeast Ohio legislators wrote letters to General Assembly leadership urging changes as well. Barbara Shaner of the Ohio Association of School Business Officials (OASBO) and Will Schwartz of the Ohio School Boards Association (OSBA), also speaking on behalf of the Buckeye Association of School Administrators (BASA), briefed the State Board of Education on their proposal.

The first Computer Science Advocacy Day was held in the Statehouse Atrium Tuesday. STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) students and teachers from across Ohio heard from legislators and leaders in the technology industry. Lt. Gov. Jon Husted and Rep. Rick Carfagna (R-Westerville) were presented with 2019 "Ohio Champions of Computer Science" awards.

A recent report from the Fordham Institute examining the performance of schools in high-poverty areas on the state report card concluded that while socioeconomic status is highly correlated with the state's achievement measures, high marks on growth or "value added" measures indicate that quality learning is still taking place at schools in poorer districts. The report, "Poverty Isn't Destiny," says that the state's growth measures are more "poverty-neutral" than its achievement measures, meaning that students' socioeconomic characteristics are not highly predictive of the growth they can achieve in a year.

Lawmakers' efforts to scale back testing for high school students could lead to situations where some middle school math students face more testing, Ohio Department of Education (ODE) staff told a State Board of Education committee Tuesday.

Lorain City Schools announced this week its academic distress commission named a new CEO to take over for departing CEO David Hardy Jr. in January. Greg Ring, who retired last year as superintendent of the Educational Service Center of Lorain County, will lead the school district. He also served as superintendent of Firelands Local Schools.

The new Ohio Online Learning Coalition announced its formation and staff leadership Thursday. Made up of representatives from e-schools, the coalition said it will focus on "sharing best practices, identifying ways to enrich students' experience with online education, and sharing information about

the advantages offered by technology-based instruction." The group hired Colleen Grady as its executive director.

ELECTIONS

Secretary of State Frank LaRose said Friday that 52 counties have completed more than half of the steps in a security directive he issued earlier this year, but he said there are still a few that have fallen behind and will need help to get things done before a Jan. 31, 2020 deadline he set. The directive asked counties to meet a multi-point list of requirements, including installing devices on county boards of elections networks that can detect intrusions by outside entities; conducting an assessment and annual training on cyber security and physical security; and conducting background checks on key employees in boards of elections offices.

A number of voting rights groups sent a letter to Secretary of State Frank LaRose and Attorney General Dave Yost this week questioning the need to announce an investigation into a number of noncitizens who either registered to vote or cast a ballot in an election. LaRose had announced earlier that his office had identified 77 individuals who cast a ballot in an Ohio election and 277 individuals who registered to vote in Ohio who appeared to be legally present non-citizens. He said the names were referred to Yost for investigation and potential prosecution. This week, the voting groups, including the League of Women Voters of Ohio, Common Cause Ohio, All Voting is Local, and the ACLU of Ohio Foundation, said that the public announcement "undermines public confidence in our elections. Not only could most registration errors and irregularities be prevented if the Legislature were to pass automatic voter registration, but these kinds of announcements are misleading, premature and unnecessary."

ELECTIONS 2018

Secretary of State Frank LaRose Wednesday said he has referred 18 voters to prosecutors for allegedly voting twice in the 2018 General Election. LaRose said that the cases were discovered through the Electronic Registration Information Center (ERIC), a coalition of states that share data in order to improve the accuracy of voter rolls and enhance voter confidence in elections. A segment of those states utilized their partnership and information sharing to identify individuals who potentially broke the law by voting in two different states.

ELECTIONS 2020

According to Secretary of State Frank LaRose's office, four more Democrats have filed paperwork to appear on Ohio's Tuesday, March 17, 2020 primary election ballot. They include Tom Steyer, U.S. Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-VT), South Bend, IN Mayor Pete Buttigieg and U.S. Sen. Elizabeth Warren (D-MA).

Nick Owens, a member of the State Board of Education and a Brown County assistant prosecutor, announced Monday that he has filed to run for the Republican nomination for the 66th House District. The seat is currently held by Rep. Doug Green (R-Mt. Orab), who is term limited.

