



STATEHOUSE REPORT

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Child Protection Reform Act receives first hearing

[House Bill 635](#) (Representatives Tom Young and Phil Plummer), the Child Protection Reform Act, received its first hearing in the House Children and Human Services Committee this week. The bill focuses on procedures when multiple counties are involved in a child welfare case, as well as visitation requirements and other provisions.

A full analysis of HB 635 is available [here](#).

During sponsor testimony, Representatives Young and Plummer shared that the bill is a result of the tragic death of Herschel Creachbaum, a 7-year-old boy with developmental disabilities who was murdered by his mother's boyfriend. Herschel's case involved two counties.

Under HB 635, if a report involves a child that resides in a county other than the county that received the report, or the child lives in both the county that received the report and another county, the following actions must be taken:

- The county that received the report must immediately notify the other agency;
- The agencies must jointly determine the lead agency before a case is filed in court; and
- Until the lead agency is agreed upon, the agencies must jointly investigate the report.

The bill would also increase in-person visitation requirements for children placed in residential facilities from minimum of at least one monthly visit to at least one weekly visit. Additionally, it would require weekly in-person visitation for any child under the age of five and any child or youth with a developmental disability.

HB 635 would create two mandates for case plans:

- If a child is eligible to participate in Part C Early Intervention, the child's case plan must require that participation; and
- If the child is under the age of three, the case plan must require the child and their family participate in Help Me Grow.

Currently, participation in these programs is voluntary.

During the question-and-answer portion of testimony, Vice Chair Jodi Salvo, Ranking Member Crystal Lett, and Representative Karen Brownlee all suggested adding an appropriation to the bill, noting that the increased caseworker visitations required could significantly increase costs for county JFS agencies.

CCAO is considering the legislation through our standing committee process and does not have a position on the legislation at this time.

Members with questions should contact Rachel Reedy at rreedy@ccao.org.

Sponsors give testimony on property tax levy oversight bill

A bill that would give local elected officials more oversight of property tax levies received its first hearing in the House Local Government Committee. [House Bill 466](#) (Representatives Beth Lear and Kevin Ritter) would require non-elected bodies to receive approval from an elected entity before a property tax levy could be placed on the ballot.

The bill would assign the oversight duties largely to the elected entity that created the entity seeking a levy. For example, a county park district would need to obtain approval from the board of county commissioners, while a township park district would either need to obtain approval from the township trustees or the legislative authority of each township or municipality it serves (the responsibility varies based on if the park district commissioners are appointed by a township or by a common pleas judge).

The bill is similar to another, [House Bill 137](#) (Representative Brian Lorenz), but covers more entities. HB 137 applies to county library levies and park district levies; HB 466 applies to all levies placed by non-elected entities. CCAO supports both bills.

Boards of county commissioners have this authority for many county entities but do not for others, such as county library levies or health district levies. CCAO advocates for commissioners to have oversight of these levies as well to ensure that every property tax levy that comes before the voters is approved by elected officials. Unelected entities should not have direct, unfettered access to the ballot box, regardless of what public function they provide,

If you have questions about either HB 466 or HB 137, please contact [Research Analyst Nick Ciolli](#).

Other county-related bills receive hearings

In addition to the bills discussed above, other bills of note to counties received hearings this week. Four of these are briefly discussed here, while others are listed in the Committee Hearings section of Legislative Activity.

House Bill 314 (Disruptive Public Records Requests)

This week, the House Judiciary Committee heard opponent testimony regarding [HB 314](#) (Representatives Dani Isaacsohn and Sharon Ray), a bill that would allow public offices to see a court order denying voluminous and abusive public records requests and allow public offices to contract with third parties to help fulfill public records requests.

CCAO [testified as a proponent](#) at the prior committee meeting.

Providing opponent testimony was the ACLU, the Ohio Innocence Project, the Ohio Employment Lawyers Association, Protecting Ohio Employees, Protect Ohio Women at Work, and a private individual.

The opponents' testimony largely centered on philosophical issues with restricting access to public records and to charging the public to obtain records. The lack of certain definitions (such as what constitutes "voluminous") was also raised.

House Bill 646 (Data Center Study Commission)

The House Technology and Innovation Committee favorably reported [HB 646](#) (Representatives Gary Click and Kellie Deeter) this week. The bill creates a Data Center Study Commission to examine several components of data centers and their impact on communities and to issue a report.

The committee made changes to the bill before voting. One of the changes concerned membership of the commission, which previously had not been defined other than the number of members and the appointing authority (the governor, the Senate President, the Speaker of the House, and the minority leaders of each chamber).

Of note to counties is that now one of the three appointments by the governor must be an individual "with knowledge of county government." The other local governments are also represented through appointments by the Speaker of the House (townships) and the Senate President (municipalities).

On Wednesday, Speaker of the House Matt Huffman indicated that he plans to bring the bill to a floor vote by the end of March.

While not related to the bill, the Speaker also indicated that there may also be a floor vote later in March to override the Governor's veto of a budget provision that would have eliminated the ability of the Tax Credit Authority to grant sales tax exemptions to data centers.

