

THE STATEHOUSE REPORT

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Second round of ARPA funding for townships and smaller municipalities clears House committee



The House Finance Committee this week passed legislation to distribute the second tranche of American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds to “non-entitlement units” (NEU) of local government in Ohio. [House Bill 377](#), sponsored by Reps. Thomas Hall and DJ Swearingen, would distribute \$422 million in ARPA funds to cities, villages and municipalities under 50,000 in population. Counties are direct recipients of ARPA funds from the federal government and will not be impacted by HB 377.

HB 377 follows in the footsteps of House Bill 168, legislation enacted last year which provided the first tranche of ARPA funds to NEU local governments in Ohio. The funds can be used for a multitude of COVID-19 response efforts and local government operations.

The Ohio Office of Budget and Management indicated that if HB 377 were passed by mid to late June, funds would be distributed to NEU local governments in July.

The bill cleared the House Finance Committee by a vote of 22-1 and now moves on the full House for a floor vote. The Ohio Senate Finance Committee has scheduled an informal first hearing for HB 377 on Tuesday of next week, indicating swift movement through the General Assembly.

Water lien legislation slated for opposition testimony

Legislation impacting counties’ and other local governments’ ability to place liens on properties for unpaid water charges is scheduled for opposition testimony next week in the Senate Energy and Public Utilities Committee.

[Senate Bill 193](#), sponsored by Sen. Sandra Williams, would prohibit local governments from placing a tax lien and foreclosing on property when water service charges are unpaid. CCAO is opposed to this legislation.

Under existing statute in [ORC 6103.02](#), counties have the ability to certify to the county auditor unpaid rates and charges for county water service. These certified amounts are then placed on the real property tax list by the county auditor as a lien on the property and collected in the same manner as property taxes.

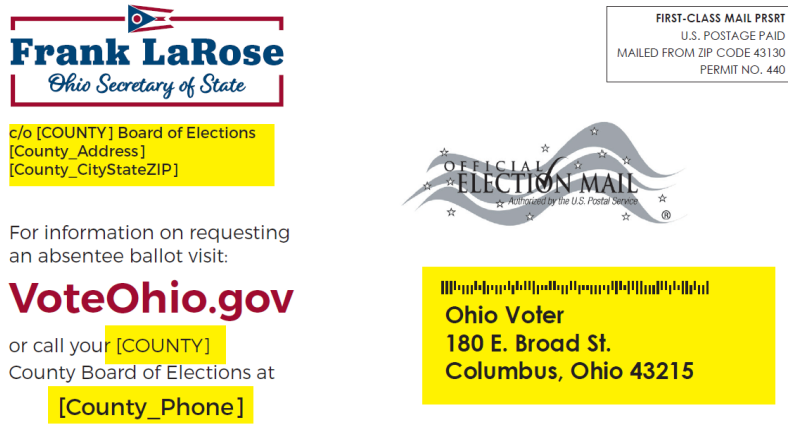
CCAO wishes to see existing statutory authority maintained. Placing liens on properties for unpaid water bills is typically a tool of last resort for counties. Many county water systems have processes and procedures in place, such as notifications and payment programs, for customers with unpaid balances. Certifying unpaid bills is only necessary when other options have been exhausted.

Furthermore, prohibiting certification of unpaid water bills will have the effect of increasing water rates paid by all other customers in the county water system. Other than bringing lawsuits against customers, counties have few other tools to ensure unpaid charges are collected. Absent certification, many unpaid bills would go uncollected. Ultimately, these expenses would have to be absorbed by all other ratepayers in the system, thus necessitating rate increases.

Counties invest considerable resources into county water systems. Counties spend millions of dollars annually to build, maintain and improve these systems. It is critical that counties have the tools in place to collect unpaid charges so that these systems remain financially viable and affordable for the customers they serve.

The policy team encourages members to share their concerns about SB 193 with their state senators. Any questions about SB 193 can be directed to CCAO Policy Analyst [Adam Schwiebert](#).

State Controlling Board approves funds for absentee ballot request mailing for November general election



The Ohio Controlling Board on Monday approved \$3 million in funding to mail absentee ballot applications to all registered voters in advance of the November 2022 general election. The practice of absentee ballot application mailing for even-year general elections has been in place for over a decade.

The funding amount totals \$3 million, with \$1.2 million dedicated to postage. Return postage for mailing in absentee ballot applications will not be included in the mailing. Over eight million absentee ballot request forms will be mailed to voters later this year.

Bill Introductions

[SB 335](#) (Hoagland, Lang) - To modify the homestead property tax exemption for disabled veterans.

[HB 650](#) (Wiggam, Young) - To require photo identification to vote, to make other changes to the Election Law, and to require the Bureau of Motor Vehicles to provide free state identification cards to persons seventeen and older.