The following endorsements were made over the week:

- The Ohio Manufacturers' Association PAC endorsed Ohio Supreme Court Justices Judith French and Sharon Kennedy for re-election in 2020.

EMPLOYMENT/UNEMPLOYMENT

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), total nonfarm payroll employment rose nationally by 266,000 in November, and the national unemployment rate fell from 3.6 percent to 3.4 percent. BLS said the number of unemployed persons, at 5.8 million, was little changed over the month before.

ENERGY

The Ohio Consumers' Counsel (OCC) is urging the Public Utilities Commission of Ohio (PUCO) to permanently ban Verde Energy and PALMCo Energy from the Buckeye State and to reject a proposed settlement negotiated by the Ohio Attorney General's Office that would allow the out-of-state suppliers to resume operations in Ohio. PUCO staff previously declared Texas-based Verde and New York-based PALMCo "managerially unfit" to continue operating as competitive retail electric suppliers (CRES) and competitive retail natural gas suppliers (CRNGS) in Ohio, citing a long list of "unfair, misleading, deceptive or unconscionable tactics" in their operations and marketing. They together account for 40 percent of PUCO's open investigations into supplier-related complaints.

The emerging Energy Harbor Corp. is preparing to relocate downtown from FirstEnergy Solutions' (FES) west Akron campus in the first several months of 2020 after the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) recently approved the transfer of its Ohio and Pennsylvania operating licenses to the new corporate parent, effective with completion of FES' bankruptcy proceedings. FES/Energy Harbor will be the parent of Energy Harbor Nuclear Generation and Energy Harbor Nuclear Corp.

Chairman Sam Randazzo of the Public Utilities Commission of Ohio (PUCO) and his predecessor, Executive Director Asim Haque of PJM Interconnection's State and Member Services, provided a topical overview on electric grid reliability to the Senate Energy and Public Utilities Committee.

ENVIRONMENT

Williams County will receive \$500,000 in H2Ohio funding for its project to construct a new wastewater collection and treatment system that will serve approximately 90 homes in the unincorporated area of Kunkle, the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency (Ohio EPA) announced Friday.

The Cuyahoga County Common Pleas Court has imposed a \$284,600 fine and ordered mercury remediation at a Cleveland warehouse where the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) and Ohio EPA previously removed more than 400 tons of fluorescent bulbs and debris. The Ohio Attorney General's Environmental Enforcement Section is handling the case.

Research out of Ohio State University (OSU) recently published in the journal *Environmental Science & Technology* found that nature-based solutions to air pollution might, in many cases, be better and cheaper than technology at combating air pollution. In 75 percent of the counties analyzed, researchers found it was cheaper to use plants to mitigate air pollution than it was to add technological interventions such as smokestack scrubbers to the sources of pollution. In addition, the study showed that restoring vegetation to county-level average canopy cover reduced air pollution an average of 27 percent across the counties.

Central Ohio residents and businesses have reached a 50 percent waste diversion rate for the first time, the Solid Waste Authority of Central Ohio (SWACO) recently announced.

FEDERAL

U.S. Sen. Rob Portman (R-OH) reacted to the pending U.S. House's passage of the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA) during a call-in with reporters Tuesday, saying he was very pleased. "This is a really good agreement for Ohio. Our two top trading partners are Canada and Mexico and this allows us to send more of our Ohio farm products. It allows us to create more auto jobs in Ohio. It makes it easier for online sales for Ohio companies, so this is going to be good for the economy, good for workers, good for wages"

GENERAL ASSEMBLY/STATEHOUSE

House Speaker Larry Householder (R-Glenford) announced Friday that Taylor Jach has been named majority press secretary of the Ohio House of Representatives. Jach has experience developing strategic communications campaigns and managing media relations across the private and public sectors. She assumed her duties Monday.

The Joint Committee on Agency Rule Review (JCARR) approved all items on its agenda Monday without holds or questions, including Ohio Air Quality Development Authority (OAQDA) rules to implement the new nuclear and renewable generation program created by HB6 (Callender-Wilkin). Rep. Jamie Callender (R-Concord) noted this was the final meeting as JCARR chair, as that will shift to a Senate member in 2020. The next meeting is at 1:30 p.m. on Thursday, Jan. 16, 2020.

