



# Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission Monthly Legislative Update

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MID-OHIO REGIONAL  
**MORPC**  
PLANNING COMMISSION

**Joseph Garrity**  
Director of Government Affairs  
+ Strategic Initiatives  
(614) 233-4127  
jgarrity@morpc.org

## What's Happening

### *New General Assembly Convenes*

The 134th Ohio General Assembly is well underway. In addition to new members representing portions of our region, there are also new committee assignments in both legislative chambers. Of particular note is that Sen. Stephanie Kunze of Franklin County has been named the new Chair of the Senate Transportation Committee, the committee in that chamber that will review, amend and enact the state's transportation budget. Also, Rep. Erica Crawley of Columbus will be the Ranking Democrat on the House Finance Committee.

MORPC will be meeting with all members of our region's General Assembly Delegation to present our 2021-2022 Public Policy Agenda.

### *DeWine Introduces \$171.5 Billion Budget for FY 22-23*

Governor Mike DeWine introduced a \$171.5 billion all funds main operating budget for the FY 22-23 biennium on February 1. The budget which sees a 2% increase in General Revenue Fund (GRF) spending in FY22 over FY21 and another 3.4% increase in FY23, looks very different from what was anticipated a year ago when the COVID-19 pandemic closed down the state and the economy. Although DeWine suggested at the onset of the pandemic that he may need to tap into the state's Budget Stabilization Fund (rainy day fund), the proposal does not contemplate using the rainy day fund to balance in either fiscal year.

From a revenue standpoint, the Office of Budget and Management (OBM) projects lower revenue collections compared to the Legislative Service Commission (LSC) by \$487.8 million in FY22 and by \$390.3 in FY23. OBM Director Kim Murnieks explained that the DeWine Administration is trying to be conservative in their estimates due to these uncertain times to prevent the General Assembly and the Administration having to make future budget cuts. LSC Director Wendy Zhan said that her agency's higher tax revenue forecasts compared to OBM are due to more optimistic assumptions about economic growth over the coming months. LSC projects 9.6 % growth in from FY20 to FY 21, while OBM predicts just 7.4% economic growth during that period. In addition, LSC is projecting lower state-share spending on Medicaid than the DeWine administration.

Governor DeWine's budget includes a number of spending provisions that are targeted to benefit local governments and communities:

- » **Local Government Fund (LGF):** The Executive Budget continues funding for the LGF at its statutory levels. OBM projects that the LGF will generate \$425 million in FY22 and \$440 million in FY23.
- » **Investing In Ohio Initiative:** Governor DeWine is proposing an investment of \$1 billion from one-time revenue sources for this initiative that includes:
  - » **Expanded Broadband Access:** Investing \$250 million to provide grants to expand broadband access throughout Ohio, with the goal of ensuring that all households have the basic connectivity necessary to support children's homework, a job search, or online training.



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- » **Infrastructure Grants:** Invest \$200 million to provide up to \$2.5 million in grants to pay for infrastructure projects in communities.
- » **Homeowner Assistance:** The budget includes \$565 million in federal dollars to provide assistance to homeowners with rent and utility assistance, in addition to home energy assistance. The funds will be awarded to local Community Accion Agencies to provide relief to those struggling with the loss of income due to the pandemic.
- » **Transportation:** DeWine's budget recommendation continues to invest in multi-modal transportation including rail development, airport improvements, and public transit. Additional federal funding received from the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act (the second CARES Act) will be used in fiscal year 2022 for COVID-19 relief for the ODOT, local transportation agencies, and public transit systems.

The Ohio House Finance Committee, chaired by Rep. Scott Oelslager (R-Canton) has already started hearings on the budget even though the budget bill has not been officially introduced. It is expected that will happen by the middle of February. The "Transportation Budget" which includes appropriations for ODOT, the Ohio Department of Public Safety, and the Ohio Turnpike Commission will receive early deliberations before the House Finance Transportation Subcommittee this month. The main operating budget bill, containing appropriations for the next two fiscal years, needs to pass before the end of June.

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### *FY22-23 Budget*

House hearings on the governor's proposed FY22-23 budget began in the House Finance Committee with testimony from invited witnesses including Office of Budget and Management (OBM) Executive Director Kim Murnieks, Legislative Service Commission Executive Director Wendy Zhan and Ohio Tax Commissioner Jeff McClain. This followed the unveiling of the proposed budget by Gov. Mike DeWine and Lt. Gov. Jon Husted. The budget, which sees a 2 percent increase in General Revenue Fund (GRF) spending in FY22 over FY21 and another 3.4 percent increase in FY23, looks very different from what was anticipated a year ago when the COVID-19 pandemic closed down the state and the economy. All this without having to touch the state's Rainy Day Fund (RDF). That is largely due, according to DeWine, to the influx of federal funds into the state in addition to steps the state took early on which included freezing and cutting spending and then refinancing the state's debt as well as the unintended consequences of the pandemic's shifting consumers' buying habits from purchasing services — which are not subject to the state sales tax — to purchasing goods, which are resulting in an increase in the state's sales tax revenue.