House Bill 443 (Delinquent Property Tax Lien Enforcement)

The House Ways and Means Committee held a second hearing on [HB 443](#) (Representatives David Thomas and Adam Mathews), a bill that would prohibit delinquent tax lien enforcement against certain owner-occupied homes.

The bill was amended during this week's hearing. In the As Introduced version of the bill, the homeowner would have to have paid at least some portion of their delinquent taxes to be exempted from tax lien enforcement. The amendment changes that amount from an undefined "portion" to an amount equal at minimum to the amount they paid in taxes in the last year they were current on their tax bill.

Proponent testimony was provided by the Warren County Treasurer, the Lake County Treasurer, AARP, the Council on Aging of Southwestern Ohio, the Legal Aid Society of Southwest Ohio, and the Western Reserve Area Agency on Aging.

Capital reappropriations bills introduced, work on full capital budget continues

This week, the General Assembly introduced House Bill 730 (Representative Brian Stewart) and Senate Bill 371 (Senator Jerry Cirino), each chamber's version of the capital reappropriations bill. The bills are identical and total \$1.93 billion in reappropriations.

The capital reappropriations bill is distinct from the capital budget bill. The reappropriations bill, as the name suggests, reappropriates funding for projects authorized in prior capital budgets but that are still ongoing. Capital appropriations, including reappropriations, are not effective immediately so to ensure there is no funding lapse for any of the ongoing projects, the bill would need to be signed by the Governor by March 31 (unless it includes an emergency clause, which would allow the bill to be signed later).

Work on the full capital budget continues. As in prior years, CCAO's primary focus for capital budget advocacy will be securing funding for county jail projects.

Additionally, communities have until next Thursday (March 12) to [submit applications for community projects](#).

Legislative Activity

Floor Activity

The following bills that may interest counties received consideration on the floor of one of the two chambers of the General Assembly.

Senate

- [Senate Bill 262](#) (Senator Bill Blessing, III): To require a public authority or other party to a construction contract to note variations from an industry standard form.
 - **PASSED 30-0**

- [Senate Bill 63](#) (Senators Theresa Gavarone and Bill DeMora): To generally prohibit the use of ranked choice voting, to withhold Local Government Fund distributions from a municipality or chartered county that uses ranked choice voting, and to make changes to election petition records.
 - **CONCURRED to House of Representatives changes, 24-7**

Committee Hearings

The following committees held hearings this week regarding bills that may interest counties.

House Natural Resources

- [House Bill 182](#) (Representative Levi Dean): To prohibit a public water system from adding fluoride to its water.
 - Second hearing, proponent testimony the Fluoride Action Network, Ohio Advocates for Medical Freedom, and 15 private individuals.
- [House Bill 627](#) (Representative Jason Stephens): To allow a board of county commissioners to disapprove of certain scenic river designations.
 - First hearing, sponsor testimony

House Government Oversight

- [House Bill 481](#) (Representative Sarah Fowler Arthur): To allow a public body to meet in an executive session to discuss the performance of a public employee or official.
 - Second hearing, no testimony
- [House Bill 223](#) (Representatives Adam Mathews and Bernard Willis): To prohibit the state or a political subdivision from purchasing a United States or Ohio flag that was not made in the United States.
 - Fourth hearing, no testimony

House Ways and Means

- [House Bill 540](#) (Representatives Justin Pizzulli and David Thomas): To require payments in lieu of taxes from conservation organizations with significant holdings of tax-exempt land.
 - Fourth hearing, no testimony
 - **AMENDED** to further reduce the percentage of land exempted from taxation to 47.5%.
- [House Bill 504](#) (Representative Angie King): To authorize counties to temporarily exempt a portion of property's increased value from taxation following a reappraisal.
 - Third hearing, no testimony

House Local Government

- [House Bill 493](#) (Representatives David Thomas and Dan Troy): To sunset the sale of delinquent property tax certificates on January 1, 2027.
 - Second hearing, no testimony
 - **AMENDED** to limit the provisions of the bill to delinquent tax certificates for owner-occupied residences and agricultural properties.

House Children and Human Services

- [House Bill 647](#) (Representatives Phil Plummer and Tom Young): To revise the law governing the publicly funded child care program, modify an appropriation for the Child Care Cred Program, and to make an appropriation for a data analytics project.
 - Third hearing, opponent testimony from the Ohio Prosecuting Attorneys Association, Policy Matters Ohio, KinderCare, 12 other organizations, and 17 private individuals; interested party testimony from the Ohio Chamber of Commerce, Groundwork Ohio, Ohio Head Start Association, and four other organizations.

