



THE FITZGIBBON GROUP

association management – government relations – strategic planning

Emergency Management Association of Ohio

Legislative Update

Prepared by: Michelle Fitzgibbon

Phone: (614) 378-2156

E-mail: michelle@fitzgibbongroup.com

Report created on June 8, 2025

- HB23** **CREATE ESCAPED CONVICT ALERT PROGRAM** (ROEMER B, WILLIAMS J) To create the escaped convict alert program.
Current Status: 6/10/2025 - House Public Safety, (Fourth Hearing)
State Bill Page: <https://www.legislature.ohio.gov/legislation/legislation-summary?id=GA136-HB-23>
- HB26** **REQUIRE STATE, LOCAL IMMIGRATION COOPERATION** (WILLIAMS J, FISCHER T) To require state and local authorities to cooperate with the federal government in the enforcement of immigration laws, to prescribe funding reductions for noncompliance, to name this act the Protecting Ohio Communities Act, and to declare an emergency.
Current Status: 4/29/2025 - House Public Safety, (First Hearing)
State Bill Page: <https://www.legislature.ohio.gov/legislation/legislation-summary?id=GA136-HB-26>
- HB96** **OPERATING BUDGET** (STEWART B) To make operating appropriations for the biennium beginning July 1, 2025, and ending June 30, 2027, to levy taxes, and to provide authorization and conditions for the operation of state programs.
Current Status: 6/11/2025 - Senate Finance, (Fourteenth Hearing)
State Bill Page: <https://www.legislature.ohio.gov/legislation/legislation-summary?id=GA136-HB-96>
- HB309** **LAW CHANGES-COUNTY FUNDING** (THOMAS D) To modify the law governing county budget commissions, property taxation, and alternative apportionment formulas for local government and public library funds.
Current Status: 6/11/2025 - House Ways and Means, (Second Hearing)
State Bill Page: <https://www.legislature.ohio.gov/legislation/legislation-summary?id=GA136-HB-309>
- HB335** **LAW CHANGES-COUNTY FUNDING** (THOMAS D) To modify the law governing county budget commissions, property taxation, county sales taxation, and alternative apportionment formulas for local government and public library funds.
Current Status: 6/11/2025 - House Ways and Means, (First Hearing)
State Bill Page: <https://www.legislature.ohio.gov/legislation/legislation-summary?id=GA136-HB-335>
- SB69** **INTENTION TO REFORM-STATE PUBLIC RETIREMENT SYSTEMS** (ROMANCHUK M) To declare the General Assembly's intent to enact legislation to reform the law governing the state's public retirement systems.
Current Status: 2/12/2025 - Referred to Committee Senate Financial



THE FITZGIBBON GROUP

association management – government relations – strategic planning

Institutions, Insurance and Technology

State Bill Page: <https://www.legislature.ohio.gov/legislation/legislation-summary?id=GA136-SB-69>

AGRICULTURE

Vineyards and wineries throughout Ohio are raising a glass in celebration of June as Ohio Wines Month. The Ohio Department of Agriculture (ODAg) is now offering additional support to the state's winemakers to help keep business flowing strong with the Vineyard Expansion Assistance Program (VEAP). VEAP is an incentive program created and funded by the Ohio Grape Industries Committee (OGIC) to help wineries and vineyards to invest in and plant high-quality, high-value grapes onsite instead of purchasing them from other states. Meanwhile, a kick-off event for Ohio Wine Month culminated in the recognition of some of the best wines and wineries the state of Ohio has to offer.

The Ohio Soybean Council (OSC) and the Vietnam Ministry of Agriculture and Environment have signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) to promote trade cooperation between the Ohio soybean industry and Vietnamese partners. Specifically, the MOU promotes trade collaboration elements like trade missions and promotional events, OSC said in a news release.