Gov. DeWine proposed a \$1 billion COVID recovery initiative as part of his proposed FY22-23 budget. He explained that the proposal, which uses one-time funds only, seeks investments of \$460 million to help small businesses, \$250 million for expansion of broadband access and \$70 million to strengthen the state workforce as part of a goal for Ohio to emerge from the pandemic "even stronger." The aid to small businesses includes grants totaling \$200 million for bars and restaurants, \$150 million in general relief, \$50 million for the lodging industry, \$40 million for indoor entertainment venues and \$20 million for new businesses that were often unable to receive previous funding.

During the first hearing in the House Finance Committee on the governor's proposed budget, Office of Budget and Management (OBM) Director Kim Murnieks said it shouldn't be a surprise that the OBM FY22-23 revenue forecast is lower than that of the Legislative Service Commission (LSC): "It's ... pretty normal for OBM's forecast to be more conservative than LSC's forecast because we have to implement the budget after it's passed. We have to live with it for two years, and live within it for two years. So it really doesn't serve us well to be overly optimistic," Murnieks said. LSC Director Wendy Zhan said her agency's higher tax revenue forecasts compared to OBM's — \$487.8 million more in FY22 and \$390.3 million in FY23 — are driven substantially by LSC's more optimistic view of how much tax revenue will grow in FY21. LSC predicts 9.6 percent growth from FY20 to FY21, while OBM predicts 7.4 percent.

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## ***Attorney General***

Attorney General Dave Yost says he supports the indictment of former Columbus police Ofc. Adam Coy for murder and dereliction of duty in the December shooting death of Andre Hill, and will prosecute the case with full confidence in the grand jury's findings. Yost responded to the indictment after the Franklin County Grand Jury charged the 19-year police veteran with murder, felonious assault and two counts of dereliction of duty for failing to activate his body camera and failing to inform fellow officers that "he felt Mr. Hill presented a danger," the AG said. The grand jury no-billed or rejected charges for "purposeful murder."

## ***Business/Corporate***

The application window for the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) re-opened though the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) said there is an initial limit to only community financial institutions (CFIs) in order to "promote access to capital." The First Draw loan window for CFIs opens first, followed by the window for Second Draw PPP Loans. The program will open to all participating lenders shortly afterward, the SBA said. This PPP round involves up to \$284 billion that can be used for job retention and certain other expenses through March 31. Certain existing PPP borrowers can apply for the Second Draw loans as well, if they have less than 300 employees and can demonstrate at least a 25 percent reduction in gross receipts between comparable quarters in 2019 and 2020.

## ***Census***

With a perfect storm of aging residents, low birth rates, COVID-19 deaths and immigration cutbacks, 16 states saw population decreases last year as the United States experienced the slowest national population growth since the Great Depression. The nation grew only about 7 percent between 2010 and 2020, similar to the previous historic low between 1930 and 1940, according to new Census Bureau estimates, which do not reflect the 2020 census counts. The agency will release the final 2020 census tally in March.

## ***Civil Rights***

Monday, Jan. 18 was Martin Luther King, Jr. Day, the nation's annual observance of the life and teachings of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. But this year, that observance was much different as breakfasts, marches and other events across the state and nation were cancelled or moved online. This followed now 10 months of lockdowns due to the COVID-19 pandemic which has claimed a disproportionate number of African Americans and the civil unrest first fueled by the Black Lives Matter protests this summer over the deaths of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor at the hands of police and then the Jan. 6 siege of the nation's Capitol. It came, however, just ahead of the inauguration of the nation's first Black and Asian Vice President in Kamala Harris.

The Columbus Metropolitan Club (CMC) returned to its ongoing series "Racism: Where Do We Go from Here?" with perspectives from activists in the Columbus area. LaShaun Carter, assistant executive director at Franklin County Children Services, hosted the event and opened the discussion with his thoughts on the current political moment and its toll on the Black community. "If hindsight is 2020, what are we willing to do differently in 2021 to dismantle the influence of systemic racism? What we have come to understand is that the system that is institutional racism was created, implemented and sustained with intentionality, and it is that same intentionality that is required to dismantle it," he commented.

