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**Emergency Management Association of Ohio
Legislative Update**

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- HB23 CREATE ESCAPED CONVICT ALERT PROGRAM, ALLOW PARENT COMPANY APPLICATION** (ROEMER B, WILLIAMS J) To create the escaped convict alert program and to allow a prior parent company of a bank to apply to the Secretary of State for the appointment and commission of banking police officers.
Current Status: 12/1/2025 - **SIGNED BY GOVERNOR**; eff. 90 days
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: 10/1/2025 - Consideration of Governor's Veto; Senate Overrides Veto on Item 66, Vote 21-11
State Bill Page: <https://www.legislature.ohio.gov/legislation/legislation-summary?id=GA136-HB-96>
- HB309 LAW CHANGES-COUNTY BUDGET COMMISSIONS** (THOMAS D) To modify the law governing county budget commissions and property taxation.
Current Status: 12/19/2025 - **SIGNED BY GOVERNOR**; eff. 3/18/26
State Bill Page: <https://www.legislature.ohio.gov/legislation/legislation-summary?id=GA136-HB-309>
- HB317 UAS PURCHASE LIMITS-FOREIGN ENTITIES** (MATHEWS T) To prohibit the purchase of small unmanned aircraft systems manufactured or assembled by a covered foreign entity.
Current Status: 9/30/2025 - House Technology and Innovation, (First Hearing)
State Bill Page: <https://www.legislature.ohio.gov/legislation/legislation-summary?id=GA136-HB-317>
- HB335 LIMIT INSIDE MILLAGE REVENUE INCREASES** (THOMAS D) To limit revenue



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increases from inside millage levies occurring due to a reappraisal or update.

Current Status: 12/19/2025 - **SIGNED BY GOVERNOR**; eff. 3/18/26

State Bill Page: <https://www.legislature.ohio.gov/legislation/legislation-summary?id=GA136-HB-335>

HB365 PROVIDE PROPERTY TAX REFUNDS (BRENNAN S, HALL D) To authorize a refundable income tax credit or rebate for homeowners and renters whose property taxes or a portion of their rent exceed five per cent of their income and to name this act the Property Tax Refund Act.

Current Status: 6/18/2025 - Referred to Committee House Ways and Means

State Bill Page: <https://www.legislature.ohio.gov/legislation/legislation-summary?id=GA136-HB-365>

HB413 CREATE LOCAL GOVERNMENT EXPENDITURE DATABASE (YOUNG T, PETERSON B) To create the Ohio Local Government Expenditure Database and require political subdivision participation, to require the state retirement systems to participate in the Ohio State Government Expenditure Database, and to make an appropriation.

Current Status: 2/17/2026 - House Technology and Innovation, (Fourth Hearing)

State Bill Page: <https://www.legislature.ohio.gov/legislation/legislation-summary?id=GA136-HB-413>

HB420 ELIMINATE PROPERTY TAXES BY 2030 (CLICK G, WILLIS B) To disallow and, by 2030, eliminate property taxes levied for a continuing period of time and to name this act The Taxpayers Freedom Trilogy – Act One: Discontinuing the Continuum.

Current Status: 2/11/2026 - House Ways and Means, (First Hearing)

State Bill Page: <https://www.legislature.ohio.gov/legislation/legislation-summary?id=GA136-HB-420>

HB421 ALLOW PROPERTY TAX REDUCTION BY INITIATIVE (CLICK G, THOMAS D) To reduce unvoted property taxes by initiative and to name this act the Taxpayers Freedom Trilogy – Act Two: Arresting Inside Millage.

Current Status: 9/15/2025 - Referred to Committee House Ways and Means

State Bill Page: <https://www.legislature.ohio.gov/legislation/legislation-summary?id=GA136-HB-421>

HB422 INCREASE PROPERTY TAX PASSAGE THRESHOLDS (CLICK G, NEWMAN J) To increase the approval threshold required for passage of certain property taxes and to name this act the Taxpayers Freedom Trilogy – Act Three: The Triumph of the Taxpayer.

Current Status: 9/15/2025 - Referred to Committee House Ways and Means

State Bill Page: <https://www.legislature.ohio.gov/legislation/legislation-summary?id=GA136-HB-422>



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- HB425 PROHIBIT TRESPASS, UNAUTHORIZED RECORDING-DRONES** (HOOPS J) To prohibit trespass and types of unauthorized recording with an unmanned aerial vehicle system.
Current Status: 9/15/2025 - Referred to Committee House Transportation
State Bill Page: <https://www.legislature.ohio.gov/legislation/legislation-summary?id=GA136-HB-425>
- HB466 LEVY REQUIREMENT-PROPERTY TAX APPROVAL** (LEAR B, RITTER K) To require certain subdivisions to obtain the approval of the body that created the subdivision before levying a property tax.
Current Status: 10/1/2025 - Referred to Committee House Local Government
State Bill Page: <https://www.legislature.ohio.gov/legislation/legislation-summary?id=GA136-HB-466>
- HB473 PROHIBIT PUBLIC EMPLOYER CONTRIBUTION PAYMENTS** (THOMAS D) To prohibit a public employer from paying employee contributions to a state retirement system.
Current Status: 10/29/2025 - House Public Insurance and Pensions, (Third Hearing)
State Bill Page: <https://www.legislature.ohio.gov/legislation/legislation-summary?id=GA136-HB-473>
- HB499 LAW CHANGES-COUNTY BUDGET COMMISSIONS** (BARHORST T, KING A) To modify the law governing county budget commissions and property taxation.
Current Status: 10/8/2025 - Referred to Committee House Ways and Means
State Bill Page: <https://www.legislature.ohio.gov/legislation/legislation-summary?id=GA136-HB-499>
- HB520 ESTABLISH COUNTY BLUE RIBBON COMMITTEES** (MATHEWS T, THOMAS D) To establish and convene a Blue Ribbon Committee in each county to review and assess each taxing unit within the county and each county program or department to identify duplication of services and generally to streamline and improve county efficiency and effectiveness.
Current Status: 2/4/2026 - **SUBSTITUTE BILL ACCEPTED**, House Local Government, (Third Hearing)
State Bill Page: <https://www.legislature.ohio.gov/legislation/legislation-summary?id=GA136-HB-520>
- HB598 ALLOW RESIDENTIAL STABILITY ZONES-TAXES** (SIGRIST M, HOOPS J) To authorize local governments to create residential stability zones where homeowners may qualify for a partial property tax exemption.
Current Status: 11/19/2025 - Referred to Committee House Ways and Means
State Bill Page: <https://www.legislature.ohio.gov/legislation/legislation->