ATTORNEY GENERAL

Attorney General Dave Yost and colleagues in seven other states have secured a permanent ban against a Texas-based robocaller behind billions of illegal calls including millions sent to Ohioans, the AG said Thursday. "This scammer's line is dead -- and it's not coming back," Yost said in a statement. A federal judge in Texas has found John Spiller in contempt of court and imposed the harshest penalty possible, permanently barring him from starting future telecommunications companies or otherwise operating in the telecom industry. He is forbidden to collaborate with those aiding his illegal operations, make deceptive statements, or use aliases in government filings.

FY26-27 PROPOSED BUDGET

Senate Republicans' first round of changes to the FY26-27 operating budget bill keeps with the GOP inclination of the last several cycles to lower state income taxes, continues implementation of the new K-12 funding formula but with some money tied to performance, and proposes a \$1.7 billion unclaimed funds transfer to support major projects like the new Cleveland Browns Brook Park stadium development.



THE FITZGIBBON GROUP

association management – government relations – strategic planning

The Senate Finance Committee adopted a substitute version of HB96 (Stewart) Tuesday afternoon, and legislative leaders soon after provided an overview and took questions at a press conference.

Speaker Matt Huffman (R-Lima) discussed Wednesday ways the Senate changed the budget from the House's version, including the flat tax proposal, Browns stadium funding and education funding. He also discussed other topics including redistricting and Ohio Police & Fire Pension Fund contributions. Huffman said he was a "big fan" of the Senate's flat tax proposal, as his main concern had been whether that would affect the business income deduction, and it did not. There has been a "20-year journey" toward a flat tax, he continued.

House Minority Leader Allison Russo (D-Upper Arlington) was sharply critical of the Senate budget's flat tax proposal while speaking to reporters Wednesday, saying that would only benefit "the wealthiest Ohioans" as those making under \$100,000 would see "nothing" from it and people close to that amount "will see very little."

CHILDREN/FAMILIES

The time period between Mother's Day and Father's Day would be known as "Natural Family Month" under legislation proposed by Reps. Beth Lear (R-Galena) and Josh Williams (R-Oregon). "The natural family -- a man and a woman united in marriage, raising their biological and/or adopted children -- is the foundational institution in our free society," Lear told the House Community Revitalization Committee during sponsor testimony on HB262. "For generations, this family structure has provided stability, nurtured moral and civic virtues, and ensured the overall health and prosperity of our communities." Lear said the legislation uses the "bully pulpit" of the state to encourage more Ohioans to get married and have children, noting she believes Ohio's birth rate is too low.

CIVIL RIGHTS

A forthcoming House joint resolution would explicitly authorize same-sex marriage and interracial marriage in the Ohio Constitution, House Democrats announced Tuesday. The Marriage Equality Act aims to place a constitutional amendment on the November 2026 general election ballot, Reps. Eric Synenberg (D-Beachwood) and Anita Somani (D-Dublin) said during a Statehouse press conference. "Our constitution should reflect who we are today, not just who we were in the past. This is about recognizing the lived realities of thousands of Ohioans who deserve to see their rights respected not just in principle, but in practice," Synenberg said. "It has been nearly 20 years since Ohio voters last had the chance to weigh in on this issue and it's time we let them speak again."



THE FITZGIBBON GROUP

association management – government relations – strategic planning

CRIME AND PUNISHMENT

Gov. Mike DeWine and Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction (DRC) Director Annette Chambers-Smith announced Friday the state will award \$50 million for construction and renovation projects at 19 local jails across Ohio. The money is part of the Ohio Jail Safety and Security Program within the current capital budget.

Fraudulent Toledo investment executive Richard Scheich has pleaded guilty to a bill of information in Lucas County Common Pleas Court. He is among multiple co-defendants charged with deceiving and defrauding investors in the decadelong Northwest Capital Ponzi scheme. The Ohio Department of Commerce's (DOC) Division of Securities and the Ohio Attorney General's Bureau of Criminal Identification and Investigation (BCII) are investigating the Ponzi scheme. The AG's Special Prosecutions Section is handling legal proceedings.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT/URBAN REVITALIZATION

Gov. Mike DeWine's administration announced Monday the approval of assistance for six projects expected to create 716 new jobs and retain 1,337 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 \$50 million in new payroll and spur over \$39 million in investments across Ohio.