## ***Coronavirus***

Scientists at the Ohio State University Wexner Medical Center and College of Medicine announced that they have discovered a new variant of SARS-Cov-2, the virus that causes COVID-19. While the new variant carries a mutation identical to the U.K. strain, "it likely arose in a virus strain already present in the United States," they said. The researchers also report the evolution of another U.S. strain that acquired three other gene mutations not previously seen together in SARS-CoV2. As Ohioans age 80 and older become eligible to receive their COVID-19 vaccinations, the Ohio Department of Health (ODH)

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will launch a new online tool to assist residents in finding a provider that has been allotted vaccines, Gov. Mike DeWine said during his biweekly coronavirus briefing.

The coronavirus.ohio.gov tool, is searchable by zip code and county, but it will not be updated in real-time, the governor said. Those eligible to receive a vaccine should consult local resources to determine up-to-date vaccine availability. Ohioans can find additional information about providers administering vaccines by calling their local health department or visiting their local health department website.

Roughly 800 Ohio health providers will begin administering COVID-19 vaccinations to individuals age 80 and older, Gov. Mike DeWine announced. The governor said there are about 420,000 Ohioans in that age range, and the state is expecting about 100,000 vaccines to be delivered. The eligibility timeline for non-80-plus-year-old individuals in Phase 1B is as follows: Individuals with both a severe congenital, developmental or early-onset medical disorder and a developmental or intellectual disability will be among the first people under age 65 to be eligible for the COVID-19 vaccine, Gov. Mike DeWine announced. Those individuals, along with people age 75 and older, are now eligible to receive COVID-19 vaccinations.

The Ohio Department of Health (ODH) said it was immediately suspending a vaccine provider in Columbus after learning the company had potentially mishandled doses of the Moderna COVID-19 vaccine, leading to 890 doses going to waste. ODH said it took immediate action to suspend SpecialtyRX and is asking the Ohio State Board of Pharmacy to open an investigation.

Gov. Mike DeWine and Ohio First Lady Fran DeWine received their first dose of the COVID-19 vaccine. The governor has also discussed equity in vaccine distribution. The Ohio Legislative Black Caucus Foundation had called on DeWine to specially define ways his administration would address the low vaccination rate for Black Ohioans.

The Health Policy Institute of Ohio (HPIO) said that its examination of data on vaccinations given in Ohio found some data on ethnicity and race for those receiving the COVID-19 vaccination was unknown, which it said will make it harder for policymakers to know if vaccine efforts are reaching communities of color. HPIO said its analysis found that the race of COVID-19 vaccine recipients is unknown for more than one in eight vaccinations administered in the state, and ethnicity is unknown in more than one in four.

Gov. DeWine said his administration will be making the vaccine available to those 65 and older starting the week of Feb. 8, but after that, he will not be expanding the eligibility. With nearly 2.5 million Ohioans in the 65 and older age range, he said it will take time to get that group vaccinated. Asked when he would estimate the rest of the population would be eligible, DeWine refused to speculate, saying it all depends on the availability of vaccines.

## ***Economic Development***

Greater Ohio Policy Center's (GOPC) highest priority for the FY22-23 operating budget is securing a policy change dedicating millions of dollars for the redevelopment of brownfields, GOPC Strategic Engagement Director Jason Warner said.

## ***Economy***

A new survey of Ohio economists by Scioto Analysis shows the majority think Ohio's economy will improve when K-12 schools can be safely opened in person statewide. The survey was conducted through Scioto Analysis' Ohio Economic Experts Panel, which has over 40 Ohio economists from over 30 Ohio higher education institutions. A majority, 19 of the 32 economists who responded, agreed that "Ohio's economy will receive a substantial boost as soon as K-12 schools can be safely opened in person statewide."

## ***Elections***

Secretary of State Frank LaRose announced that his office will offer an online portal for local candidates and campaigns to file their finance reports electronically.

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## *Elections 2022*

U.S. Sen. Rob Portman (R-OH) announced that he won't run for re-election in 2022, citing the increasing partisanship across the country and in Congress. Portman, who was first elected to the Senate in 2010 and who easily won re-election in 2016, said he doesn't plan to leave his seat early, and that he will use his time left to get things done for the state, including what he called "a number of oversight projects and legislative initiatives."

The U.S. Census Bureau said that it is scheduled to finish its apportionment counts by April 30, 2021. The release of the apportionment counts will kick off the process of drawing new district lines for Congress and the Ohio General Assembly. Ohio will also learn how many congressional seats it will have over the next decade, with the state expected to lose at least one seat.

