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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: 10/28/2025 - House Technology and Innovation, (Second 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: 9/15/2025 - Referred to Committee House Ways and Means

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: 11/13/2025 - **BILL AMENDED**, House Local Government, (Second 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: 11/19/2025 - Introduced

State Bill Page: <https://www.legislature.ohio.gov/legislation/legislation-summary?id=GA136-HB-608>

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, Dec. 19, 2025

ADDICTION/SUBSTANCE ABUSE

The U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) is intensifying its fight against the threat of synthetic opioids with the launch of "Fentanyl Free America," an enforcement initiative and public awareness campaign aimed at reducing both the supply and demand for fentanyl, DEA said recently in a statement. DEA said the initiative underscores its commitment to protecting communities from the negative effects of fentanyl, citing data collected by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), which reported nearly 50,000 lives lost to the substance last year.

AGING

The Ohio Department of Medicaid (ODM) plans to add new territory to the existing MyCare footprint from spring through summer after launching a redesigned version of the integrated Medicare-Medicaid program at the beginning of 2026. The program, which aims to better coordinate care for Ohioans eligible for both Medicare and Medicaid, began during the Kasich administration and was recently re-bid by the DeWine



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administration as part of the broader Next Generation managed care redesign. ODM says program improvements include enhanced behavioral health services, expanded transportation options and stronger support for long-term care and community-based living. Last year, ODM awarded MyCare contracts to four companies: Buckeye Health Plan, Anthem Blue Cross and Blue Shield, CareSource and Molina Healthcare of Ohio.

AGRICULTURE

Official dates for the 2026 fair season, including Ohio's 94 county and independent fairs along with the Ohio State Fair, have been released, the Ohio Department of Agriculture (ODAg) announced. The Paulding County Fair will start off the season Saturday, June 6, 2026, and the season will conclude Saturday, Oct. 17, 2026 with the Fairfield County Fair. The schedule is [HERE](#).

ARTS, SPORTS AND ENTERTAINMENT

A federal judge has denied a motion to stop the state from transferring unused unclaimed funds into a new fund to fund sports facilities including a new Cleveland Browns stadium, but will allow a lawsuit challenging the move to continue. The federal lawsuit was filed in October on behalf of four individuals with funds in Ohio's Unclaimed Funds Trust Fund, asking the court to prohibit what they insisted is an unlawful taking that will cause irreparable harm. Judge Edmund Sargus refused to grant the plaintiffs' request to issue a preliminary injunction preventing the unclaimed funds provisions of the budget bill. Still, Sargus allowed the case to continue, dismissing a state motion seeking to have the case tossed from court on the argument that plaintiffs lack standing and that their claims are not ripe because they will still be permitted to file administrative claims to recover unclaimed funds.

ATTORNEY GENERAL

County task forces established under the Ohio Attorney General's Organized Crime Investigation Commission have arrested 20 men in recent weeks for various human trafficking crimes. The Mahoning Valley Human Trafficking Task Force and H.E.A.L. Human Trafficking Task Force conducted separation sting operations in Mahoning, Columbiana, Ashland, Erie and Lorain counties.

The former director of prison re-entry nonprofit Lazarus Experience has been sentenced to 10-13 years behind bars for stealing more than \$200,000 from the organization and donors including elderly Ohioans, Attorney General Dave Yost announced recently.

The Ohio Attorney General's Office has secured a three-count felony indictment of a Columbus-area school board trustee and former executive director of Pickerington Food



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Pantry for falsifying the nonprofit's 2022 audit report in support of a grant application. Vanessa Niekamp, 55, of Pickerington, also fiscal officer for Violet Township's Board of Trustees, now faces charges of telecommunication fraud and identity fraud, both third-degree felonies, as well as forgery, a fourth-degree felony. She was indicted in Fairfield County Common Pleas Court.

Ohio has joined a multistate lawsuit originally filed by the Federal Trade Commission against Uber USA, LLC and Uber Technologies, Inc. for deceptive practices tied to the company's Uber One subscription service, Ohio Attorney General Dave Yost announced Tuesday.

Attorney General Dave Yost says state efforts to improve criminal justice data collection and dissemination and communications among law enforcement agencies saw a major boost with this week's upgrade of the decades-old Ohio Law Enforcement Gateway (OHLEG). SmartSearch improves the speed and efficiency of law enforcement investigations, and therefore public safety, by streamlining siloed information into a "single, powerful search," Yost said. Customizable dashboards allow individual agencies to define and track specific law enforcement data and larger patterns and trends in their communities. New mapping, meanwhile, shows when and where crimes are occurring in real time.