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[summary?id=GA136-HB-598](#)

- HB608 LAW CHANGES-PROPERTY TAXES** (THOMAS D, GLASSBURN C) To modify the law governing property taxes and other local taxes.
Current Status: 2/4/2026 - Referred to Committee House Ways and Means
State Bill Page: <https://www.legislature.ohio.gov/legislation/legislation-summary?id=GA136-HB-608>
- HB673 PROPERTY TAX CREDIT EXPANSION** (STEPHENS J) To expand the statewide owner-occupied residence property tax credit to all tax levies.
Current Status: 2/4/2026 - Referred to Committee House Ways and Means
State Bill Page: <https://www.legislature.ohio.gov/legislation/legislation-summary?id=GA136-HB-673>
- HB695 NDA PROHIBITION-LOCAL OFFICIALS** (BIRD A, STEWART B) To prohibit certain local elected officials from entering into nondisclosure agreements.
Current Status: 2/12/2026 - Introduced
State Bill Page: <https://www.legislature.ohio.gov/legislation/legislation-summary?id=GA136-HB-695>
- 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 Institutions, Insurance and Technology
State Bill Page: <https://www.legislature.ohio.gov/legislation/legislation-summary?id=GA136-SB-69>
- SB275 ELIGIBLE HOMEOWNERS-DEFER PROPERTY TAX PAYMENT** (CRAIG H, REYNOLDS M) To allow eligible homeowners to defer the payment of a portion of their property taxes.
Current Status: 10/28/2025 - Senate Ways and Means, (First Hearing)
State Bill Page: <https://www.legislature.ohio.gov/legislation/legislation-summary?id=GA136-SB-275>

Friday, Feb. 13, 2026

ADDICTION/SUBSTANCE ABUSE

The Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) Detroit Field Division announced its 2025 seizure statistics for communities in Ohio, Michigan and Northern Kentucky. Those include 1,658 kilograms of cocaine, 1,054 kilograms of methamphetamine, 432 kilograms of counterfeit pills and 147 kilograms of fentanyl. The DEA also reported



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seizing 324 firearms and over \$17 million in cash and assets. Agents made 950 arrests in the region during the year as well.

AMERICA 250-OHIO

In keeping with America 250-Ohio's theme for February, "Ohio Works: Innovation and Industry," the America 250-Ohio Commission has launched a lineup of statewide events recognizing Ohio's contributions to innovation. At the center of February's events is the Ohio Innovation Trail, a self-guided tour throughout the state featuring more than 80 sites connected to inventors, manufacturers, engineers and scientific breakthroughs. The trail aims to showcase Ohio's role in transforming industries, transportation, health care and daily life, and includes sites like Thomas Edison's birthplace in Milan, the Wright Brothers Museum in Dayton, the Steel Museum in Youngstown and the Hoover Historical Center in North Canton. To find the map, go [HERE](#).

ARTS, SPORTS AND ENTERTAINMENT

The Ohio Arts Council (OAC) recently approved grants for 77 artists from around the state through its Individual Excellence Awards (IEA) program, an initiative recognizing artists across disciplines to support skill development and career growth, a statement released by OAC said. Out of the 77 artists awarded, 73 will receive \$5,000 and four collaborative artists will receive \$2,500, OAC said, adding that grant funding totals for FY26 reached \$375,000. Funding recommendations for IEA are made through an anonymous, open panel review process focused on the "exceptional merit" of past artistic work, OAC explained. This funding cycle, OAC said it received 469 applications from artists across the state in categories including choreography, criticism, fiction, nonfiction, playwriting/screenplays, poetry and music composition.

ATTORNEY GENERAL

Attorney General Dave Yost Thursday called Ohio "ground zero" for senior abuse in the U.S. and unveiled a new statewide campaign with the health care and financial industries to train private-sector employees and educate all Ohioans about a state "epidemic" that has quadrupled in less than a decade. Yost announced the partnership at a press conference joined by the Ohio Health Care Association (OHCA), Ohio Bankers League (OBL) and Ohio Pharmacists Association (OPA), expanding the awareness campaign launched with OPA last fall. "In the state of Ohio, we've seen a heartbreaking and terrible crime grow by 400 percent over the last seven years. The offense? A devastating yet often invisible crime called elder abuse," he said, highlighting his elder abuse [website](#).

BALLOT ISSUES



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Following certification of its petition language, Ohioans for Cannabis Choice held a press conference Monday to discuss the start of its signature collection effort to repeal sections of marijuana omnibus bill, SB56 (Huffman). Dr. Bridget Cole Williams detailed how she worked at the Cleveland Clinic before starting a medicinal cannabis business and working as medical director at Care Alliance, a federally qualified health center in Cleveland. Williams spoke in depth about the medical benefits people around Ohio have received from CBD products, saying removing them would take away that option for their physical and mental health.