EDUCATION

The Ohio School Safety Center (OSSC) announced Thursday that 16 Ohio high school students have been selected for the 2025-2026 Ohio Student Safety Advisory Council. Gov. Mike DeWine created the council in 2022 to help OSSC leadership identify school safety concerns and develop innovative solutions to address them. Students from last year's council will be presenting their capstone projects at the 2025 School Safety Summit in June.

The Ohio High School Athletic Association (OHSAA) recently announced the winners of the OHSAA Sportsmanship, Ethics and Integrity Awards for the 2024-2025 school year. "Throughout the 2024-2025 school year, the coaches associations of the sports sanctioned by the OHSAA selected one of their own for an OHSAA Sportsmanship, Ethics and Integrity Award. Individuals selected reflect the values of sportsmanship, ethics and integrity through their professional responsibilities and are role models for student-athletes and others," OHSAA said in a news release.



THE FITZGIBBON GROUP

association management – government relations – strategic planning

Recently retired Marysville Schools Superintendent Diane Allen is the DeWine administration's nominee to serve as deputy director for the Division of Primary and Secondary Education at the Ohio Department of Education and Workforce (DEW).

Electronic Classroom of Tomorrow (ECOT) founder William Lager has turned to the 10th District Court of Appeals to halt an asset freeze imposed at the trial court, but the state argues the decision isn't ripe for appeal. Judge Kimberly Cocroft of Franklin County Common Pleas Court agreed this spring with her magistrate's recommendation to freeze Lager's assets. Cocroft previously found Lager and affiliated companies liable for more than \$100 million in state funding to ECOT, ruling he had violated the law against public officials' profiting from contracts.

ELECTIONS

An investigation into an electronic poll book in Perry County that had been "exhibiting odd behavior" found no evidence of malicious intrusion or compromise of the device, the secretary of state's office. Secretary of State Frank LaRose had ordered all counties that used the type of poll book, which had been newly purchased by Perry County but never used in an election, to switch to paper ballots for the May primary election. LaRose provided the update on the device as he issued his sixth cybersecurity directive to county boards of elections. The secretary of state's office said an investigation into the device by its Integrity Unit and cybersecurity team found that while there was no evidence that the poll book had been tampered with, "noncompliant configurations and storage protocols were uncovered that require correction in order to be fully compliant ahead of the November general election." The cybersecurity directive includes those remedial actions, as well as a number of other updates that county boards of elections must comply with ahead of the November election.

Secretary of State Frank LaRose Tuesday said his office is formally referring potential cases of fraudulent noncitizen registration and double-votes to Ohio Attorney General Dave Yost and attorneys general of seven states and the District of Columbia for further review and potential prosecution.

Secretary of State Frank LaRose Thursday announced he has certified the May 6 primary election official results, marking the completion of the statewide canvass by Ohio's 88 county boards of elections and formally affirming the winners. "Election officials throughout Ohio stepped up once again to deliver a smooth and accountable election for the people of Ohio," said LaRose. "Our continued focus on readiness and high standards are a model for other states to follow, and everyone involved should take pride in being a part of that." He also highlighted 11 local races that triggered automatic recounts and two that resulted in tie votes in order to stress the importance of participation in elections.



THE FITZGIBBON GROUP

association management – government relations – strategic planning

ELECTIONS 2026

Fifth District Court of Appeals Judge Andrew King Monday officially threw his hat into the ring for the Ohio Supreme Court in 2026, setting up a potential primary with current Justice Pat Fischer as they look to unseat Justice Jennifer Brunner, the last statewide-elected Democrat in office.