The Buckeye State will receive its share of a multi-million-dollar settlement with big-box home improvement store Menards in time for New Year's. Arizona and a half dozen Midwest states targeted the company's rebate program for alleged false advertising, including various "omissions and failures" in presenting its merchandise credit checks (MCC) as point-of-sale discounts. Within 14 days of the Dec. 17 settlement, Ohio is due \$365,173 of Menards' \$4.25 million payout to the following additional states: Arizona, Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Nebraska, South Dakota and Wisconsin, where the company's corporate headquarters are located. Menards has 90 days from the settlement date to fully implement all reforms.

CITIES

The Columbus Metropolitan Club (CMC) discussed Columbus' downtown region Wednesday, with a forum focusing on the safety of the city in light of CMC's Annual State of Downtown report highlighting the economic growth of the district. Amy Taylor, president of Downtown Columbus Inc., opened the forum, recalling the downtown strategic plan crafted in 2022, which found members of the community calling for greater residential investment. Taylor detailed the economic growth within the district in response to the community input collected through the strategic plan, saying downtown Columbus has experienced "remarkable momentum" in mixed-use development projects in areas such as retail, housing and entertainment.



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The Ohio Mayors Alliance, the bipartisan coalition of mayors in Ohio's 30 largest cities, announced that Akron Mayor Shammias Malik, Mansfield Mayor Jodie Perry, and Springfield Mayor Rob Rue have been elected to the group's seven-member board of directors. They join current board members Cleveland Mayor Justin Bibb, Findlay Mayor Christina Muryn, Parma Mayor Tim DeGeeter, and Lima Mayor Sharetta Smith.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT/URBAN REVITALIZATION

The DeWine administration Wednesday announced that 33 projects will be awarded more than \$73 million in tax credits as part of the 35th round of the Ohio Historic Preservation Tax Credit Program. The credits will help preserve 45 buildings across the state, and the projects are expected to leverage approximately \$681 million in private investments. The awarded projects span 14 communities, including Akron, Bowling Green, Canton, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Columbus, Dayton, Lakewood, Marysville, Mount Sterling, Springfield, Toledo, Trotwood, and Wadsworth. The communities of Bowling Green, Mount Sterling, and Wadsworth are receiving tax credits through his program for the first time.

The DeWine administration announced earlier this week the approval of 17 projects that will create 2,347 new jobs and retain 8,592 jobs statewide earlier this week. During its monthly meeting, the Ohio Tax Credit Authority (TCA) reviewed economic development proposals brought to the board by JobsOhio and its regional partners. The following projects are expected to result in more than \$148 million in new payroll and generate over \$1.1 billion in investments across Ohio.

ECONOMY

A recent report by the Ohio Manufacturers' Association (OMA) measured the industry's benefits to the state, saying it remains the largest private sector contributor for Ohio's economy. The report used a range of 2023 and 2024 data depending on what is currently available, including that manufacturing GDP rose by 2.9 percent to \$137.9 billion in 2024. That represented 16.5 percent of Ohio's private economy.

The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) announced Tuesday that total national nonfarm payroll employment increased by 64,000 jobs to 7.8 million in November as the federal unemployment rate rose to 4.6 percent. The latest unemployment numbers, delayed more than a week due to the federal shutdown, show the unemployment rate and total nonfarm payroll employment were higher than a year ago, when the federal unemployment rate was 4.2 percent and the number of unemployed people was 7.1 million.



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The Cleveland Federal Reserve Bank recently released survey findings showing more businesses expect to decrease employment over the next year, going from 7 percent in 2024 to 18 percent in the most recent data collected from Oct. 30 through Nov. 6 as part of the Survey of Regional Conditions and Expectations (SORCE). Businesses that expect unchanged employment fell from 54 to 51 percent, while those that project hiring more employees decreased from 39 to 32 percent. There were 134 respondents in 2024 and 164 in 2025. The number of respondents having difficulty filling open positions in the past three months decreased from 61 percent in November 2024 to 58 percent in the newest survey. Those with no job openings over the past three months remained at 11 percent. Those who reported no difficulty in hiring ticked up from 29 percent in 2024 to 31 percent in 2025.