FY26-27 BUDGET

Major tax sources exceeded collection estimates by more than \$100 million in January, according to preliminary data from the Office of Budget and Management (OBM). January revenues of \$2.9 billion were \$127.3 million or 4.6 percent higher than expected, bringing the surplus for FY26 so far to \$645 million or 3.7 percent more than expected. Total revenues for the first several months of FY26 have passed \$18 billion. Sales taxes yielded nearly \$1.4 billion versus forecasts of \$1.35 billion, with the non-auto sales tax up \$40.4 million or 3.4 percent versus estimates and the auto sales tax up \$2.7 million or 1.8 percent. Income tax collections surpassed \$1.2 billion, \$72 million or 6.3 percent more than expected.

FY27-28 CAPITAL APPROPRIATIONS

Lawmakers have formally kicked off their process for collecting and vetting community project proposals for possible inclusion in the forthcoming FY27-28 capital appropriations budget. Organizations seeking community project funding from the state must turn in their proposals to legislators' offices by Thursday, March 12. Lawmakers themselves will submit funding requests for projects they are supporting to their respective chambers' finance committees by Thursday, March 26. Sen. Jerry Cirino (R-Kirtland), chair of the Senate Finance Committee, discussed his outlook for the capital budget process with reporters Tuesday following a meeting of his committee. He said he expects the capital appropriations bill to pass in June. "I'll be meeting one-on-one with all 32 other senators to talk about their projects," Cirino said.

CHILDREN/FAMILIES

Reps. Gary Click (R-Vickery) and Josh Williams (R-Toledo) held a press conference Tuesday on their newly introduced HB693, which seeks to protect parents who affirm a child's biological sex -- rather than gender identity -- from punitive actions in the child welfare system solely on that basis. Click opened by citing *Daily Caller* reporting, saying the Cuyahoga County Division of Children and Family Services had a program to ask and record children's gender identity and define parents as abusive if they were not affirming



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of it. He said that could affect custody cases and disqualify people who wanted to be foster parents, and hearing about it led him to work with Heritage Foundation Senior Policy Analyst Laura Hanford on drafting the bill. HB693 would prohibit government agencies from defining parents as harmful or dangerous solely due to affirming the biological sex; prohibit them from proactively soliciting information on sexual orientation or gender identity and expression or recording it in a database; prohibit them from compelling parents to "affirm a child's false perceptions about their sex"; prohibit them from contracting with organizations that provide educational materials suggesting it is harmful to affirm biological sex; and prohibit them from denying anyone the ability to be a foster parent on that basis.

Gov. Mike DeWine and the Ohio Department of Children and Youth (DCY) announced Monday that the agency has received \$14.7 million in federal grants to support access to early care and education services. The Preschool Development Grant - Birth to Five comes from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families. DCY and DeWine said the grant funding will strengthen Ohio's early childhood system by upgrading technology, building a research and impact hub, and supporting early care and education providers through curriculum development, professional learning, and business support resources.

Sens. Bill DeMora (D-Columbus) and Louis Blessing (R-Cincinnati) held a press conference Wednesday introducing their new bill, SB341, which seeks to end child marriage in Ohio by prohibiting anyone under age 18 from marrying. The senators were joined by Fraidy Reiss, executive director for Unchained at Last; Emily Gemar, director of public policy at the Ohio Alliance to End Sexual Violence; Maria York, policy director for the Ohio Domestic Violence Network; and Stephanie Lowry, an advocate and survivor of forced child marriage. The legislation would set an absolute age requirement for marriage, eliminating current exceptions that grant 17-year-olds the ability to wed, the senators said. "It's our principle at this point," said Blessing in his remarks, "we really should not have a situation where children have the ability to get married in Ohio."

EDUCATION

Two broad education policy proposals, including some budget follow-up items, will be a near-term focus for the Senate Education Committee, Chair Andrew Brenner (R-Delaware) told *Hannah News*. In a phone interview, Brenner said as committee deliberations resume this winter and spring, he'll be focusing on his own SB311 (Brenner) as well as HB455 (Manning-Bird). Brenner's SB311 includes some follow up on items left out of the biennial budget, HB96 (Stewart), including provisions on schools' obligation to sell unused or underused buildings. The legislation specifies enrollment figures that can qualify a school as underused and addresses which educational entities have the right to purchase such buildings. "Local school systems have basically worked



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to avoid selling their buildings to community schools for the sole sake of preventing competition. Now, they won't say that, but just looking at it and the fact that this seems to be a pretty common practice, I feel like that is something that definitely needs to be addressed," Brenner said.

The State Board of Education (SBOE) spent most of its meeting Monday in executive session working to identify the next superintendent of public instruction. The accelerated timeline of the search was anticipated, current Superintendent of Public Instruction Paul Craft told *Hannah News*, considering his upcoming resignation effective July 2026. He added his leave may begin sooner than planned for reasons he didn't specify. His expected departure, along with other temporary requests for leave on the board's staff, has contributed to the swift hiring process, according to Craft, who added it's all being done to set the board up well for the expected transition. Later in the week, the SBOE announced that it would hold a special meeting on Monday, Feb. 23 and possibly Tuesday, Feb. 24, to interview the following candidates for state superintendent:

- Shawn Braman, superintendent of Northwest Local School District
- Jeffrey Greenley, superintendent of Belpre City Schools
- Larry Hook, superintendent of Forest Hills School District
- John Shepard, Ohio Department of Education and Workforce (DEW)
- Julia Simmerer, senior executive director of DEW's Center for Teaching Leading and Learning
- Philip Wagner, superintendent of Johnstown-Monroe School District

SBOE set the following dates for its meetings in the next school year:

- August, no meeting
- Monday, Sept. 14, 2026
- Tuesday, Oct. 13, 2026
- Tuesday, Nov. 17, 2026
- Monday, Dec. 14, 2026
- Monday, Jan. 11, 2027



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- Monday, Feb. 8, 2027
- Monday, March 8, 2027
- Monday, April 12, 2027
- Monday, May 10, 2027
- Monday, June 14, 2027
- Monday, July 12, 2027

Participants in the Department of Education and Workforce (DEW) Student Transportation Workgroup continued their deliberations on six tentative policy priorities and recommendations for student transportation across the state Thursday during its meeting. Susan Bodary, director at Battelle Education and the group's facilitator, stressed the following are preliminary and that there would be another draft for members to discuss at its next meeting:

- Adjust the deadline for transportation plans, with the preliminary plan due in June, and final plan due on Aug. 1 each year.
- Establish "strong, collaborative" relationships between public districts, community schools, chartered nonpublic schools and families.
- Ensure that districts responsible for transportation have "accurate, timely" data on transportation needs.
- Build an inventory of "successful" bus driver recruitment and retention strategies for districts and schools.
- Consider revisions to the current transportation funding formula to better meet the needs of both public, community and chartered nonpublic districts and schools.
- Increase flexibility for public districts, community and chartered nonpublic schools to manage transportation.