After adopting an amendment that made six changes to the legislation, the SB7 (Lehner-Hackett) Conference Committee voted 6-0 to approve the bill. The bill, which requires Ohio licensing agencies to provide at least a temporary license to military members and military spouses that move to the Buckeye State from another state. Both the House and Senate subsequently approved the report, sending the bill on to the governor.

It took about as long for conferees on career credentialing measure HB2 (Cross-Lepore-Hagan) to adopt committee rules and appoint a secretary as it did to iron out the differences between the House and Senate on the legislation Wednesday. The legislation creates the TechCred program and Individual Microcredential Assistance Program to help businesses find and train skilled workers. Working from the Senate version, the conference committee adopted two amendments and reported the bill unanimously. Both the House and Senate subsequently approved the report, sending the bill on to the governor.

The Senate included two priority House bills in a raft of legislation winning unanimous floor passage Wednesday, as President Larry Obhof (R-Medina) added an extra push to a House resolution labeling drug cartels "foreign terrorist organizations." Senators entered a series of 31-0 votes for HB4's (Richardson-Robinson) industry-recognized workforce credential and certificate programs, HCR10's (Wiggam-Plummer) petition to Washington for drug cartel classification as terrorist organizations, HB12's (Manning-West) newly created Ohio Children's Behavioral Health Prevention Network Stakeholder Group, SB103's (Dolan-Yuko) Cleveland Housing Court jurisdiction over environmental and safety complaints, SB175's (Schaffer) nonprofit civil immunity for handgun incidents and SB195's (Schaffer) revised winery exemption from retail food licensure.

The House Wednesday passed legislation that would prevent local governments from taxing or banning containers such as plastic bags, despite opposition from Gov. Mike DeWine. HB242 (Lang-Jones) passed 57 to 35. The House also passed legislation that would prevent hospitals from requiring nurses to work overtime as a condition of employment. Rep. Don Manning (R-New Middletown), a sponsor of HB144, said the concept is not new, as state and federal laws limits mandatory overtime in other professions such as trucking and airline pilots, all in the name of public safety. In other action, the House passed HB75 (Merrin) 54 to 39. Rep. Derek Merrin (R-Monclova) said the bill provisions, which had been included in the House-passed version of HB166 (Oelslager), the biennial budget, before it was removed by the Senate, would require legislative authorities to pass a resolution before they appeal property valuations to a board of revision. The last bill the House passed was SB9 (M. Huffman), requiring health plan issuers to release certain claim information to group plan policyholders. The bill passed 86 to 6.

Sen. John Eklund (R-Chardon) announced Wednesday that he will no longer run for the seat currently held by Rep. Diane Grendell (R-Chesterland). "I have not been troubled about challenging anybody, but going against an incumbent who has the unanimous and full support of the House Republican Caucus has presented many unexpected challenges," Eklund said.

The House State and Local Government Committee discussed its report on regular review of state occupational licenses Wednesday, with Chairman Scott Wiggam (R-Wooster) saying responses from entities in the report are expected in the coming weeks. State entities included in the report are the State Board of Education and Ohio Department of Education (ODE), Athletic Commission, Home Inspector Board, Ohio Environmental Protection Agency (Ohio EPA), Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR), Ski Tramway Board, Historical Boiler Licensing Board, Division of Securities, Ohio Construction Industry Licensing Board (OCILB), Ohio Department of Health (ODH) and State Medical Board. The report will be used in drafting legislation to "fix and clean-up" licensure requirements and included recommendations to eliminate a range of licenses considered duplicative or overly burdensome and to streamline the process for others.

The Legislature's Cancer Caucus Wednesday heard an overview of cancer-related provisions in the state's biennial budget, HB166 (Oelslager), as well as from the coalition Ohio Partners for Cancer Control.