EDUCATION

When the Ohio High School Athletic Association (OHSAA) adopted bylaws allowing high school athletes to enter into name, image, and likeness (NIL) deals last month, Ohio joined 43 other states and the District of Columbia in allowing students to do so. The OHSAA bylaws, adopted by an emergency vote within the organization, followed shortly after passage by the Senate of HB184 (Stewart-T. Mathews). HB184 was originally introduced as a bill to prescribe limitations on intercollegiate athlete contracts before it became the vehicle for operating budget corrections in its final form. While many of Ohio's NIL bylaws are similar to those in many of the other states that have permitted NIL deals -- including prohibition of student association with gambling, alcohol, tobacco, cannabis and firearms and prohibition of NIL deals that use school logos and imagery -- Ohio's NIL rules aren't as restrictive as some other states.

Ohio school districts, charter and STEM schools have until month's end to adopt a policy generally barring student cell phone use during class time. Under the state budget bill, HB96 (Stewart), schools have until Thursday, Jan. 1, 2026 to adopt such a policy if they've not already done so.

Ohio colleges and universities have largely aligned their teacher preparation programs to state requirements to follow science of reading practices for literacy instruction. But auditors also found instances of disfavored practices still in use at many institutions, according to the DeWine administration. Gov. Mike DeWine and Ohio Department of Higher Education (ODHE) Chancellor Mike Duffey announced the audit results Tuesday at a Riffe Center press conference. DeWine described the results as "a bit mixed."

The U.S. Department of Education (USDOE) this week launched a nationwide scholarship competition to test high school students' knowledge of American history and civics. As part of the Presidential 1776 Award, high school students can compete in three rounds of multiple-choice and verbal exams developed by the James Madison Memorial



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Fellowship Foundation. National finals will take place in Washington, D.C. in June 2026. Research database company EBSCO will assist with the contest as well. In February, students can take an online, timed multiple-choice civics tests. Four finalists from each state will be selected from the results.

ELECTIONS

The Ohio Elections Commission Thursday wrapped up its work before it ceases to exist, fining one former state representative in one case while dismissing a complaint against another. The meeting was the final one for the commission, and concluded with members praising the work of the staff and outgoing Executive Director Phil Richter for accomplishing what could be done with limited resources. Chair Christina Hagan said that while members of the commission have come and gone, there has been an institutional knowledge "that has been present and consistent." Also, the commission fined former Rep. Sedrick Denson \$100 over failure to file reports, including his post-general election report from 2024. Denson appeared via video conference before the commission, blaming the issues on a change in treasurer. He said it has taken time for him to get records together.

ELECTIONS 2026

The biggest problem facing Washington, D.C. right now is "the culture that people care more about politics than they care about the people of this nation," U.S. Sen. Jon Husted (R-OH) said Friday moments after officially filing petitions to appear on the ballot for the 2026 U.S. Senate Race. "We've got to put aside our differences, find common ground, solve problems," Husted said, talking with reporters after filing his petitions.

Republican Ryan Colvin, a Miamisburg city councilman since 2008, Thursday announced his run for the Ohio House's 40th District in a bid to succeed Rep. Rodney Creech (R-West Alexandria), who is running for the Ohio Senate's 5th District.

Rep. Gayle Manning (R-North Ridgeville), the House speaker pro tempore, announced Monday she will run for Senate District 13, a seat now held by her son, Sen. Nathan Manning (R-North Ridgeville). She has the backing of Senate leadership. The younger Manning had previously announced he would run for Rep. Manning's District 52 House seat. If successful, the two would be reversing a switch they first made in 2018. Both are term-limited and cannot run for their current positions.

Term-limited Sen. Andrew Brenner (R-Delaware) is seeking a return to the Ohio House in 2026, running for the 61st House District. The seat is currently held by Rep. Beth Lear (R-Galena), who is running for Brenner's Senate seat. Brenner previously served in the



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Ohio House from 2011-2018, moving to the Senate after he was term-limited. He also served as Delaware County recorder from 2005-2010.

First District Court of Appeals Judge Marilyn Zayas officially launched her campaign for Ohio Supreme Court Tuesday, seeking to unseat Justice Dan Hawkins, who is running for re-election. Zayas previously made an unsuccessful run for the Court in 2022, losing in the general election to Justice Pat DeWine.