The Senate Education Committee during its Tuesday meeting heard a presentation from the Greater Springfield Partnership (GSP) on its efforts to strengthen the state's talent pipeline through student aptitude assessments. The presentation was given by Horton Hobbs, GSP vice president of economic development, and focused on YouScience Assessments and YouScience Navigators, both used as tools to assess and support a



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student's overall career readiness. YouScience Assessments test a student's aptitude, Hobbs said, and are given in the eighth grade. YouScience Navigators are individuals assigned to help students carry their aptitude score and interests through high school and onto the career field, Hobbs added.

Rep. Jamie Callender (R-Concord) is trying to bully and intimidate local school districts with recently introduced HB671 (Callender), and it won't work, according to former Ohio Supreme Court Chief Justice Eric Brown. Brown appeared with several representatives of the Vouchers Hurt Ohio (VHO) coalition on Thursday to promise immediate court action seeking an injunction of the proposed legislation to withhold state funding from schools involved in legal action concerning the state's school funding formula were it to pass the Legislature and be signed by Gov. Mike DeWine. Coalition Board Member Jocelyn Rhynard of the Dayton School Board said Callender had given VHO a gift with HB671, as the bill raises awareness of the egregiousness of the school funding system being litigated.

Rep. Rodney Creech (R-West Alexandria) was restored to committee positions Tuesday but not as a chair or vice chair, after Speaker Matt Huffman (R-Lima) removed him from all assignments last May. Creech was placed on the House Agriculture; Commerce and Labor; Local Government; and Public Safety committees according to notes in Tuesday's *House Journal*. Asked about the action and what prompted it, House Majority Press Secretary Olivia Wile told *Hannah News* only that it "was part of a series of committee changes the speaker made this week." In the Senate, Sen. Sandra O'Brien (R-Rome) was removed from the Finance Committee, according to a note in Wednesday's *Senate Journal*.

The Fordham Institute said Tuesday that Ohio State University political science professor Vladimir Kogan will join the organization as senior research fellow. He will remain an Ohio State professor. "Professor Kogan is an accomplished scholar who has become an influential voice in education both in Ohio and nationally," said Chad Aldis, vice president for Ohio policy at Fordham. "His work on governance details how often adult interests dominate school decision-making, provoking conversations about how to ensure students remain top priority. His analyses of Ohio's COVID-recovery efforts assisted state policymakers in understanding the scope of learning loss -- and the urgent need to boost achievement. His work with Fordham will continue challenging state and local leaders to seek ways that put Ohio students at the center of both education policy and practice."

ELECTIONS

According to the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL), recent changes to the way the U.S. Postal Service postmarks and distributes mail could have an outsized



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impact on elections and voting, particularly in a big federal election year like 2026. Tax returns could also be affected. The U.S. Postal Service (USPS) adopted a new rule last year that clarified that a postmark reflects the date when the mail is processed, not the date the USPS received the mail. With all states, territories, and Washington, D.C. permitting voters to use absentee/mail ballots under some circumstances, NCSL said changes to how mail is delivered and tracked would affect all states, but particularly those that accept mailed ballots postmarked on or before Election Day. NCSL said eight states and the district mail ballots to all active registered voters; another 28 states allow voters to request absentee/mail ballots without an excuse; and the remaining 14 states require a voter to provide an excuse to qualify for an absentee/mail ballot. By federal law, all states must also send absentee/mail ballots to military and overseas voters. In 2022 and 2024, about 30 percent of voters nationwide cast absentee/mail ballots, down from a peak of 43 percent during the pandemic.

ELECTIONS 2026

Hannah News published an updated list of candidates for the Tuesday, May 5 primary election. The list features candidates who filed with the secretary of state's office or county boards of elections before the filing deadline on Wednesday, Feb. 4 and includes data from all state representative, state senate, congressional, and statewide races on the ballot this year. The list, which will be updated as candidates are certified or withdraw from a race, can also be found on Hannah News' [homepage](#).

Issues with her petitions will force Rep. Erika White (D-Toledo) to run in the primary as a write-in candidate, according to the *Toledo Blade*. The issue was discussed at the Lucas County Board of Elections meeting Tuesday, where it was stated that White had filed petitions but withdrew from the race, before re-filing to run as a write-in candidate, the newspaper said. The newspaper said the reason for White's withdrawal was not made clear during the meeting, but her petitions show the declaration of candidacy may have included incorrect dates.

Democratic gubernatorial candidate Dr. Amy Acton and running mate David Pepper spoke to reporters Tuesday near OhioHealth Grant Medical Center in Columbus, discussing the range of affordability issues with health care now and what they would do to address them. They also contrasted their stance against an October 2024 statement by Republican frontrunner Vivek Ramaswamy that the Medicare and Medicaid programs were mistakes. Acton said she's traveled around the state for two years and people have concerns over "the cost of everyday life" -- including housing, child care, utility prices and property taxes -- but rising health care costs are now the number one issue. She said she's been working on that issue her whole career and knows about it personally from her own childhood. If elected, she pledged to work on affordability issues such as medical



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debt, the largest cause of bankruptcy in Ohio and the U.S., the cost of prescriptions, and surprise medical billing.