The Senate released its January through July session calendar for 2020 Thursday, with 10 sessions days and another 10 if-needed dates spread from January through June. The first session date is scheduled for Wednesday, Jan. 22, though an if-needed date is set for Wednesday, Jan. 15. The final session on the calendar is set for Wednesday, June 3, with if-needed sessions set for Wednesday, June 10 and Wednesday, June 24. Breaks are scheduled for late February through the March primary, and for two weeks in April.

In its last voting session of the year, the House Thursday unanimously passed HB230 (Crossman) to designate the month of May as "Brain Cancer Awareness Month" and HB264 (Wilkin-O'Brien) to allow the Ohio Water Development Authority to provide for the refinancing of loans for certain public water and waste water infrastructure projects. The House also agreed to the Senate amendments to HB12 (Manning-West), creating the Ohio Children's Behavioral Health Prevention Network Stakeholder Group, by a vote of 84-1.

At the end of the session, House Speaker Larry Householder (R-Glenford) praised lawmakers for their work and for bipartisanship in the chamber, noting that of the 66 House bills that the chamber passed, 25 had bipartisan co-sponsors, and 18 of those were signed by Gov. Mike DeWine.

The Regional Economic Development Alliance Study Committee accepted reports from four workgroups Thursday, which are being harmonized into one final report as the committee has concluded its work. The topics included revenue sharing among local governments, increasing communication between business and educators, changes to existing programs and infrastructure needs.

In other action, the House Civil Justice Committee reported out HB355 (Wilkin-Swearingen) which provides qualified immunity to camp operators; the House Health Committee reported out HB383 (Clites) which designates March as "Bleeding Disorders Awareness Month"; the House Insurance Committee reported out HB339 (Merrin) which makes technical corrections to the laws governing insurance, and SB9 (M. Huffman) which requires health plan issuers to release certain claim information to group plan policyholders; the House Transportation and Public Safety Committee reported out HB411 (D. Manning) which creates the Ohio Sons of the American Legion license plate; the House Ways and Means Committee reported out HB196 (Powell) which exempts memberships to gyms or other recreational facilities operated by nonprofits from the sales tax; HB222 (Stoltzfus-Howse) which provides an income tax credit for employers' expenses training a commercial vehicle operator; and HB297 (Ginter-Powell) which provides an income tax credit for cash donations to pregnancy resource centers; the House State and Local Government Committee reported out HB358 (Sobecki-Sheehy) which designates Aug. 17 as "Eugene 'Gene' F. Kranz Day"; the Senate General Government and Agency Review Committee reported out SB165 (Schaffer) which addresses requirements for SNAP; and the Senate Insurance and Financial Institutions Committee reported out SCR5 (Schaffer) which urges Congress to pass the Mark Takai Atomic Veterans Healthcare Parity Act.

GOVERNOR

Regardless of where others stood, Gov. Mike DeWine and Senate President Larry Obhof (R-Medina) said Monday, it was always clear what John Kasich's position was on contentious state issues. They and Capitol Square Review and Advisory Board (CSRAB) Executive Director Laura Battocletti spoke at the unveiling of Kasich's official portrait as 69th governor of Ohio. Kasich is also a former U.S. representative and state senator. The Holocaust Memorial served as the backdrop for the painting, which was done by John Seibels Walker.

Gov. Mike DeWine signed two Senate bills into law during a ceremony held in his office on Thursday. SB77 (Hoagland-Williams) designates June 12 as Women Veterans' Day and SB5 (Kunze-Dolan) strengthens criminal penalties for those convicted of promoting prostitution, a bill aimed at stopping human trafficking.

Appointments made during the week include the following:

- AuBree LaForce of Vermilion (Erie County) as a student member on the Northeast Ohio Medical University Board of Trustees for a term beginning Dec. 6, 2019 and ending June 29, 2021.
- Wynette P. Carter-Smith of Springboro (Warren County) to the Ohio Peace Officer Training Commission for a term beginning Dec. 6, 2019 and ending Sept. 20, 2022.

- David R. McNelly of Millfield (Athens County) to the Ohio Statewide Independent Living Council for a term beginning Dec. 6, 2019 and ending Oct. 26, 2020.