Casey Putsch, an automotive industry entrepreneur, announced Tuesday that he will seek the Republican nomination for governor in 2026, painting himself as an alternative to Republican gubernatorial front-runner Vivek Ramaswamy. Putsch announced his run on his YouTube channel in a 30-minute video he said he recorded at 2 a.m., noting Ramaswamy's fortune, and saying Ohio deserves better. He also attacked Democratic-front runner Amy Acton, calling her a "deeply-entrenched bureaucrat."

The cost of doing business is going up, according to several Columbus-area small business owners who sat down with Democratic U.S. Senate candidate Sherrod Brown on Wednesday to discuss issues of affordability. Letha Pugh, who owns both a bakery and a restaurant in Columbus, told Brown that the "cost of beef has become astronomical," estimating that her costs for beef have nearly tripled in recent months. Pugh said her restaurant uses local suppliers, whose prices are less volatile due to tariffs. Pugh said larger suppliers increase their prices merely on the threat of tariffs but then don't bring the prices back down if tariffs are lifted or never put in place. She said her cost of goods had been at about 30 percent of revenues, and now it's over 40 percent.

The following endorsements were made over the week:

- United Steelworkers endorsed former Democratic U.S. Sen. Sherrod Brown for election to the U.S. Senate in 2026.
- The Cleveland Building & Construction Trades Council endorsed U.S. Sen. Jon Husted (R-OH) for election in 2026.
- Associated Builders and Contractors of Ohio endorsed former Republican Rep. Craig Reidel for election to Ohio Senate District 1.
- The gubernatorial campaign of Democrat Amy Acton announced the endorsement of the Ohio Federation of Teachers.
- Americans for Prosperity-Ohio endorsed Mike Kahoe for Ohio House District 31; Vik Sandhu for Ohio House District 35; Jesse Styles for Ohio House District 57; Andrew



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Brenner for Ohio House District 61; Patti Rockey for Ohio House District 81; and Wezlynn Davis for Ohio House District 86.

ENERGY/UTILITIES

Meta wants to put Ohio on the map with the company's first largescale artificial intelligence (AI) center east of the state capital and has secured the Public Utilities Commission of Ohio's (PUCO) blessing to take over the American Electric Power (AEP) of Ohio substation abandoned for now by Intel Corp. Commissioners voted 4-0 Wednesday, with Vice Chair Daniel Conway not participating, to allow Meta, i.e. Facebook, and its subsidiary, Sidecat LLC, to assume use of the 500-megawatt (MW) capacity substation for three years while Intel seeks to resolve "market and geopolitical" barriers to its original timeline for construction and completion of its proposed semi-conductor plant.

The Public Utilities Commission of Ohio (PUCO) Nominating Council posted Commissioner Dennis Deter's seat to interested applicants Monday for a term commencing April 11, 2026 and ending April 10, 2031. The 12-member Nominating Council says candidates have until 5 p.m., Friday, Jan. 9 to submit their credentials.

FEDERAL

The U.S. Senate passed on Wednesday its annual must-pass legislation to set lawmakers' defense priorities with a 77-20 vote on the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA). The bill now goes to President Donald Trump's desk for his signature. This year's NDAA funded several Ohio military installations, including the following, among others:

- \$45 million to build the Human Performance Wing Laboratory at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base (WPAFB).
- \$15 million in planning and design funding for a full refurbishment of WPAFB's primary runway.
- Funding for Project Pele to build an expeditionary micronuclear reactor for the military, which will bring jobs to Ohio.

GAMING/GAMBLING

In a brief meeting before the end of the year, the Ohio Casino Control Commission (OCCC) approved new and renewal licensure for numerous license types. OCCC Executive Director Matthew Schuler also reported on a forthcoming upgrade to slot



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machine software verification for the up to thousands of slot machines on the floors of each casino in Ohio.

GENERAL ASSEMBLY/STATEHOUSE

House Speaker Matt Huffman (R-Lima) and Senate President Rob McColley (R-Napoleon) this week hosted their counterparts in legislative leadership from dozens of states to assert the value of federalism and states' role in the division of power in national governance. The National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) helped to convene more than 40 legislative leaders spanning more than 30 states at the Ohio Statehouse on Monday. The Assembly of State Legislative Leaders issued a declaration on federalism and state power and established procedures and a governing framework for future collaboration, with the hopes of adopting future declarations. Huffman was elected as presiding officer for the group, while Hawaii Senate President Ron Kouchi, a Democrat, was elected recording secretary. The two leaders were part of a panel this summer at the NCSL Summit in Boston on federalism, one of the recent venues where Huffman advocated for such a gathering.