The following endorsements were made over the week:

- Vice President J.D. Vance on social media endorsed former Ohio Rep. Jay Edwards for Ohio Treasurer.
- The Associated Builders and Contractors of Ohio (ABC of Ohio) endorsed Zac Haines for Ohio Senate District 7.
- The campaign of U.S. Sen. Jon Husted announced the endorsement of U.S. Rep. Max Miller (R-Rocky River).
- The campaign of Republican congressional candidate Eric Conroy announced the endorsement of U.S. Sen. Bernie Moreno (R-OH).
- Former Ohio Sen. Niraj Antani announced on social media his endorsement of Jay Edwards for Ohio Treasurer.

EMPLOYMENT/UNEMPLOYMENT

The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) announced Wednesday that the nation added 130,000 nonfarm payroll jobs in January as the federal unemployment rate dropped to 4.3 percent, down from 4.4 percent in December. BLS said the job increases came mainly in the health care, social assistance, and construction sectors, while the federal government and financial activities sectors lost jobs. The number of unemployed people was 7.4 million in January, up from 6.9 million in January 2025, when the unemployment rate was 4.0 percent. BLS also noted in its monthly report that the number of nonfarm payroll jobs was revised downward by 15,000 jobs for November, going from a gain of 56,000 to a gain of 41,000. The December numbers were revised downward by 2,000 jobs, going from an increase of 50,000 over the month to a gain of 48,000.

ENERGY/UTILITIES

State regulators have just approved Ohio's largest behind-the-meter natural gas generating project, and it's not in the "Silicon Heartland" of Central Ohio. The 350-megawatt (MW) Apollo Power Generation Facility will provide exclusive power to the Meta/Facebook data center planned for 147 acres in Wood County, pushing total output from the state's six off-the-grid, gas-fired generating projects approved since last summer -- four now under construction -- to more than 1,200 MW when Apollo's 120 MW battery design is included.



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The renewable energy industry and environmentalists reminded Senate Republicans of their longtime defense of an "all of the above" portfolio including nuclear- and coal-fired electricity Tuesday and said the label still applies equally to solar and wind energy now disfavored by SB294 (Lang-Romanchuk), introduced last fall after passage of ratemaking overhaul HB15 (Klopfenstein). Former Ohio Consumers' Counsel (OCC) Janine Migden-Ostrander, now a fellow at Pace University Law School's Energy and Climate Center, joined representatives of Save Ohio Parks (SOP), American Clean Power Association (ACPA), Utility Scale Solar Energy Coalition (USSEC) and other renewable proponents in the Senate Energy Committee to oppose SB294, whose amended version Tuesday defines nuclear and natural gas plants as "affordable, reliable and clean" and limits generation siting to all three factors, thus excluding renewables. Other changes add advanced nuclear technology to Ohio's "prioritized" portfolio, clarify "foreign adversary" nations or interests including "critical materials" industries, and softens "reliable" to include power unavailable 24/7/365 but not enough to encompass wind and solar.

The Ohio Department of Development (DOD) recently announced \$700,000 in grants to support energy efficiency improvements in four communities. The funding comes from the Ohio Energy Efficiency Program (OEEP), which provides grants to help small businesses, local governments, manufacturers, school districts, colleges and universities, and nonprofits complete projects designed to reduce energy usage and associated costs. "Reducing energy costs is one of the most practical ways we can help our communities stretch their resources -- and their dollars -- further," said Lydia Mihalik, DOD director.

ENVIRONMENT

The Ohio Department of Development (DOD) recently announced nearly \$4.7 million in grants to upgrade water and sewer infrastructure, as well as support the growth of neighborhoods in eight communities across the state. The funding comes from the Residential Public Infrastructure Grant and Flexible Grant programs, both of which are supported through the federal Community Development Block Grant (CDBG). "This funding will improve the quality of life of thousands of Ohioans and open doors for future development opportunities," DOD noted in its release.

GAMING/GAMBLING

The Ohio Lottery Commission met Wednesday in Cleveland, receiving a presentation on financial data for January that included how sales were affected by severe weather across the state. Total ticket sales were \$340 million for the month, \$6 million -- or 1.7 percent - - lower than in January 2025 and \$18.6 million below the forecasted amount. Several racinos were closed due to the weather in late January so the video lottery terminal (VLT) usage declined sharply. Commission Chair Matthew Blair Jr. commented that he had expected the numbers to be "a lot worse" due to that. Draw-based sales games were



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\$156.3 million, up by \$3.4 million from January 2025, while net scratch-off ticket sales were \$183.7 million, down by \$9.3 million. Operating expenses in January were estimated at \$18 million. VLT revenues were \$112.1 million, with \$74.2 million distributed to racinos as commissions earned and \$37.6 million in revenue for the Ohio Lottery. Sports gaming gross revenue was \$78,474 for the month, with the proprietor's share at \$70,627 and the Ohio Lottery receiving \$7,847 before expenses.

GENERAL ASSEMBLY/STATEHOUSE

House committees are moving to a system where witnesses upload their testimony via the House website. The move mirrors one made by Senate committees about a year ago. On the www.ohiohouse.gov website, witnesses can visit the page for the committee to which they plan to testify, follow the link for the specific hearing date, then click the "upload testimony" button. There, they can select the agenda item on which they plan to speak, provide personal, organizational and contact information, upload a PDF, provide a summary of their position and include any special requests.

The Ohio Senate Wednesday unanimously passed legislation that would allow Ohio companies to offer carbon offset credits to businesses that choose to purchase them. Sen. Shane Wilkin (R-Hillsboro), sponsor of SB151, said the bill creates a voluntary program, citing several reasons to add regulation despite its voluntary nature. He said businesses that choose to enter into these agreements will get certainty as well as confidence that these credits are real and the companies offering them are following the proper rules and guidelines. The bill was one of six that cleared the chamber Wednesday with a unanimous 32-0 vote.