- Kara B. Ayers of Mason (Warren County) to the Ohio Statewide Independent Living Council for a term beginning Dec. 6, 2019 and ending Oct. 26, 2021.

- Deborah Allen Schnaidt of Granville (Licking County) reappointed to the State Auctioneers Commission for a term beginning Oct. 10, 2019 and ending Oct. 9, 2022.

- Shana F. Marbury of Bedford Heights (Cuyahoga County) to the Governor's Executive Workforce Board for a term beginning Dec. 6, 2019 and continuing at the pleasure of the governor.

INSURANCE

Health insurance companies would no longer be allowed to utilize the step therapy process for stage 4 cancer patients under legislation proposed by Sens. Bob Hackett (R-London) and Hearcel Craig (D-Columbus). The bill, which has not yet been introduced, would require insurance providers in Ohio to eliminate "fail first" provisions that require patients to first try an insurer's preferred drug prior to receiving financial coverage for the therapy prescribed by a treating physician.

Three insurance organizations and the Ohio Chamber of Commerce provided opponent testimony before the Senate Insurance and Financial Institutions Committee on SB198 (Huffman-Antonio) on Wednesday, saying the surprise medical billing measure would increase health care costs. The insurance industry and the Ohio Chamber of Commerce have expressed support for the House's plan, HB388 (Holmes).

JUDICIAL

The Board of Commissioners of the Lawyers' Fund for Client Protection announced \$15,880 in restitution to five victims of attorney theft.

The former Lorain County judge who called Lynn Slaby, a former member of the Public Utilities Commission of Ohio (PUCO) and Ohio House, a "hobgoblin of a small-minded, mouth-breathing, Tea Party type" and the 9th District Court of Appeals on which Slaby once served "nothing more than an affirmative action program for intellectually challenged Summit County Republican lawyers" is practicing law again after the Ohio Supreme Court reinstated him to the bar Tuesday.

MARIJUANA/HEMP

Ohio Medical Marijuana Control Program (MMCP) patients are now spending significantly less on products sold at dispensaries than they were in January, Ohio Department of Commerce (DOC) senior policy adviser Greg McIlvaine said Thursday. Speaking during the first meeting of the Ohio Medical Marijuana Advisory Committee (MMAC) since June, McIlvaine told members that the average price of plant material has fallen from \$48 per one-tenth of an ounce at the beginning of the year to \$33 for that same amount in November. For manufactured products sold at dispensaries, the average price per "unit" has dropped from \$100 in April to \$51 in November, he said.

MEDICAID/MEDICAID REFORM

Ohio Department of Medicaid (ODM) Director Maureen Corcoran and Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities (DODD) Director Jeff Davis addressed the closing session Friday of the Ohio Association of County Boards Serving People with Developmental Disabilities, both highlighting efforts to personalize care and to give more assistance to multi-system youth with complex challenges. Corcoran also talked about the process of re-bidding Medicaid managed care contracts, saying a second request for information (RFI) will be released "soon" that "will give you some good strong indication of the direction we're going." The second RFI will reflect ODM's learnings from an initial RFI to gather general public input on the re-bidding process, she said.

NATURAL RESOURCES

White-tailed deer hunters finished the weeklong gun season with 63,493 deer taken, according to the Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR) Division of Wildlife. During the 2018 season, 60,752 deer were harvested during the same period. The top 10 counties for deer kills include Coshocton (2,322), Tuscarawas (2,127), Muskingum (1,972), Ashtabula (1,901), Knox (1,771), Guernsey (1,734), Licking (1,514), Carroll (1,473), Holmes (1,465) and Washington (1,464).

PENSIONS

The Ohio Retirement Study Council recognized departing Executive Director Mark Atkeson of the Highway Patrol Retirement System at a short meeting Thursday. Atkeson had told the HPRS board this summer that he planned to retire. In other business, the council approved a memorandum of understanding among the five pension systems for continuing health care coverage of council staff. Coverage is provided through State Teachers Retirement System, and the five systems are to contribute in proportion to their assets in cases where expenses exceed expectations.