Though the Legislature finished one elections bill and sent it off to the governor before the holiday break, lawmakers may see action on far more extensive legislation in the new year. Sen. Theresa Gavarone (R-Bowling Green) told *Hannah News* that it is her hope that her SB153 (Gavarone-Brenner) will move quickly when they return to the Statehouse in 2026. Portions of SB153 were amended into SB293 (Gavarone), which among other provisions eliminated the four-day grace period for absentee ballots to arrive at boards of elections after Election Day and still be counted as long as they were postmarked before the election. Provisions taken from SB153 included voter list maintenance procedures for the secretary of state, as well as giving the secretary of state the ability to use state and federal databases to check for noncitizens on the voter rolls. Additionally, SB293 was also amended to adjust qualifications for members of the Election Integrity Commission, the new panel in the secretary of state's office that will take over the duties of the Ohio Elections Commission after lawmakers eliminated the latter in budget bill HB96 (Stewart). The new provision states that commission members may hold an appointed public office as long as the person is not exempt from collective bargaining, and adds prohibitions against members of the commission soliciting or being involved in soliciting contributions on behalf of a legislative campaign fund and being compensated for providing goods or services to a candidate, campaign committee, political party, legislative campaign fund, political action committee, or political contributing entities. SB153 still retains provisions requiring proof of citizenship to vote in the state and lists the documents that qualify as documentary proof of citizenship.

Democrats on the Controlling pressed the Ohio Secretary of State's (SOS) Office and the DeWine administration Monday on the transfer of the newly named Ohio Election



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Integrity Commission (OEIC) to SOS and a request by the Ohio Department of Education and Workforce (DEW) to begin spending \$105 million in federal dollars on charter school expansion and facilities funding.

GOVERNOR

The assistant directors who've led the Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities (DODD) and Ohio Department of Behavioral Health (DBH) on an interim basis this fall got Gov. Mike DeWine's nod Monday to continue in the roles on an ongoing basis. DeWine said Monday he is nominating Lyndsay Nash to be director of DODD and Tia Marcel Moretti to be director of DBH.

Judicial appointment made during the week includes the following:

- Stacey S. Stiriz to the Fulton County Court of Common Pleas, Probate and Juvenile Division. Stiriz, of Delta, will assume office on Monday, Jan. 12, 2026, and will be taking the seat formerly held by Judge Michael J. Bumb, who resigned. She 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

Gov. Mike DeWine signed two executive orders (EOs) Friday, Dec. 12, one of which ensured an Ohio Board of Pharmacy (OBP) rule approved earlier in the day banning synthetic kratom and associated products would take immediate effect. DeWine had requested that rule from the OBP Thursday. DeWine's order said the OBP found compounds related to kratom, also known as mitragynine, had "no accepted medical use in treatment in this state, have a high potential for abuse, and pose an imminent hazard to the public health, safety, or welfare." DeWine's second executive order Friday was on an Ohio Bureau of Workers Compensation (BWC) emergency rule regarding the Health Partnership Program (HPP) and how the federal HIPAA Act requires use of a nationally recognized coding system.

The Ohio Department of Health (ODH) announced Friday it is hosting trainings for a new program to improve access to maternal health care and reduce the number of deaths due to pregnancy-related complications. An average of 24 mothers die each year in Ohio during pregnancy or within one year of the end of her pregnancy due to related complications, ODH said, and 62 percent of those deaths are preventable. ODH has created the "Maternal Outreach Movement 365 (MOM 365) Program" to improve maternal health care access in high-need areas, giving resources to health care providers and clinics along with a basic understanding of postpartum conditions including associated early warning signs. More information is [HERE](#).



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As Ohio and other states continue to grapple with the impacts of this summer's federal budget recissions bill, HR1 ("One Big Beautiful Bill"), and the federal government shutdown this fall, Summer Kirby of Compass Community Health says part of the concern is that changes to policy issues affecting Ohioans' ability to stay healthy haven't reached the full depth of what will happen in the near future. Kirby said the changes to Medicaid at the state level, including cost sharing changes and potentially higher copays, have not taken full effect yet. Even reductions in SNAP benefits and Head Start closures that happened during the federal government shutdown led to lapses in child care that led to anxiety for many Ohioans, Kirby told a Health Policy Institute of Ohio (HPIO) webinar last week.