## *Energy*

Sen. Mark Romanchuk (R-Mansfield), a leading legislative advocate for utility consumers, is starting the 134th General Assembly with new legislation to repeal key portions of energy subsidy bill 133-HB6 (Callender-Wilkin). SB10 (Romanchuk) would strip the "recession-proof" decoupling mechanism affirmed in HB6 as a special favor to FirstEnergy and limit the company to merely "excessive earnings" guaranteed in energy omnibus 127-SB221. And during the first hearing on the bill, Senate Energy and Public Utilities Chair Sen. Bob Peterson (R-Sabina) indicated the bill may be on a fast track with the possibility of calling for "all testimony."

## *Energy + Utilities*

FirstEnergy will be filing a request with the Public Utilities Commission of Ohio (PUCO) to zero-out its 133-HB6 (Callender-Wilkin) "decoupling" rider — an annual profit guarantee that would have doubled previously stayed nuclear charges for a total payout of \$2 billion in consumer subsidies absent state intervention, Ohio Attorney General Dave Yost announced. Senators were met with a united voice on SB10's (Romanchuk) partial repeal of 133-HB6: the current bill is a good start on correcting the "ill-gotten" gains of the House legislation and should be followed by a cumulative override of all consumer abuses in subsidy omnibus HB6. The Senate Energy and Public Utilities Committee heard from former Sen. Jeff Jacobson on behalf of the Office of Ohio Consumers' Counsel (OCC), energy counsel Kim Bojko on behalf of the Ohio Manufacturers' Association (OMA) and Senior Attorney Robert Kelter of the Environmental Law and Policy Center (ELPC), also receiving written-only testimony from a half dozen parties including PJM Power Providers Group (P3). All three witnesses said the Legislature should strip FirstEnergy's "decoupling" profit guarantees in HB6 and "significantly excessive earnings" exemptions in 133-HB166 (Oelslager) from Ohio law as soon as possible. And all three reminded senators of FirstEnergy's former CEO's reference to decoupling as 'recession-proofing.'

## *Federal*

As Democrats won both Georgia runoff races to take control of the U.S. Senate. U.S. Sen. Sherrod Brown (D-OH) is now the Chair of the Senate's Banking, Housing and Urban Affairs Committee. In his new position as chairman of the Senate Committee on Banking, Housing and Urban Affairs, he will place an increased priority on "housing," eponymous to the committee. "We'll start with a COVID package, with rental assistance to make sure we can avoid the wave of evictions that will sweep this community, sweep this country," Brown told reporters.

U.S. Sen. Sherrod Brown (D-OH) discussed his proposed legislation, "Direct Support for Communities Act, in a conference call with media that was joined by Ohio Mayors Tito Brown of Youngstown and Steve Patterson of Athens. The senator explained that the legislation would create a fund to provide direct assistance to Ohio cities, towns, villages and counties struggling financially due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

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## General Assembly/Statehouse

Rep. Thomas West (D-Canton) takes over as the new president of the Ohio Legislative Black Caucus (OLBC) for the 134th General Assembly from outgoing president Rep. Stephanie Howse (D-Cleveland). Other OLBC officers include the following:

- » First Vice President-elect Rep. Juanita Brent (D-Cleveland)
- » Second Vice President-elect Rep. Catherine Ingram (D-Cincinnati)
- » Treasurer-elect Rep. Erica Crawley (D-Columbus)
- » Sergeant-at-Arms-elect Sen. Hearcel Craig (D-Columbus)
- » Secretary-elect Rep. Sedrick Denson (D-Cincinnati)
- » Parliamentarian-elect Sen. Vernon Sykes (D-Akron)

The Ohio Senate released the list of its committees for the 134th General Assembly. The number of committees at 16 is the same as in the 133rd. Three committees from the 133rd have been dropped: the General Government and Agency Review Committee and the two finance subcommittees. The three new committees are the Senate Small Business and Economic Opportunity Committee chaired by Sen. Michael Rulli (R-Salem), the Veterans and Public Safety Committee, chaired by Sen. Frank Hoagland (R-Adena) and the Financial Institutions and Technology Committee chaired by Sen. Steve Wilson (R-Maineville). Other committees have been reconfigured. Sen. Matt Dolan (R-Chagrin Falls) retains his position as chair of the Senate Finance Committee. Sen. Nathan Manning (R-North Ridgeville) will chair Senate Judiciary while Sen. Louis Blessing III (R-Cincinnati) will chair Senate Ways and Means. Other committee chairs are as follows:

- » Agriculture and Natural Resources - Sen. Tim Schaffer (R-Lancaster)
- » Energy and Public Utilities - Sen. Bob Peterson (R-Sabina)
- » Local Government and Elections - Sen. Theresa Gavarone (R-Bowling Green)
- » Primary and Secondary Education - Sen. Andrew Brenner (R-Powell)
- » Rules and Reference - Sen. Matt Huffman (R-Lima)
- » Financial Institutions and Technology - Sen. Steve Wilson (R-Maineville)
- » Government Oversight and Reform - Sen. Kristina Roegner (R-Hudson)
- » Health - Sen. Steve Huffman (R-Tipp City)
- » Insurance - Sen. Bob Hackett (R-London)
- » Small Business and Economic Opportunity - Sen. Michael Rulli (R-Salem)
- » Transportation - Sen. Stephanie Kunze (R-Hilliard)
- » Veterans and Public Safety - Sen. Frank Hoagland (R-Mingo Junction)
- » Workforce and Higher Education - Sen. Terry Johnson (R-McDermott)

President of the Senate Matt Huffman (R-Lima) announced his chamber's appointments to a number of joint committees. They include the following:

- » Controlling Board: Sens. Matt Dolan (R-Chagrin Falls), Bob Peterson (R-Sabina) and Vernon Sykes (D-Akron).
- » Joint Committee on Agency Rule Review: Sens. Theresa Gavarone (R-Bowling Green), vice chair; Kirk Schuring (R-Canton), George Lang (R-West Chester), Sandra R. Williams (D-Cleveland) and Hearcel Craig (D-Columbus).
- » Correctional Institution Inspection Committee: Sens. Antani, Nathan Manning (R-North Ridgeville), Craig and Williams.
- » Joint Legislative Ethics Committee: Sens. M. Huffman, vice chair; Jay Hottinger (R-Newark); Rob McColley (R-Napoleon); Kenny Yuko (D-Richmond Heights); Thomas; and Antonio.

The Ohio Legislative Black Caucus (OLBC) criticized the appointment of Sen. Steve Huffman (R-Tipp City) as the chairman of Senate Health Committee based on comments he made last summer regarding why African Americans are more susceptible to dying from COVID-19 that groups criticized as racist. In a statement, Senate Republican spokesman John Fortney said Huffman "is a medical doctor and highly qualified to chair the health committee. He has a long record of providing health care to minority neighborhoods and has joined multiple mission trips at his own expense to treat those

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from disadvantaged countries.” Fortney added that Huffman “apologized months ago for asking a clumsy and awkwardly worded question. Sincere apologies deserve sincere forgiveness, and not the perpetual politically weaponized judgment of the cancel culture.”

House Speaker Bob Cupp (R-Lima) announced the members on the House standing committees. Rep. Scott Oelslager (R-North Canton) continues as chair of House Finance with other returning chairs including Rep. Kyle Koehler (R-Springfield) for the renamed House Agriculture and Conservation Committee; Rep. Kris Jordan (R-Ostrander) for House Financial Institutions; Rep. Scott Lipps (R-Franklin) for House Health; Rep. Tom Brinkman (R-Cincinnati) for House Insurance; Rep. Scott Wiggam (R-Wooster) for House State and Local Government; and Derek Merrin (R-Monclova) for House Ways and Means. There are 23 committees and five House Finance subcommittees in the 134th General Assembly, compared to 22 standing committees/subcommittees in the 133rd, which also saw five finance subcommittees.

## ***Local Government***

Franklin County Commissioner Kevin Boyce was unanimously elected board president by the Franklin County Board of Commissioners. Boyce previously served as a state representative, Ohio treasurer and Columbus city councilmember.

## ***Military Affairs***

The Adjutant General’s Department announced that Ohio Air National Guard (ANG) Brig. Gen. James Camp, state assistant adjutant general for air, was promoted to major general. Camp has held his current position since November 2017, and is responsible for directing ANG operations and establishing policy to ensure the mission readiness of more than 5,000 personnel assigned to four flying wings and six geographically separated support units in the state.

## ***Nonprofit Organizations***

The Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission (MORPC) announced its public policy agenda for the 134th General Assembly, saying that it includes a “new focus on racial and social justice.” The agenda was recently adopted by the MORPC board of representatives from local governments throughout Central Ohio.

## ***Public Safety***

In an effort to curb work zone crashes, the Ohio State Highway Patrol has released the Work Zone Dashboard — a detailed view of work zones across Ohio and the work that troopers around the state are doing to make them safer. The Work Zone Dashboard contains an interactive map with high-priority work zones highlighted throughout the state, as well as videos of troopers enforcing work zone violations. The dashboard was developed as a part of the Ohio Statistics and Analytics for Traffic Safety program.

The Ohio State Highway Patrol (OSHP) reported 10 deaths on Ohio’s roadways during the 2020-2021 New Year’s holiday according to provisional statistics. Two fatalities were the result of not wearing a safety belt when available, four were OVI-related and five were pedestrians. The four-day reporting period began at midnight Thursday, Dec. 31, 2020 and ran through 11:59 p.m. on Jan. 3, 2021.