Sen. Nathan Manning (R-North Ridgeville) spoke on HB55 (Stewart), opening his remarks by asking his colleagues if they were "ready to talk about the exciting world of probate law." He said that while the topic may not be exciting, it will make a big difference as it addresses insolvent estates, or estates where there are not enough assets to pay all of the debts. It, too, passed unanimously.

Also passing unanimously Wednesday were the following bills:

- **SB216** (Cutrona) to designate a portion of State Route 7 in Mahoning County as the "Clarence "Sonny" Smith, Jr. Memorial Highway."
- **SB228** (Craig) to create the "Lifetown" license plate.
- **HCR13** (Hoops-Robinson) to urge Congress to designate the Buckeye Trail as a National Scenic Trail. Senators speaking on the resolution noted the designation will help bring federal funds to help maintain the trail and free up state funds for other trails.



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- **HCR22** (Roemer-Daniels) to encourage students in grades 1-12 to read the U.S. Declaration of Independence in the classroom during the 2025-26 school year in celebration of its 250th anniversary.

The League of Women Voters of Ohio (LWVO) Thursday presented a \$20,000 gift to the Capitol Square Foundation for the Ohio Women's Monument to commemorate the group's founding. Designed by artist Brenda Councill, the monument will commemorate Ohio's women's suffrage movement and honor Ohio women leaders past, present, and future. Its construction and dedication are scheduled for later this year.

In other legislative action, the Senate Health Committee reported out HB52 (Deeter) which revises the law governing the practice of certified registered nurse anesthetists and the Senate Transportation Committee reported out license plate bill, SB28 (Craig).

GREAT LAKES

Ohio State University's (OSU) Stone Laboratory announced recently it is seeking applicants for its Research Experience for Undergraduates (REU) Fellowship program. The 2026 REU Fellowship is open to undergraduates from any U.S. college, with the deadline to submit applications being Friday, Feb. 27, 2026, at 5 p.m. EST, OSU said. The fellowship runs from Monday, June 8, 2026, through Friday, July 31, 2026, and includes a stipend of \$5,500 along with free room and board for the duration of the experience. Throughout the program, OSU said REU students live on Gibraltar Island, where Stone Laboratory is located, and work alongside scientists conducting research on aquatic ecology, environmental policy, coastal wetlands and limnology.

HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

The percentage of infected ticks carrying the bacteria responsible for causing most North American cases of Lyme disease has jumped significantly in Ohio, a recent study released by the Ohio State University (OSU) said. The study, led by OSU doctoral student Ningzhu Bai and authored by Risa Pesapane, associate professor at OSU's College of Veterinary Medicine (CVM), and Andreas Eleftheriou, also of OSU's CVM, reported the percentage of Lyme infected ticks collected by researchers rose to 47.6 percent, up from 2.4 percent in 2010. The results indicate the risk of getting bitten by a tick carrying Lyme bacteria is just as high in Ohio as it is for those living in the northeastern part of the country, a region historically known for dealing with the illness, OSU said.

HIGHER EDUCATION



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Speaking on today's challenges, Baldwin Wallace University President Lee Fisher, a former Ohio lieutenant governor and attorney general, invoked the opening line of the classic Charles Dickens novel *A Tale of Two Cities*: "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times." "Those words could have easily been written today," Fisher said at a recent City Club of Cleveland forum. "It identified a paradox that defines moments of great upheaval when fear and possibility coexist. It feels both perilous and full of promise. It describes our moment perfectly -- especially the moment facing higher education." Fisher said America's colleges and universities are at the center of that paradox, adding that it is not a moment of "temporary turbulence." "The headwinds facing us are the result of a structural shift that's reshaping how we teach and how we learn, and actually how we live," he said. "Institutions long devoted to inquiry, evidence and disciplined argument are regarded by many as elitist actors, rather than a truth-seeking community."

Ohio students enrolled in short-term training programs may have access to federal funding starting in July this year, the U.S. Department of Education (USDOE) said in December 2025 following the conclusion of its Accountability in Higher Education and Access Through Demand-driven (AHEAD) Workforce Pell negotiated rulemaking committee, where consensus was reached to expand the federal government's Pell Grant program. Created to help students "attain high-wage, in-demand skills," USDOE said the Workforce Pell Grant program will address shortages in the labor force by filling the growing skills-gap and strengthening the talent pipeline. USDOE suggested in a written statement the expanded grant program will help students get jobs such as emergency medical technicians and automotive mechanics.

HOUSING/HOMELESSNESS

Home sales in 2025 were 1 percent higher than the year before, reaching sales of 126,015 compared to 124,446 in 2024, according to Ohio Realtors. The average price increased by 6 percent from 2024 to 2025, from \$243,167 to \$256,775. In December, home sales were up 6.9 percent compared to the same month a year earlier. The median sale price was \$250,000, up 2 percent from a year earlier.

IMMIGRATION

The Trump administration appealed a federal district court ruling that at least temporarily prevented the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) from revoking the Temporary Protected Status (TPS) that enables Haitians in Springfield and elsewhere to live and work legally in the United States because of poor conditions in their homeland. TPS for Haitians was due to expire early in February, but Judge Ana Reyes of the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia issued an order blocking DHS attempts to end the status. Reyes ruled that DHS Secretary Kristi Noem failed to follow the law on



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administration of TPS, which required her to assess whether current conditions in Haiti warranted an end to TPS and to consult with other agencies in doing so.