Lawmakers who belong to the Ohio House Rural Hospital Caucus wrote Gov. Mike DeWine this week to urge that independent rural hospitals be given priority for funding from the Rural Health Transformation Program (RHTP), a \$50 billion fund created by federal HR1, aka the One Big Beautiful Bill. The legislators specifically asked for priority for hospitals that are not part of a health system, not eligible for state directed payments and not included in the State Rural Hospital Tax Pilot Program created in HB96 (Stewart). The lawmakers' letter identifies the following hospitals as in need of this funding and not eligible for the state tax pilot program created in HB96:

- Ashtabula Regional Medical Center in Ashtabula County
- Blanchard Valley Regional Health Center in Hancock County
- Fisher-Titus Medical Center in Huron County
- Holzer Health System in Gallia County
- Joint Township District Memorial Hospital in Auglaize County
- Knox Community Hospital in Knox County
- Mary Rutan Hospital in Logan County
- Mercy County Community Hospital
- Pomerene Hospital in Holmes County
- Salem Community Hospital in Columbiana County
- Wilson Community Hospital in Shelby County



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- Wood County Hospital
- Wooster Community Hospital in Wayne County

HIGHER EDUCATION

Kent State University (KSU) is entering into a new partnership with the Bio-Med Science Academy Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) School, which the university says will "bring new life" to its Michael Schwartz Center while providing the public STEM school with a facility for its elementary grade students.

Shawnee State University (SSU) recently announced that it is expanding access to advanced business education, offering two new MBA courses at the Adena PACCAR Medical Education Center in Chillicothe. The MBA courses will begin in January and feature a hybrid learning format, allowing students to balance academic and personal responsibilities and to network with other professionals, SSU said.

The Youngstown State University (YSU) Foundation Board of Trustees' Investment Committee recently passed a resolution providing the Student Investment Fund (SIF) with \$1.5 million to increase its managed portfolio, payable over three years in increments of \$500,000 beginning this academic year. The funds will be used to invest in fixed-income assets, according to the university. The SIF team now has an opportunity to compete in two different competitions in New York and Chicago. Since the student organization's inception in 2008, SIF team members have only researched and invested in equities.

A dozen high school students from across the state were awarded \$18,000 in scholarships at the 14th annual Ohio State University (OSU) Marion Technical College (MTC) Marion Math Challenge, which took place at OSU's Marion Campus on Friday, Dec. 12. A total of 107 students from six different high schools competed in the challenge, MTC said.

Cincinnati State Technical and Community College received \$250,000 from the GE Aerospace Foundation earlier this fall for the college's Aviation Maintenance Technology program. The donation will be used to fund start-up salaries for the new faculty in the program, Cincinnati State said, and will also help with the college's plans to increase enrollment in the program.

In a slate of actions during its December Board of Trustees meeting, Kent State University (KSU) trustees approved a provision to eliminate 19 low enrollment academic programs to comply with SB1 (Cirino).



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Clark State College (CSC) recently announced Evon Walters as its next president, following a national search. Walters will assume his role in July 2026, CSC said. Walters will succeed Jo Alice Blondin, who will retire after 13 years as Clark State's president and 33 years of service in higher education. She expressed her support for Walters in Clark State's announcement. Walters began his career at the University of Massachusetts and has since held senior leadership roles at colleges including Montgomery County Community College and Suffolk County Community College, according to Clark State.

Carol Bradford, dean of the Ohio State University (OSU) College of Medicine, will be stepping down from her position at the end of the month, OSU Wexner Medical Center CEO John Warner told the medical center's Board of Trustees during its December meeting. Warner said Bradford had notified him the day before the meeting of her decision to step down. In addition to her role as dean, Bradford serves as the medical center's vice president of health sciences.

The University of Toledo (UT) recently launched its new Northwest Ohio Cancer Research Institute (NOCRI), an initiative the university says will bring together experts to research and develop new cancer treatment. UT said in its announcement the institute will support collaboration between clinicians and researchers specializing in biology, chemistry, engineering, medicine, pharmacy and physics at the university along with partners including ProMedica and the Toledo Clinic.