## ***Redistricting/Reapportionment***

For the first time since the 1960s, Ohio will undergo a new mapmaking process for congressional and General Assembly lines that could restrain what kind of districts lawmakers can draw, and bring what some advocates hope are fairer districts. General Assembly districts are drawn by the seven-member Ohio Redistricting Commission, which includes the governor, secretary of state, and auditor, and four appointees of the General Assembly. Any map that is adopted requires a “yes” vote from at least two members representing each of the two major political parties in the General Assembly in order to be passed. In other words, there must be at least four members — two Democrats and two Republicans — approving the

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map. If the commission fails to adopt a plan due to an impasse, the deadline is extended to Sept. 15. If the commission adopts a plan by a simple majority vote by that date, the plan must be replaced after four years.

Congressional maps are drawn by the General Assembly and need the approval of two-thirds of the members of each chamber, including at least half of the members of each of the two largest political parties represented in the chamber. If lawmakers deadlock, the process is shifted to the Ohio Redistricting Commission, which must attempt to draw a plan that passes a bipartisan vote by Oct. 31. If that fails, it goes back to the General Assembly to draw a plan by Nov. 30. If the General Assembly adopts a plan by a simple majority vote, it must follow additional standards for districts including that the plan can't unduly favor or disfavor a political party or its incumbents; must not unduly split governmental units; and lawmakers must attempt to draw compact districts.

## **Taxation**

The General Assembly should pass legislation allowing municipalities — until March 2023 — to continue collecting income taxes from employees who are not physically working in the taxing jurisdiction of their employer due to the COVID-19 pandemic, according to the Greater Ohio Policy Center (GOPC). Gov. Mike DeWine should also create a task force to study how the pandemic has affected the municipal income tax system, GOPC Senior Manager of Special Projects Erica Spaid Patras said during GOPC's webinar laying out the organization's 2021 public policy platform.

## **Technology**

Lt. Gov. Jon Husted offered an overview of state efforts to expand broadband access in Ohio during a livestreamed Columbus Metropolitan Club forum on "bridging the digital divide", noting those efforts began before the pandemic that has since "lit a fire under [the problem]."

Lt. Gov. Jon Husted announced the state's latest effort to expand broadband access in underserved areas, as a pilot project will use existing Multi-Agency Radio Communications System (MARCS) towers in Scioto and Jackson counties. The towers are part of a statewide, wireless digital communication network for emergency and law enforcement personnel. The project will give Internet Service Providers (ISPs) an opportunity to apply for a state grant to attach the necessary equipment to six towers in the two counties, providing low-cost Internet access.

## **Transportation/Infrastructure**

Lima was named as the latest city to benefit from "Smart Gigabit Community" status as part of a joint effort between nonprofit US Ignite and Spectrum, and the project will work to reduce vehicle and pedestrian traffic congestion due to rail activity at the city's more than 40 grade crossings. Spectrum and US Ignite are partnering with DriveOhio and InnovateOhio as well, providing a multi-year grant and additional resources to the state for smart transportation initiatives.

The Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT) announced it has launched a new tool to help the media and the public stay up to date on the agency's snow fighting efforts. The ODOT Winter Media Center includes information about material usage, downloadable video b-roll and photos, story ideas, and links to ODOT's snow and ice page, weather information, and a live feed of ODOT's social media posts from across the state.

As technology in passenger vehicles gets smarter, researchers are looking to keep up by making roads safer and more efficient with technology that can communicate with these vehicles. That research and the challenges that come with it were the subject of a webinar that was sponsored by Ohio State University, AAA, the Transportation Research Center in East Liberty, DriveOhio, Columbus State Community College and Smart Columbus.

For the week ending Jan. 30, the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS) reported 47,786 initial unemployment claims to the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL). That is slightly fewer than the number of new jobless claims reported last week, which was 49,974. It was the highest number of new jobless claims since May 2020.



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## Utilities

OCC is urging Gov. Mike DeWine to break from his predecessors and appoint a bona fide advocate for average Ohioans to the Public Utilities Commission of Ohio (PUCO). Consumers' Counsel Bruce Weston is recommending Executive Director Greg Poulos of Consumer Advocates of the PJM States (CAPS), who is a past OCC staffer, for the seat vacated by former PUCO Chairman Sam Randazzo.