PEOPLE

OhioX, a nonprofit organization focused on "growing Ohio's economy through technology and innovation," announced its formation Monday. The group will work to raise awareness, advocate and increase collaboration on those efforts, and will be led by Chris Berry. Berry is a recent co-founder of GreenBlock Group, a tech consultancy firm in Ohio, and served as chief of staff to former Ohio Treasurer Josh Mandel, including work on the OhioCrypto.com effort.

The County Engineers Association of Ohio (CEAO) installed its 2020 officers including President Jeff Stauch, Union County engineer; First Vice President Frederick Wachtel, Coshocton County engineer; Second Vice President Keith Bennett, Stark County engineer; Treasurer James Wiechart, Mercer County engineer; and Immediate Past President Jeffrey Linkous, Clinton County engineer.

Clinton County Clerk of Courts Cindy Bailey was named 2020 president of the Ohio Clerk of Courts Association (OCCA) at the annual winter conference, the association announced. Also installed were Lake County Clerk of Courts Maureen Kelly as first vice president; Butler County Clerk of Courts Mary Swain as second vice president; Fulton County Clerk of Courts Tracy Zuver as third vice president; Wyandot County Clerk of Courts Ann Dunbar as treasurer; and Guernsey County Clerk of Courts Teresa Dankovic as secretary. The immediate past president is Fairfield County Clerk of Courts Branden Meyer.

POLITICS

The Ohio Republican State Central and Executive Committee on Friday approved a new policy on the endorsement procedure for 2020's non-incumbent contested primary elections in the General Assembly. After an effort to table the measure failed by a vote of 10-40, the committee approved the new policy by voice vote.

POVERTY

A new report by the Center for Community Solutions shows that residents who live in poor areas of Ohio are likely to have significantly shorter life expectancies than those who live in wealthier areas. The study notes that part of Columbus's South Franklinton neighborhood has the lowest life expectancy in the state, or 60 years of age.

PUBLIC SAFETY

Following adoption of a provision in the transportation budget, HB62 (Oelslager), that removed the state's requirement to display a front license plate, Sen. Jay Hottinger (R-Newark) offered sponsor testimony Wednesday in the Senate Transportation, Commerce and Workforce Committee on his SB179 which would reinstate Ohio's requirement to display two license plates. If the bill is not passed, the state's front license plate requirement will be rescinded on July 1, 2020.

RELIGION

The Thomas More Society, a national not-for-profit law firm, teamed up with the American Nativity Scene to help "keep privately funded manger scenes in the public square for Christmas," including Ohio. "Baby Jesus" debuted at the Ohio Statehouse on Wednesday, making it official that Christmas nativities will be featured at half of the nation's state capitols this holiday season.

TECHNOLOGY

The first application period for the new "TechCred" program, supporting businesses in training existing employees to upskill them toward a more advanced position, closed on Oct. 31 and results for those applications were announced Friday. Lt. Gov. Jon Husted, who leads the Governor's Office of Workforce Transformation and other initiatives, said applications were approved for 234 employers, which will provide 1,576 credentials to current workers.

TRANSPORTATION/INFRASTRUCTURE

A joint legislative study committee looking at the future of transportation in Ohio turned its attention to a different funding mechanism during its Tuesday hearing, but questions remain on how to implement an alternative to the gas tax and whether such a mechanism would violate privacy. The Road to Our Future Joint Legislative Study Committee heard about the possibility of Ohio's moving to a vehicle miles traveled tax instead of a gasoline tax.

LEGISLATIVE ACTIVITY:

SENATE:

PASSED BY SENATE

- HB4 WORKFORCE CREDENTIALS (Rep. Tracy Richardson, Rep. Phil Robinson) To permit the Governor's Office of Workforce Transformation to develop industry-recognized credentials and certificate programs.
Vote 31-0
- HB12 CHILDREN'S BEHAVIORAL HEALTH NETWORK (Rep. Don Manning, Rep. Thomas West) To create the Ohio Children's Behavioral Health Prevention Network Stakeholder Group.
Vote 31-0
- SB103 GRANT CONCURRENT JURISDICTION-POLLUTION (Sen. Matt Dolan, Sen. Kenny Yuko) Revises jurisdiction of Cleveland Housing Court regarding both criminal environmental pollution cases and administrative review/appeal of building, health or safety code.
Vote 31-0
- SB175 CIVIL IMMUNITY-NONPROFIT CORPORATIONS (Sen. Tim Schaffer) To grant civil immunity to nonprofit corporations and persons associated with them for certain injuries, deaths, or losses resulting from the carrying of handguns.
Vote 31-0
- SB195 WINERY LICENSURE (Sen. Tim Schaffer) To revise the exemption from retail food establishment licensure that applies to certain wineries.
Vote 31-0