Democratic gubernatorial candidate and former Ohio Department of Health Director Amy Acton announced a four-day, 15 stop listening tour across Ohio "to continue her work of listening to Ohioans about how our leaders can best empower them to succeed and make their community stronger." The tour kicked off on Wednesday with stops in Akron, Kent and Youngstown.

The following endorsements were made over the week:

- The congressional campaign of Republican Kevin Coughlin announced the endorsements of U.S. Sens. Bernie Moreno (R-OH) and Jon Husted (R-OH), Secretary of State Frank LaRose, and U.S. Rep. Max Miller (R-Rocky River).

EMPLOYMENT/UNEMPLOYMENT

Rep. Bob Peterson (R-Sabina) invoked the myth of Sisyphus as he began to roll the boulder of unemployment compensation reform Wednesday. "From my experience, this is an accurate analogy. The unemployment compensation problem is actually simple -- the system either needs more money (raise fees), or reduce benefits or some combination of the two, while meeting both federal and state statutes. There have been multiple attempts to address this shortfall over the years, but the difficulty has always overcome the will of the Legislature," he said. Peterson, who is both chair of the House Public Insurance and Pensions Committee and sponsor of the new HB321, told committee members his proposal would bump the taxable wage base for unemployment compensation from \$9,000 to \$9,500 and impose a 0.14 percent of pay contribution on employees of "negatively rated" employers -- those who take more out of the system than they contribute. Of Ohio's 40 brackets for unemployment compensation taxes, 13 are negatively rated.

ENERGY/UTILITIES

The Ohio Department of Development (DOD) recently announced a total of \$5.15 million in grants to upgrade water infrastructure and promote economic development in seven communities across the state. The funding comes from the Residential Public Infrastructure Grant and Economic Development programs, both of which are supported through the federal Community Development Block Grant (CDBG). In total, this funding



THE FITZGIBBON GROUP

association management – government relations – strategic planning

will improve the quality of life for nearly 3,400 Ohioans, create dozens of new jobs, and open doors for future development opportunities, the department notes.

Ohioans could know a lot about the people and machinations behind the 133-HB6 (Callender-Wilkin) government bribery scheme next week after former executives and lobbyists for FirstEnergy deliver compelled testimony at the Public Utilities Commission of Ohio (PUCO). Subpoenaed to appear at PUCO at 10 a.m., Tuesday, June 10 are the following former officials of FirstEnergy: CEO Steven Strah; Senior Vice President and Chief Legal Officer Robert Reffner; Senior Vice President Dennis Chack of Product Development, Marketing and Branding; Vice President Joel Bailey of State and Local Government Affairs and Economic Development; Director Justin Biltz of State Regulatory Affairs; and former Director Ty Pine of State Affairs - all terminated following the company's deferred prosecution agreement (DPA) with the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) in 2021.

GAMING/GAMBLING

The House bill legalizing Internet casino gambling would directly harm the horse racing industry and would lead to significant job losses at brick-and-mortar gambling facilities, Ohio Horsemen's Benevolent and Protective Association (OHBPA) Executive Director Dave Basler said Tuesday. "The bill upsets the balance this General Assembly wisely created when video lottery terminals (VLTs) were legalized in 2013, undercutting an essential source of funding for the horse racing industry," Basler told the House Finance Committee during opponent testimony on HB298 (Stewart-John).

GENERAL ASSEMBLY/STATEHOUSE

All Joint Committee on Agency Rule Review (JCARR) agenda items cleared at Monday's meeting without legislator questions or public testimony, including a set of Ohio Department of Public Safety (DPS) rules on school bus construction standards. While there was little fanfare to those items, House Chair Jamie Callender (R-Concord) and Sen. Andrew Brenner (R-Delaware) remarked on the Ohio Athletic Commission's (OAC) having not performed a five-year rule review since 2019. Callender said OAC was a "frustrating" example of not completing that and had not returned phone calls from JCARR Director Ashley Frustaci, so he made a "special request" for their leaders to appear at the next JCARR meeting on Tuesday, June 24 "to explain why they have gone six consecutive years without filing for their five-year review rules and explain to us why they are not returning phone calls from JCARR."