Senate Local Government

- [Senate Bill 42](#) (Senators Michele Reynolds and Hearcel Craig): To authorize local governments to create residential stability zones where homeowners may qualify for a partial property tax exemption.
 - Second hearing, proponent testimony from the Franklin County Auditor, the Hamilton County Auditor, the Greater Ohio Policy Center, the Ohio Chamber of Commerce, COHHIO, the Ohio Municipal League, and five other organizations and one private individual.
- [House Bill 397](#) (Representatives Kellie Deeter and Mark Johnson): To expand the allowable uses of profits from jail commissary funds.
 - Second hearing, no testimony

Senate Finance

- [Senate Bill 315](#) (Senators Tim Schaffer and Hearcel Craig): To require Ohio's SNAP program to begin using chip-enabled EBT cards.
 - First hearing, sponsor testimony

Senate Armed Services, Veterans Affairs and Public Safety

- [House Bill 297](#) (Representatives Kevin Ritter and Johnathan Newman): To increase the amount a county may provide to military and veterans organizations for Memorial Day expenses.
 - First hearing, sponsor testimony

Senate Ways and Means

- [Senate Bill 285](#) (Senator Tim Schaffer): To exempt agricultural land converted to certain conservation uses from recoupment charges.
 - Third hearing, no testimony
- [Senate Bill 359](#) (Senator Tim Schaffer): To modify the tax enforcement authority of the Department of Taxation, municipal tax administrators, county treasurers, and the Board of Tax Appeals and to modify a sales tax exemption for automated car wash services.
 - First hearing, sponsor testimony

Senate Workforce Development

- [Senate Bill 331](#) (Senators Steve Wilson and Willis Blackshear): To allow certain public hospitality employees to accept gratuities.
 - First hearing, sponsor testimony

Introduction of Bills

The following bill(s) that may be of interest to counties were introduced this week:

- [House Bill 727](#) (Representatives Tex Fischer and Phil Plummer): To modify the formula for grants to counties from the Department of Youth Services to operate community corrections facilities for felony delinquents.
- [House Bill 733](#) (Representatives Sarah Fowler Arthur and David Thomas): To expressly include the production of maple syrup and maple products in the laws relating to agriculture.
- [House Bill 737](#) (Representatives Bill Roemer and Thomas Hall): To require that cash payments to the state and local governments be rounded to the nearest nickel.
- [Senate Bill 372](#) (Senator Tim Schaffer): To require the Director of Budget and Management to establish and administer a centralized reporting system for financial status reports regarding public money provided through a grant or loan program, or through an economic development program, a workforce development program, or a public assistance program.

Upcoming Committee Hearings

The following committees are currently scheduled to meet and discuss bills that may be of interest to counties. Other committees will likely meet as well, but as of press time for Statehouse Report, they have not released agendas. Please note that these schedules are subject to change.

If you would like to offer testimony on any bill, please visit the committee page and contact the committee chair's office for instructions on how to submit testimony.

Tuesday, March 10

[House Technology and Innovation](#) (10:00 a.m.)

- [House Bill 413](#) (Representatives Tom Young and Bob Peterson): 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.
 - Fifth hearing, no testimony
 - **POSSIBLE AMENDMENTS**
 - **POSSIBLE VOTE**

[House Children and Human Services](#) (10:30 a.m.)

- [House Bill 647](#) (Representatives Phil Plummer and Tom Young): To revise the law governing the publicly funded child care program, modify an appropriation for the Child Care Cred Program, and to make an appropriation for a data analytics project.
 - Fourth hearing, all testimony
 - **POSSIBLE AMENDMENTS**
- [House Bill 649](#) (Representatives Josh Williams and D.J. Swearingen): To require video surveillance of child care centers, to establish an online portal for tracking child care

center attendance, and to require investigations of waste, fraud, and abuse allegations relating to providers of publicly funded child care.

- Second hearing, proponent testimony and interested party testimony
- **POSSIBLE SUBSTITUTE BILL**

Senate Local Government (4:00 p.m.)

- [Senate Bill 42](#) (Senators Michele Reynolds and Hearcel Craig): To authorize local governments to create residential stability zones where homeowners may qualify for a partial property tax exemption.
 - Third hearing, opponent testimony and interested party testimony
- [House Bill 397](#) (Representatives Kellie Deeter and Mark Johnson): To expand the allowable uses of profits from jail commissary funds.
 - Third hearing, opponent testimony and interested party testimony

Wednesday, March 11

House Local Government (9:00 a.m.)

- [House Bill 695](#) (Representatives Adam Bird and Brian Stewart): To prohibit certain local elected officials from entering into nondisclosure agreements.
 - First hearing, sponsor testimony

House Development (9:45 a.m.)

- [House Bill 284](#) (Representatives Mark Hiner and Erika White): To require iron or steel that is produced in the United States be used on projects supported by state funds.
 - Fourth hearing, all testimony
 - **POSSIBLE AMENDMENTS**

House Ways and Means (10:15 a.m.)

- [House Bill 598](#) (Representatives Mark Sigrist and Jim Hoops): To authorize local governments to create residential stability zones where homeowners may qualify for a partial property tax exemption.
 - First hearing, sponsor testimony
- [House Bill 443](#) (Representatives David Thomas and Adam Mathews): To prohibit enforcement of delinquent property tax liens against certain owner-occupied homesteads.
 - Third hearing, opponent testimony

2026 State of the State Address (12:00 p.m.)