CONSIDERATION OF CONFERENCE COMMITTEE REPORT

- HB2 CREDENTIAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (Rep. Jon Cross, Rep. Michele Lepore-Hagan) To create the TechCred Program and the Individual Microcredential Assistance Program, to develop a grant program to support industry sector partnerships, and to make an appropriation.
Senate Accepts Conference Committee Report, Vote 31-0
- SB7 TEMP STATE OCCUPATIONAL LICENSES-MILITARY (Sen. Peggy Lehner, Sen. Robert Hackett) Regarding temporary state occupational licenses for members of the military and their spouses.
Senate Accepts Conference Committee Report, Vote 31-0

ADOPTED BY SENATE

- HCR10 DRUG CARTELS (Rep. Scott Wiggam, Rep. Phil Plummer) To urge the federal government to designate certain drug cartels operating from Mexico as foreign terrorist organizations.
Vote 31-0

HOUSE:

PASSED BY HOUSE

- HB230 MONTH DESIGNATION-BRAIN CANCER AWARENESS (Rep. Jeffrey Crossman) To designate the month of May as "Brain Cancer Awareness Month."
Vote 87-0

HB264 WATER DEVELOPMENT-LOAN REFINANCING (Rep. Shane Wilkin, Rep. Michael O'Brien) To allow the Ohio Water Development Authority to provide for the refinancing of loans for certain public water and waste water infrastructure projects.
Vote 86-0

CONSIDERATION OF SENATE AMENDMENTS

HB12 CHILDREN'S BEHAVIORAL HEALTH NETWORK (Rep. Don Manning, Rep. Thomas West) To create the Ohio Children's Behavioral Health Prevention Network Stakeholder Group.
House Does Concur, Vote 85-1

CONSIDERATION OF CONFERENCE COMMITTEE REPORT

HB2 CREDENTIAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (Rep. Jon Cross, Rep. Michele Lepore-Hagan) To create the TechCred Program and the Individual Microcredential Assistance Program, to develop a grant program to support industry sector partnerships, and to make an appropriation.
House Accepts Conference Committee Report, Vote 85-2

SB7 TEMP STATE OCCUPATIONAL LICENSES-MILITARY (Sen. Peggy Lehner, Sen. Robert Hackett) Regarding temporary state occupational licenses for members of the military and their spouses.
House Accepts Conference Committee Report, Vote 87-0

ADOPTED BY HOUSE

HR287 RELATIVE TO TRAVEL ALLOWANCE. (Rep. Larry Householder, Rep. Emilia Sykes) Relative to travel allowance.
Vote 87-0

PASSED BY HOUSE

HB75 PROPERTY VALUE CONTESTS (Rep. Derek Merrin) To require local governments that contest property values to formally pass an authorizing resolution for each contest and to notify property owners.
Vote 54-39

HB144 NURSE EMPLOYMENT-MANDATORY OVERTIME (Rep. Don Manning) To prohibit a hospital from requiring a registered nurse or licensed practical nurse to work overtime as a condition of continued employment.
Vote 80-13

HB242 CONTAINER USE RESTRICTIONS (Rep. George Lang, Rep. Don Jones) To authorize the use of an auxiliary container for any purpose, to prohibit the imposition of a tax or fee on those containers, and to apply existing anti-littering law to those containers.
Vote 58-35

SB9 HEALTH PLAN CLAIM INFORMATION (Sen. Matt Huffman) To require health plan issuers to release certain claim information to group plan policyholders.
Vote 87-6