INTEL

Intel Corporation recently hired Ted Geer, an economic development professional with experience at the Ohio Department of Development (DOD) and Columbus regional organizations, as its director of state government affairs for Ohio. Geer previously worked for DOD as a deputy chief of policy and special projects. He was also manager for the semiconductor sector at One Columbus and economic development and infrastructure officer for the Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission (MORPC). He holds a bachelor's degree in economics from Ohio State University. At the national level, Intel also announced its hiring of Robin Colwell as senior vice president of government affairs. Colwell most recently served as a deputy assistant to President Donald Trump and deputy director of the National Economic Council.

JUDICIAL

The Ohio Supreme Court looks to improve on the "fraction" of attorneys who responded to its 2025 pro bono survey and last year's sharp increase in reported in-kind donations exceeding \$1.5 million. It is once again asking nearly 44,000 active members of the state bar to complete the Ohio Access to Justice Foundation (OAJF) and Court's survey so they can better understand the free counsel and charitable gifts needed to support legal assistance in the state. The 10-minute survey is anonymous and asks attorneys to disclose what types of cases they handled. "Attorneys can streamline the process by compiling their pro bono hours before taking the survey. For attorneys who work at law firms, one representative can report on behalf of all firm attorneys," the Court said. New for 2026, the survey also asks whether members of the bar have used the "Pro Bono Ohio" website, a "one-stop shop" for pro bono opportunities within a lawyer's legal expertise. The Pro Bono Ohio website can be found [HERE](#).

LOBBYISTS/ORGANIZATIONS

The Ohio Municipal League announced Friday its Board of Trustees met for the first time with village of Lisbon Fiscal Officer Tracey Wonner as president. Wonner previously served as first vice president was elected president for 2026 at the final 2025 board meeting of the year. Wonner succeeds Zanesville Mayor Don Mason, who will remain on the board as past president.

The County Engineers Association of Ohio (CEAO) announced Rep. Roy Klopfenstein (R-Haviland) as 2025 Legislator of the Year. The association said the distinction results from Klopfenstein's support of key legislative initiatives, including sponsorship of



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legislation to increase county FORCE account limits and protection of the professional surveyor qualification for engineers.

Hannah News Service unveiled a new feature that fosters collaboration for its clients, many of whom are lobbyists on Capitol Square: Shared ActionTRACK Reports. With Shared ActionTRACK Reports, users can share legislative reports with others in their organization to stay aligned on tracked legislation, without duplicating work across multiple user accounts. Shared Reports will save time by allowing teams to collaborate on the same ActionTRACK reports, so teams stay in sync. Instead of multiple users re-adding the same bills, organizations can share reports across users, add internal bill-level comments in one place, and receive automatic updates as legislation moves through the legislative process.

MARIJUANA/HEMP

Attorney General Dave Yost recently filed a lawsuit in Franklin County Common Pleas Court against nine multistate cannabis operators, accusing the businesses of conspiring "to form cartels to limit the availability of independent Ohio cannabis companies' products to Ohio consumers." The lawsuit names Ascend Wellness, Ayr Wellness, The Cannabist Company, Cresco Labs, Curaleaf, Green Thumb Industries, Jushi, Trulieve and Verano as defendants. It argues that the companies have used similar tactics to drive down competition in other states. "They have systematically leveraged their operations in other states to diminish competition, and now they are applying the same anticompetitive strategies in Ohio. Until now, the cartels' activities have gone unchallenged," the lawsuit states. The lawsuit argues the actions of the nine companies reduced product choice and quality for Ohio consumers, stifled innovation, and allowed the defendants to maintain or increase supra-competitive prices in the state's cannabis market.

MENTAL HEALTH

Youth in juvenile justice facilities have higher rates of mental health disorders, including depression, suicidal ideation and suicidal behavior, a policy brief recently released by the Health Policy Institute of Ohio (HPIO) reports. Taking a deep dive into the "root causes" of mental health challenges for youth at risk for justice involvement, HPIO found the percentage of Ohio youth in juvenile correctional facilities in need of mental health support increased to 78 percent in November 2025, up from 67 percent in November 2019. The brief reports juvenile detention to be "harmful" for youth mental health, with research suggesting detention to "not effectively" deter delinquent behavior. In response to the reported findings, HPIO suggests policymakers strengthen crisis intervention, increase diversion from the juvenile justice system and improve mental health treatment access for youth in Department of Youth Services (DYS) facilities.



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NATURAL RESOURCES

As the DeWine administration and the General Assembly continue work on this year's capital budget, Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR) Director Mary Mertz does not anticipate a continuation of the investments that culminated in Ohio state parks' recognition last year as the best such system in the U.S. "It's going to be much more foundational, replacing electric systems, replacing wastewater systems, dam rehabilitation and repair. These are things we've done all along, but this bill will really be about that," Mertz told *Hannah News* about the capital investments ODNR hopes for in an upcoming budget.

A proposed amendment to the Ohio Constitution drew both opponents, who call the amendment unnecessary, and proponents, who say it would preserve Ohioans' history and culture, before the Senate General Government Committee on Tuesday. SJR8 (Huffman) would enact a new section of the Ohio Constitution to establish a constitutional right to hunt and fish. In opponent testimony, Erica Davidson of Columbus Animal Advocates called a constitutional amendment codifying those rights unnecessary and potentially harmful to wildlife management and conservation science. Davidson said Ohioans already have the lawful ability to hunt and fish, and a constitutional right to hunt and fish throughout the state "risks constraining future wildlife policy, even when science indicates alternatives -- such as habitat restoration, disease control measures, or population controls that differ from harvest -- are necessary for public safety and ecological health," possibly leading to unintended consequences for conservation and ecosystems.

PENSIONS

The two Ohio public pension systems still invested in companies doing business in Iran and Sudan substantially winnowed their holdings over the past year. But Sen. Mark Romanchuk (R-Ontario) said nearly two decades after lawmakers pushed the pension funds to begin divestment, he's growing impatient for them to take the final step. "Yeah, that's absolutely taken too long. And we know it's taken too long because other plans have been able to get to zero, completely divested themselves," Romanchuk told reporters after Thursday's meeting of the Ohio Retirement Study Council (ORSC).