Over two million Ohio consumers already have given scandal-rocked FirstEnergy a \$4.5 million insurance policy in the first 14 days of 2021 and will pay at least \$102 million by year's end as part of its "perverse," "obscene" and "criminally offensive" "cash grab" if a Franklin County judge does not immediately halt the utility's 133-HB6 (Callender-Wilkin) decoupling charge, Attorney General Dave Yost advised the court in an amended filing supported by the Office of Ohio Consumers' Counsel (OCC). Yost asked Franklin County Common Pleas Court Judge Chris Brown to expand his Dec. 21 injunction against the state's collection of \$150 million in HB6 nuclear subsidies to include its \$310,722 per day decoupling charge, which ensures all future FirstEnergy revenues match the company's 2018 highwater mark, regardless of how much electricity it actually supplies in a given year. He says that represents an \$85 million annual increase over last year's surcharge, effective Jan. 1, 2021.

Commission's (FERC) Office of Energy Market Regulation; George Elmaraghy, and Independent and member of the Ohio River Valley Water Sanitation Commission (ORSANCO) and the International Joint Commission Water Quality Board; Louis Tosi, a Republican and partner at Shumaker, Loop & Kendrick in Toledo; Ronald Russo, a Democrat who serves as development manager for First Solar Corp.; and Stephen Serraino, an Independent who serves as general counsel, corporate secretary, and chief compliance and ethics officer for Michigan's Upper Peninsula Power Company.

PUCO approved the increase of residential natural gas rates by \$1.70 per thousand cubic feet (Mcf) for customers of Columbia Gas of Ohio and \$1.16 Mcf for customers of Vectren Energy Delivery of Ohio Wednesday. Columbia's standard choice offer (SCO) auction resulted in the "retail price adjustment" for the service period April 1, 2021 - March 31, 2022. Vectren's SCO auction resulted in a slightly smaller increase for the same service period.

# Legislative Updates

**Goal 1: Promote regionalism at the local, state, and federal levels of government fostering economic growth, prosperity, efficient use of resources, and a high quality of life for Central Ohio residents.**

- HB43** PUBLIC BODIES - ELECTRONIC MEETINGS (SOBECKI L, HOOPS J) To authorize public bodies to meet via teleconference and video conference.  
**Current Status:** 2/11/2021 - House Government Oversight, (First Hearing)  
**State Bill Page:** <https://www.legislature.ohio.gov/legislation/legislation-summary?id=GA134-HB-43>
- SB15** FISCAL OFFICERS-LIABILITY (WILSON S) To change the circumstances in which certain fiscal officers may be held liable for a loss of public funds.  
**Current Status:** 2/2/2021 - Senate Local Government and Elections, (First Hearing)  
**State Bill Page:** <https://www.legislature.ohio.gov/legislation/legislation-summary?id=GA134-SB-15>
- SB20** COUNTY UTILITY SUPPLY CONTRACTS (HACKETT R) To exempt county utility supply contracts entered into under a joint purchasing program from the 10-year maximum period for such contracts and to declare an emergency.  
**Current Status:** 2/3/2021 - Referred to Committee Senate Local Government and Elections  
**State Bill Page:** <https://www.legislature.ohio.gov/legislation/legislation-summary?id=GA134-SB-20>
- SB45** TAX INDUCEMENTS CERTAIN BUSINESSES (PETERSON B, KUNZE S) To enhance state and local tax inducements for businesses making substantial fixed asset and employment investments and their suppliers.  
**Current Status:** 2/9/2021 - Senate Ways and Means, (First Hearing)  
**State Bill Page:** <https://www.legislature.ohio.gov/legislation/legislation-summary?id=GA134-SB-45>

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**Goal 2: Achieve an advanced, inclusive, and exceptional transportation system that connects Central Ohio's people and products to the world.**

- HB47** ELECTRIC CAR CHARGING STATION GRANT REBATE (LOYCHIK M) To require the Director of Transportation to establish an electric vehicle charging station grant rebate program and to make an appropriation.  
**Current Status:** 2/4/2021 - Referred to Committee House Transportation and Public Safety  
**State Bill Page:** <https://www.legislature.ohio.gov/legislation/legislation-summary?id=GA134-HB-47>
- SB23** ILLEGALLY PASSING SCHOOL BUS (GAVARONE T) To impose a civil penalty when a driver who illegally passes a school bus cannot be identified, to designate the month of August as "School Bus Safety Awareness Month," and to designate this act as the School Bus Safety Act.  
**Current Status:** 2/9/2021 - Senate Veterans and Public Safety, (Second Hearing)  
**State Bill Page:** <https://www.legislature.ohio.gov/legislation/legislation-summary?id=GA134-SB-23>
- SB32** ELECTRIC VEHICLE CHARGING STATION (RULLI M) To require the Director of Transportation to establish an electric vehicle charging station grant rebate program and to make an appropriation.  
**Current Status:** 2/3/2021 - Referred to Committee Senate Transportation  
**State Bill Page:** <https://www.legislature.ohio.gov/legislation/legislation-summary?id=GA134-SB-32>