Rep. Roy Klopfenstein (R-Haviland) was named as the new House Agriculture Committee chair Tuesday, following the resignation of former Rep. Don Jones (R-Freeport). In addition, Rep. Adam Mathews (R-Lebanon) became vice chair of the House



THE FITZGIBBON GROUP

association management – government relations – strategic planning

Energy Committee and Rep. D.J. Swearingen (R-Huron) was named vice chair of the House Judiciary Committee.

Palo Alto Networks Director of Government Affairs and Policy Thomas MacLellan gave a presentation on cybersecurity to the House Technology and Innovation Committee Tuesday, detailing how cyber threats are becoming more sophisticated, faster and more complex. The median amount of time between when attackers compromise a system and complete their attack has shortened from nine days in 2021 to two in 2023 and just hours in the latest attacks, while it takes an average of six days to resolve these incidents.

House members took the advice of several colleagues Tuesday and adopted "one big beautiful" dangerous dog bill incorporating the consensus best of HB240 (Lawson-Rowe-C. Thomas), HB241 (C. Thomas-Lawson-Rowe) and HB247 (K. Miller) -- now the legislative vehicle by way of an omnibus substitute bill. The House Public Utilities Committee confined testimony to HB247 and heard from Avery Russell, after whom "Avery's Bill" is named, her mom, the American Kennel Club, Nationwide Children's Hospital, Reynoldsburg City Attorney's Office, Ohio County Dog Warden Association, and postman Michael Schneider.

Wednesday's House session included passage of SB100 (Manchester), allowing Ohio Farm Bureau to offer health plans to its members; HB47 (Williams-Santucci), regarding human trafficking penalties; HB124 (D. Thomas-T. Hall), regarding property valuations; HB48 (A. Mathews-Santucci), increasing tax deductions for ABLE and 529 accounts; HB133 (Craig), providing a tax credit for small employers providing individual coverage via health reimbursement; SB27 (Johnson), designating March 20 as "Ameloblastoma Awareness Day"; and HB210 (Roemer-Plummer), regarding catalytic converter theft.

Wednesday's Senate session included passage of SB60 (Wilkin-Huffman), regarding veterinary telemedicine; and SB155 (Brenner-Ingram), regarding real estate wholesaling.

Reps. Bill Roemer (R-Richfield) and David Thomas (R-Jefferson) announced plans Wednesday for sweeping property tax legislation that incorporates pending bills and makes new proposals including elimination on levying inside millage by all jurisdictions but townships and authority for local governments to provide supplemental homestead exemptions, among other ideas.

House Minority Leader Allison Russo (D-Upper Arlington) will resign her caucus leadership position at the end of June, she announced Thursday. Russo's announcement said decisions about her "political future" will come later; she's previously acknowledged the possibility of seeking another office. She will be term-limited in the House at the end of 2026.



THE FITZGIBBON GROUP

association management – government relations – strategic planning

Rep. Jodi Salvo (R-Bolivar) recently participated in the 2025 White House Leadership Conference, according to her office. The conference, hosted by the White House Office of Intergovernmental Affairs in partnership with the National Association of Counties, aims to support county leaders and strengthen the relationship between federal and local governments.