HOUSING/HOMELESSNESS

The Ohio Department of Development (DOD) said Tuesday approximately \$10 million in grants is available through the Residential Economic Development District (REDD) program to support the creation of workforce housing near economic development projects. The application window is open now through Friday, Jan. 16, 2026, at 5 p.m. Additional information regarding the grant guidelines and application can be found [HERE](#).

JUDICIAL

Justin Kudela was recently sworn by Chief Justice Sharon Kennedy in as the new clerk of the Court, returning to the Thomas J. Moyer Ohio Judicial Center after a stint with the Delaware Municipal Court.

The commissioners of a fund within the Ohio Supreme Court established to reimburse victims of attorney theft, embezzlement or misappropriation recently announced reimbursements to six clients of Ohio attorneys who were determined to have engaged in dishonest conduct resulting in financial losses to those clients. The Board of Commissioners of the Ohio Supreme Court's Lawyers' Fund for Client Protection (LFCP)



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approved the reimbursement over \$80,000 to six victims of attorney theft at its meeting on Friday, Dec. 12.

LOBBYISTS

Innovation Ohio (IO) and Innovation Ohio Education Fund (IOEF) Thursday announced Michael McGovern as the next president and CEO of the organization, effective January 2026. Previously serving as IO's communications director and most recently as the senior director of messaging and research at ProgressNow, McGovern brings more than 15 years of experience in strategic communications, research and progressive advocacy to the role, IO said. Current President and CEO Rep. Desiree Tims (D-Dayton) will continue to serve in the position until the end of the year and remain with the organization as senior advisor, IO said.

MARIJUANA/HEMP

With the stated goal of expanding cannabis research, President Donald Trump on Thursday signed an executive order to hasten the process of rescheduling marijuana from a Schedule I drug with the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) to the less severe Schedule III. The move from Schedule I to Schedule III under the Controlled Substances Act would change marijuana classification from that of drugs like heroin, with no accepted medical benefit and the highest potential for abuse, to that of drugs like Tylenol and codeine, which have a moderate to low potential for physical and psychological dependence. Thursday's executive order directs the U.S. Attorney General to expedite the completion of the rescheduling process, which was begun under the Biden administration, but left unfinished by the time Trump assumed office in January 2025 due to legal and administrative issues.

NATURAL RESOURCES

Despite limits on deer gun season being placed in response to this year's outbreak of Epizootic Hemorrhagic Disease (EHD), hunters in Ohio checked 85,448 deer during the state's weeklong gun season ending on Sunday, Dec. 7. That total comes in just shy of the 2024 total for Ohio's seven-day gun season of 87,191, which was the highest total since 2011. Harvest totals were lower in 2025 in Athens, Meigs and Morgan counties due to lower bag limits in those counties in response to this year's unprecedented EHD outbreak.

- Coshocton - 3,037 - Coshocton County also led the state in 2024 with 2,955 deer checked.

- Ashtabula - 3,031



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- Tuscarawas - 2,764
- Muskingum - 2,581
- Knox - 2,558
- Carroll - 2,440
- Licking - 2,046
- Ashland - 2,037
- Columbiana - 1,968
- Harrison - 1,912

The Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR) Division of Wildlife is putting out the call for those who want to protect the state's public lands, waterways and fish and wildlife resources. Applications for the next class of Ohio Wildlife Officer training school are now being accepted until Sunday, Jan. 11, 2026. The program is seeking to fill up to 12 wildlife positions throughout Ohio when the new class begins in August 2026. The application for the program is available [HERE](#).

OHIO HISTORY

The America 250-Ohio Commission held its final meeting of the year Friday in preparation for a historic 2026 for the state and nation as the U.S. celebrates 250 years since the Declaration of Independence as part of its semiquincentennial.

PARKS/RECREATION

The Public Safety in State Parks Working Group debated Tuesday whether first-responder concerns on the three Bass Islands and other state parks around Ohio could be addressed by convention and visitors bureau (CVB) funding in budget bill HB96 (Stewart) adopted by the Hocking Hills Tourism Impact Emergency Services (TIES) Grant Program. At least one member suggested problems on South Bass Island are not due to the state park but to drunken and disorderly conduct in and around Put-in-Bay.