# Legislative Updates

**Goal 3: Pursue sustainability solutions that protect and conserve our natural resources and promote a diverse supply of clean, affordable, and reliable sources of energy for our growing region.**

- HB10** REPEAL HB6 - REVISE ELECTRIC UTILITY SERVICE LAW (LELAND D) To repeal Section 5 of H.B. 6 of the 133rd General Assembly to make changes regarding electric utility service law, to allow the implementation of energy waste reduction programs, and to repeal certain provisions of H.B. 6 of the 133rd General Assembly.  
**Current Status:** 2/4/2021 - Referred to Committee House Public Utilities  
**State Bill Page:** <https://www.legislature.ohio.gov/legislation/legislation-summary?id=GA134-HB-10>
- HB18** REPEAL HB6 (LANESE L) Repeal HB 6 of the 133rd GA  
**Current Status:** 2/4/2021 - Referred to Committee House Public Utilities  
**State Bill Page:** <https://www.legislature.ohio.gov/legislation/legislation-summary?id=GA134-HB-18>
- HB57** REPEAL HB6 ENERGY LAWS (SKINDELL M, O'BRIEN M) To repeal the changes made by H.B. 6 of the 133rd General Assembly to the laws governing electric service, renewable energy, and energy efficiency and the changes made to other related laws.  
**Current Status:** 2/4/2021 - Referred to Committee House Public Utilities  
**State Bill Page:** <https://www.legislature.ohio.gov/legislation/legislation-summary?id=GA134-HB-57>
- SB19** WETLAND MITIGATION-PROPERTY TAX (SCHAFFER T) To establish a property tax exemption for certain property used for wetland mitigation projects.  
**Current Status:** 2/9/2021 - Senate Ways and Means, (Second Hearing)  
**State Bill Page:** <https://www.legislature.ohio.gov/legislation/legislation-summary?id=GA134-SB-19>
- SB29** ELIMINATE AUTO ENROLLMENT-UTILITY AGGREGATION (HOAGLAND F) To eliminate automatic enrollment in governmental electric and natural gas aggregation programs.  
**Current Status:** 2/3/2021 - Referred to Committee Senate Energy and Public Utilities  
**State Bill Page:** <https://www.legislature.ohio.gov/legislation/legislation-summary?id=GA134-SB-29>
- SB44** REVISE HB6 FROM 133RD G.A. (RULLI M, CIRINO J) To repeal the nuclear resource credit payment provisions, and amend, and rename as solar resource, the renewable resource credit payment provisions of H.B. 6 of the 133rd General Assembly.  
**Current Status:** 2/9/2021 - Senate Energy and Public Utilities, (First Hearing)  
**State Bill Page:** <https://www.legislature.ohio.gov/legislation/legislation-summary?id=GA134-SB-44>

# Legislative Updates

## Goal 4: Promote effective data policies and the equitable deployment of digital infrastructure that benefit Central Ohio communities.

**HB2** REGARDS BROADBAND EXPANSION (CARFAGNA R, STEWART B) Regarding broadband expansion, including access to electric cooperative easements and facilities, and to make an appropriation.

**Current Status:** 2/11/2021 - House Finance, (Second Hearing)

**State Bill Page:** <https://www.legislature.ohio.gov/legislation/legislation-summary?id=GA134-HB-2>

**SB8** BROADBAND-ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE EASEMENTS (MCCOLLEY R) Regarding broadband expansion, including access to electric cooperative easements and facilities, and to make an appropriation.

**Current Status:** 2/9/2021 - REPORTED OUT, Senate Energy and Public Utilities, (Third Hearing)

**State Bill Page:** <https://www.legislature.ohio.gov/legislation/legislation-summary?id=GA134-SB-8>

# Your Government Affairs Team



**Steve Tugend**  
Director +Chair, Government Affairs  
(614) 462-5424  
stugend@keglerbrown.com



**Tony Fiore**  
Of Counsel  
(614) 462-5428  
afiore@keglerbrown.com



**David Ingram**  
Of Counsel  
(614) 462-5487  
dingram@keglerbrown.com



**Rusty Schuermann**  
Director  
(614) 462-5440  
rschuermann@keglerbrown.com



**Robert Dove**  
Associate  
(614) 462-5443  
rdove@keglerbrown.com



**Mike Culp**  
Government Affairs Advisor  
(614) 462-5477  
mculp@keglerbrown.com



**Andy Shifflette**  
Government Affairs Advisor  
(614) 462-5491  
ashifflette@keglerbrown.com



**Bev Staten**  
Government Affairs Specialist  
(614) 462-5455  
bstaten@keglerbrown.com