In other legislative action, House Education Committee reported out HCR7 (Ghanbari-J. Miller), expressing support for Buckeye Boys State and Buckeye Girls State; House General Government Committee reported out HB244 (Grim-Piccolantonio), to designate March as Women's History Month; House Government Oversight Committee reported out HB31 (Humphrey-Stewart), regarding recording of parole board hearings; and HCR8 (Williams), encouraging congressional renewal of the 2017 Tax Cuts and Jobs Act; Senate Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee reported out HB64 (Thomas-Deeter), regarding hunting and fishing licensee discounts for seniors; Senate Financial Institutions and Technology Committee reported out SB65 (Lang), regarding ancillary product protection contracts and other vehicle laws; House Development Committee reported out SB6 (Roegner), regarding building inspections; House Veterans and Military Development Committee reported out SB39 (Johnson-Craig), regarding display of posters on benefits and services for veterans; Senate Armed Services, Veterans Affairs and Public Safety Committee reported out SR69 (Reynolds), regarding repression by the government of Bhutan; and SB179 (Johnson), regarding verification of the veteran status of imprisoned people.

GOVERNOR

The governor signed the following bills:

- **SB21 DESIGNATE RUTHERFORD B. HAYES DAY** (BRENNER A, REINEKE W) To designate October 4 as "Rutherford B. Hayes Day."

Judicial appointments made during the week includes the following:

- Antonio S. Nicholson to the Cuyahoga County Court of Common Pleas, General Division. Nicholson, of Solon, will assume office on Monday, July 14 and will be taking the seat formerly held by Judge Deena Calabrese, who was elected to the Eighth District Court of Appeals. He will serve the remainder of the unfinished term and will need to run for election in November 2026 to retain the seat.

HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recently updated their vaccine schedule for children ages six months to 17 years, adding a note about "shared



THE FITZGIBBON GROUP

association management – government relations – strategic planning

clinical decision-making" between a patient or parent/guardian and the health care provider. This followed a video where U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services Robert F. Kennedy Jr. announced the COVID vaccine "for healthy children and healthy pregnant women has been removed from the CDC recommended immunization schedule."

With Lyme disease being more prevalent in Ohio, it's more important than ever to take precautions against tick bites, Ohio Department of Health (ODH) Director Bruce Vanderhoff said Thursday. "Ohio has experienced a major increase in this tick-borne disease in recent years. Lyme disease used to be uncommon in Ohio," Vanderhoff said during a virtual press conference. In the 1990s, Vanderhoff said, ODH only reported 12 to 24 cases per year. "Compare that to 2023, when we reported over 1,300 cases -- or last year, when that number rose to over 1,700," he said.

HIGHER EDUCATION

The University of Toledo (UToledo) announced Thursday that their next provost and executive vice president for academic affairs is University of Akron Dean Dr. Mitchell S. McKinney. McKinney, who will join UToledo on Monday, July 14 is currently dean of the Buchtel College of Arts and Sciences at the University of Akron - a position he has held since 2021.

HOUSING/HOMELESSNESS

The Ohio Housing Finance Agency has announced Sens. Michelle Reynolds (R-Columbus) and Hearcel Craig (D-Columbus) and Reps. Allison Russo (D-Upper Arlington) and Brian Lorenz (R-Powell) as non-voting members of the agency's board. The four legislators are the first to fill the board's non-voting positions after those were created by legislation following recommendations from the Senate Select Committee on Housing in the 135th General Assembly.

IMMIGRATION

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has deleted its recently published list of "sanctuary jurisdictions defying federal immigration law" after sheriffs across the country -- including Warren County Sheriff Barry Riley -- criticized the list for being inaccurate. The news release announcing the list still appears on the DHS website, but the actual list is no longer available.

JUDICIAL



THE FITZGIBBON GROUP

association management – government relations – strategic planning

The Ohio Supreme Court focused on key initiatives designed to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of Ohio's judicial system in 2024, underscoring the judiciary's role in adapting to a rapidly changing world, according to the Court's 2024 annual report. The annual report was released recently with the theme of "Dynamic Innovation in the Administration of Justice: Perpetual Change Requires Continuous Quality Improvement," which the Court said reflects its mission "to adapt and evolve in safeguarding rights and upholding justice while remaining steadfast in its commitment to serving the people of Ohio."