PENSIONS

The State Teachers Retirement System (STRS) said Wednesday that Aaron DiCenzo, serving as interim chief investment officer for the past several months, will get the title



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permanently, which also makes him deputy executive director for investments. DiCenzo, who took over in February to succeed the retiring Matt Worley. According to STRS, he has more than two decades of experience in private markets and institutional asset management. He joined STRS in 2018, and the system credits him with the growth in alternative investments and the launch of the direct and co-investment portfolio.

PEOPLE

The Ohio Job and Family Services Directors' Association (OJFSDA) named Summit County Department of Job and Family Services (JFS) Director Terri Burns its 2025 Outstanding Director of the Year, the association announced Monday. OJFSDA said Burns had been nominated by her peers for the award and was officially announced as the 2025 recipient during OJFSDA's membership meeting last week.

POLLS/STUDIES

Ahead of next year's midterm elections, a new Quinnipiac University Poll released Wednesday shows congressional Democrats receiving their lowest approval rating since the pollster began asking the question, but the party still may win control of the U.S. House next year. The poll found just 18 percent of voters approve of the way Democrats are handling their job, while 73 percent disapprove, the lowest approval rating since Quinnipiac began asking the question in 2009. It broke the previous low from July of this year, when 19 percent approved and 72 percent disapproved. One explanation is the way congressional Democrats are polling among their own party. Forty-two percent of Democratic respondents approve of the way members of their own party in Congress are handling their job, while 48 percent disapprove. For Republicans in Congress, 35 percent of respondents approve of their job performance, while 58 percent disapprove. That includes 77 percent of Republicans who approve of the way their own party is handling their job in Congress, while 18 percent disapprove.

Women in Central Ohio define wealth as more than just financial stability, working a steady job and mere survival, rather viewing wealth as an opportunity to create autonomy and purpose and contribute to their communities. But many women in the region still experience barriers that prevent them from building wealth and having the freedom to make their own decisions about their lives, according to a recent survey of over 3,000 women by The Women's Fund of Central Ohio (WFCO).

PUBLIC SAFETY

Gov. Mike DeWine announced more than \$23 million in FFY26 federal grants Monday for traffic safety programs statewide topped by the Ohio State Highway Patrol (OSHP), several leading counties and a few outliers. The Ohio Traffic Safety Office (OTSO) in the



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Ohio Department of Public Safety (DPS), which also houses OSHP, approved 195 separate awards to five state agencies and 150 public and private entities in 68 counties.

The Office of Criminal Justice Services (OCJS) announced Tuesday that it awarded over \$3.9 million in federal grants to reduce violence against women in Ohio. Targeted to local governments and nonprofits working to strengthen services for victims of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault and stalking, OCJS said the Violence Against Women Act grants aim to improve local capacity for law enforcement and prosecution strategies, as well as victim services.

STATE GOVERNMENT

The Ohio Water Development Authority (OWDA) approved \$29.5 million in funding through the Fresh Water Loan Fund Program for water improvement projects across the state during its December board meeting, the agency said Tuesday. The funding will be dispersed through low interest loans granted to 11 projects in Ohio communities focused on improving wastewater and drinking water infrastructure, OWDA said in its announcement.

TRANSPORTATION/INFRASTRUCTURE

Following a weekend when nearly all of Ohio was blanketed from snow and ice, the Ohio Turnpike and Infrastructure Commission (OTIC) on Monday authorized nearly \$2.4 million for the purchase of 12 snow and ice truck bodies from a manufacturer in Mentor. The new truck bodies will replace 12 similar trucks that were authorized to be disposed of, as they are at the end of their viability, at a cost of \$2,398,782.

Around 900 Ohio drivers have had their requests for personalized license plates denied by the Ohio Bureau of Motor Vehicles (BMV) in 2025. The Ohio BMV regularly rejects requests that it judges to be profane, obscene, sexually explicit, to refer to excrement or to advocate lawlessness. But even beyond those guidelines, the BMV rejected plates in 2025 from drivers who were simply being too boastful, such as BRVMFR, IFXSH1T, RICH AF, RICH AF2, and RICH AF3. BMV denied many requests in 2025 that attempted to incorporate "F," "FK," "FN" or other similar references to the four-letter word, as well as several with "MF" and its variants. And certainly, the BMV, based in Ohio's capital city, would never grant one driver's request of F CBUS, or another driver's SCRWBVMV, for that matter.