PEOPLE

Steven Steinglass, dean emeritus of the Cleveland State University College of Law and former advisor to the Ohio Constitutional Modernization Commission, died Monday. He was 83. According to his obituary, Steinglass graduated from the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania in 1964 and received his law degree from Columbia Law School in 1967. He joined the faculty at Cleveland State University College of Law in



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1980, teaching courses from civil procedure to constitutional law. He served as associate dean, interim dean, and ultimately as dean of the college from 1997 to 2005. From 2013-2017, he served as the senior policy advisor to the Ohio Constitutional Modernization Commission. A celebration of his life will be announced by his family at a later date. Memorial contributions may be made to the Steven H. Steinglass Endowed Scholarship Fund at Cleveland State University, College of Law, 2121 Euclid Ave., Cleveland, Ohio 44115. Former Ohio Senate President Larry Obhof (R-Medina) reacted to Steinglass' death on social media, calling him a "giant in his field -- one of the premier scholars of the Ohio Constitution. He was also just an all-around good guy. Godspeed, my friend."

STATE GOVERNMENT

The Office of Budget and Management (OBM) said Thursday that Controlling Board President Jill Schuler is stepping down to become senior director of operations at the Ohio Housing Finance Agency (OHFA). OBM Chief Legal Counsel Paul Disantis will take over her role as board president. Schuler had served as Controlling Board president since 2023, and has experience in senior staff roles at the Ohio departments of commerce, health, and job and family services. Disantis, who served in senior legal and policy roles with the Ohio Secretary of State and the Ohio House of Representatives before joining OBM in 2024, will preside as Controlling Board president beginning with the Monday, Feb. 23 meeting, OBM said. In addition to his work in the private and public sectors, he has also served as a judge advocate with the United States Army Reserves.

STUDIES/POLLS

Figures released recently by the U.S. Census Bureau show that Ohio's population growth from 2024 to 2025 slowed slightly compared to the year before, continuing the increase in the state's population following slight decreases at the beginning of the 2020s. The number of people calling Ohio home stood at 11,900,510 as of July 1, 2025, holding steady the state's position at seventh most populous state, between Illinois, ranked sixth (12,719,141), and Georgia, ranked eighth (11,302,748). Ohio's figure increased 0.3 percent (+39,889 population) over the Census Bureau's figure for Ohio in 2024. That yearly increase is slightly smaller than Ohio's increase from 2023-2024 of 0.44 percent (+52,231 population). The total increase from 2024-2025 ranked Ohio's growth at 11th among states for the year, ranking just above the rate of increase of neighboring Indiana at 12th, and behind states in the top 10 in growth that are mostly located in the southern U.S.

TAXATION

Sales and income taxes levied at three or four times their current rates would be needed to supplant tens of billions of dollars in property tax revenue should a pending ballot issue



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campaign to abolish property taxes be successful, according to the Office of Budget and Management (OBM.) OBM Director Kim Murnieks wrote a memo last week to Gov. Mike DeWine outlining consequences of property tax abolition. Murnieks described her memo as a "high-level summary" that would be followed by a more detailed analysis should the abolition amendment make the ballot. State law requires the administration to provide analyses whenever issues make the ballot that would require spending of funds by the state or local governments. "Eliminating property taxes would immediately destabilize local budgets and force deep cuts to essential services, reducing or eliminating funding for local law enforcement, first responders, and schools, delaying road and infrastructure repairs, and threatening services for seniors and people with disabilities," Murnieks wrote.

TECHNOLOGY/AEROSPACE

DriveOhio announced Tuesday its selection of nine public safety agencies for the Ohio Statewide Drone First Responder (DFR) Pilot Program, which it said is a first-of-its-kind effort to expand rapid aerial response capabilities in communities of all sizes. The program is led by the Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT) and DriveOhio with management support from SkyfireAI. It reflects the state's effort to give first responders "innovative tools that improve situational awareness, enhance officer and responder safety, and reduce emergency response times."

The Columbus Metropolitan Club recently discussed how cybersecurity is changing with developments in artificial intelligence (AI) as part of a forum with Kirk Herath, former cybersecurity strategic advisor to Gov. Mike DeWine; Sophia Mohr, chief innovation and technology officer at COTA; and Michael Wyatt, global identity offering leader for cyber and strategic risk at Deloitte. It was moderated by Padma Sastry, adjunct faculty at Ohio State University's (OSU) College of Engineering who opened the forum by describing how AI can be used both to defend against cyber threats and to support them, then asked the panelists what cybersecurity and AI look like in their specific fields. Herath noted he'd retired from his role in the DeWine administration four weeks ago and gave a technical description about how AI is "highly dependent on data." AI can be used in cybersecurity to automate many procedures and allow the workforce to focus on more important tasks, he continued, though there will be a time in the future when fewer people are needed due to AI. He also explained how automated attacks pose an increased risk.

TRANSPORTATION/INFRASTRUCTURE

Two asphalt companies this week agreed to pay \$30 million to settle claims that they had submitted fraudulent test results for asphalt projects to the Ohio Department of Transportation (ODOT). The U.S. Attorney's Office for the Southern District of Ohio



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announced the settlement agreements. Under the agreements, Kokosing Materials, Inc. will pay \$17.5 million to resolve allegations that it submitted false or fraudulent asphalt test results from 2012 through 2024. Barrett Paving Materials, Inc. will pay \$12.5 million to resolve allegations that it submitted false or fraudulent asphalt test results from 2013 through 2025.

WORKFORCE

The Ohio Department of Development (DOD) recently announced the November round of TechCred had 799 employers awarded over \$15.4 million in funds that will enable Ohioans to earn 10,895 tech-focused credentials. DOD noted TechCred is one of several state programs to strengthen the workforce along with the newly created WorkOhio initiative.