MARIJUANA/HEMP

The General Assembly's marijuana legislation could result in the introduction of a constitutional amendment that would legalize marijuana with very few restrictions, investment adviser Sir Alan Mooney said Wednesday. "I have legislation I'd like to be introducing for a constitutional amendment to legalize cannabis like a tomato," Mooney told the House Judiciary Committee during opponent testimony on SB56 (Huffman). Mooney was one of numerous opponents who showed to testify against SB56 on Wednesday, with cannabis advocates saying the latest version of the bill is better than previous versions but still isn't close to what voters approved in 2023.

MEDICAID/MEDICAID REFORM

Experts in behavioral health gave dire warnings this week about the potential fallout if lawmakers enact and federal action trips a "kill switch" to terminate Medicaid expansion coverage. A Columbus Metropolitan Club forum focused on that topic Wednesday, featuring Maryhaven President and CEO Oyauma Garrison, National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) of Franklin County Executive Director Rachelle Martin, and health policy consultant Amy Bush Stevens, who works with the Health Policy Institute of Ohio (HPIO). Moderating the discussion was Greg Moody, director of professional development for Ohio State University's Glenn College of Public Affairs, who served as top health policy adviser to former Gov. John Kasich when Ohio implemented expansion coverage. Gov. Mike DeWine proposed at the outset of HB96 (Stewart) budget deliberations a trigger provision that will automatically cease expansion coverage should the federal government's matching funds rate drop below 90 percent. House and Senate Republicans so far have kept the provision in their versions of the budget bill.

MILITARY AFFAIRS

Maj. Gen. John Harris Jr. formally retired from the military and as adjutant general in a ceremony Friday at the Ohio Statehouse, with Brig. Gen. Matthew Woodruff succeeding him in command of the Ohio National Guard. Harris is set to become director of the Ohio



THE FITZGIBBON GROUP

association management – government relations – strategic planning

Department of Veterans Services (DVS) following the retirement of former director Deborah Ashenhurst earlier this month and pending approval of the Ohio Senate.

Gov. Mike DeWine and Air Force Research Laboratory (AFRL) Commander Brig. Gen. Jason Bartolomei Monday signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) renewing the state's partnership with AFRL, located at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base (WPAFB) in Dayton. This extends previous agreements and formalizes the partnership to execute U.S. Air Force (USAF) and U.S. Space Force (USSF) missions while fostering advanced research, industrial partnerships and economic development within Ohio.

NATURAL RESOURCES

While Ohio's Great Lake, Lake Erie, is known as the Walleye Capital of the World, fishers in 2024 showed that walleye certainly isn't the only fish being caught off the state's North Coast. Fish Ohio records from the Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR) show 3,710 catches of trophy fish from 17 different species from Lake Erie during 2024, many of which represent records in state history.

PARKS/RECREATION

Children of all abilities are welcomed to Delaware State Park's new inclusive playground made possible through the ongoing collaboration between the Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR), the Columbus Blue Jackets, and other organizations. The playground, which recently opened, is designed with accessibility and inclusion at its heart, featuring sensory-friendly play structures, inclusive swings and a climbable model of the Blue Jackets' mascot, Stinger. Additional improvements include ADA-compliant restrooms and new sidewalks around the playground.

A kick-off event for Ohio Wine Month culminated in the recognition of some of the best wines and wineries the state of Ohio has to offer.

PENSIONS

The decision by two State Teachers Retirement System (STRS) trustees to forego written discovery requests in a case seeking their removal but then asking for re-opening of discovery is "inexcusable neglect," a judge ruled recently in rejecting the trustees' request to extend case deadlines. Former STRS Trustee Wade Steen and current STRS Board Chair Rudy Fichtenbaum face allegations from Attorney General Dave Yost that they breached their fiduciary duty to the pension fund, something they have disputed strongly. The allegations focus on their conduct related to potential STRS work with investment firm QED.



THE FITZGIBBON GROUP

association management – government relations – strategic planning

Pension contribution rates for police officers would rise to match those of firefighters, but rates could float based on actuarial requirements after parity is achieved under new legislation on the Ohio Police & Fire (OP&F) Pension Fund. Reps. Cindy Abrams (R-Harrison) and Thomas Hall (R-Middletown) testified Wednesday to the House Public Insurance and Pensions Committee on HB280, the latest OP&F funding proposal.

PUBLIC SAFETY

The DeWine administration recently launched a social media campaign encouraging parents to spend "quality time" practicing safe driving skills with teenage children who are becoming new drivers. It is produced by the Ohio Traffic Safety Office (OTSO) and compares the time spent on driving to activities such as soccer and ballet.

The Office of Criminal Justice Services (OCJS) released two requests for proposals (RFP) Tuesday for federal grants to combat violence against women and prevent crime overall. The STOP (Services, Training, Officers and Prosecutors) Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) and Edward J. Byrne Memorial Justice Assistance Grant (JAG) programs fund victim service providers and law enforcement, prosecution, court and correction agencies throughout Ohio.

Saying "enough is enough," Fraternal Order of Police (FOP) of Ohio President Jay McDonald announced Thursday the organization and local FOP lodges will carry out a united effort to bolster support for law enforcement officers' safety at all levels of government. That will include grading elected officials based on their level of support, and he said those deemed unsatisfactory will face FOP-recruited candidates. In the coming weeks, McDonald continued, the FOP of Ohio will release a legislative framework covering local and state laws, including how prosecutors and judges treat people accused of violent crimes. His remarks followed several high-profile attacks on police in Ohio during May, which, McDonald noted, is traditionally recognized as "Law Enforcement Officer Memorial Month" as well.

The Ohio State Highway Patrol (OSHP) is urging motorists to support roadway safety during what public safety officials call the "100 Deadliest Days of Summer." Running Memorial Day through Labor Day, this period sees an increase in traffic and, as a consequence, serious injury and fatal crashes, the administration says.

STATE GOVERNMENT

The Controlling Board Monday approved an extension of the contract to operate and maintain the Ohio Lottery's traditional gaming systems during a lengthy meeting that saw one lawmaker hold a number of waiver of competitive selection requests by agencies on the agenda. Sen. Shane Wilkin (R-Hillsboro) held all of the items on the agenda



THE FITZGIBBON GROUP

association management – government relations – strategic planning

involving a waiver, saying those particular requests made up 44 percent of Monday's agenda, "which is ridiculous." He said if that is the way agencies are going to handle their business, he is willing to spend his Mondays on Controlling Board questioning each of those items.

TAXATION

Gov. Mike DeWine announced Friday that the state's 2025 Sales Tax Holiday will run from Friday, Aug. 1 through Thursday, Aug. 14. The holiday sales tax exemption will apply to items priced at \$500 or less, purchased in-person or online, with some exceptions including purchases of services, watercraft, outboard motors, motor vehicles, alcoholic beverages, tobacco, vapor products or any item that contains marijuana.

TECHNOLOGY/AEROSPACE

House Technology and Innovation Committee Chair Thad Claggett (R-Newark) said Tuesday that he was confused and concerned about U.S. House-passed language to prevent states from setting regulations on artificial intelligence (AI) for 10 years. The item is part of a tax and immigration bill being taken up by the U.S. Senate and is opposed by the National Conference of State Legislatures and National Association of Attorneys General. Claggett told committee members he found the proposal "highly problematic" while understanding there were concerns about having 50 different AI regulatory systems.

TRANSPORTATION/INFRASTRUCTURE

Gov. Mike DeWine and Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT) Director Pamela Boratyn announced the recipients of nearly \$52 million in grants over the next four years to improve safety for bicycle and pedestrian traffic. Awarded through the Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP), ODOT said the funding will support 44 projects in 33 counties.

actionTRACK - Hannah News Service, Inc.

The Fitzgibbon Group
88 E. Broad Street, Suite 1450
Columbus, Ohio 43215
www.fitzgibbongroup.com