STATEHOUSE REPORT

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Budget hearings begin in the House Finance Committee

On Thursday, the legislative language of the Executive Budget was posted on the House Finance Committee's website. While the bill has not been formally introduced, the release has allowed CCAO to begin reviewing in-depth the governor's proposals. You can access the budget language here as well as on CCAO's Legislative Platform page, where you can access the Association's platform and budget priorities handout.

The House Finance Committee began hearings on the main operating budget and the transportation budget by inviting testimony from a number of department heads.

On Monday, OBM Director Kimberly Murnieks and LSC Director Wendy Zhan provided testimony on the underlying financial forecasts used for the budget and the LSC analysis and ODOT Director Jack Marchbanks gave testimony regarding the transportation budget.

On Tuesday, the Finance Committee heard testimony from a panel of Medicaid-involved agencies (Department of Aging Director Ursel McElroy, OMHAS Director Lori Criss, DODD Director Kim Hauck, and Medicaid Director Maureen Corcoran) and the Finance Subcommittee on Transportation heard testimony from Director Marchbanks.

On Thursday, Finance heard testimony from Interim Superintendent of Public Instruction Dr. Stephanie Siddens and Chancellor of Higher Education Randy Gardner.

During the course of testimony this week, the agency heads discussed and members of the Finance Committee and Transportation Subcommittee asked questions related to CCAO priorities.

On Tuesday, during Director Murnieks' testimony, Representative Willis Blackshear, Jr. (D-Dayton) asked if the increase in the Local Government Fund percentage from 1.66% to 1.70% is in codified law compared to uncodified law. This is an important question since a codified change is permanent (unless the legislature makes further changes) while uncodified language expires at the end of the biennium. Director Murnieks indicated that it is a permanent law change. The relevant code section is ORC 131.51(A) and can be found at line 9193 of the budget bill.

During his testimony on Tuesday in front of the full Finance Committee, Director Marchbanks fielded a question from Representative Gail Pavliga (R-Portage County) regarding the $25 million in ODOT's operating budget for critical maintenance for county airports. Rep. Pavliga inquired for the definition of “critical maintenance,” which Director Marchbanks answered as referring to maintenance items that county airports have deferred due to lack of funds; in particular, he highlighted paving of tarmacs and replacement/installation of runway lighting as two such deferred maintenance items that would be supported through the funding. CCAO will inform counties as to the proposed methodology of distributing these funds when more details become available.

During Wednesday’s panel with the directors of Aging, Developmental Disorders, OHMAS, and Medicaid, Representative Cindy Abrams (R-Harrison) asked Director of Aging McElroy about the Healthy Aging Grants to Local Partners, a proposed $40 million allocation from state-level ARPA funds for grants to local partners to help aging seniors remain in their homes and local communities. Director McElroy shared that the department envisions the funds flowing to boards of county commissioners who will then work with local bodies (such as Area Agencies on Aging and non-profit organizations) to determine how best to spend the funds. She also indicated that the funds will likely be distributed according to a formula where each county receives a base payment with additional funds based on a formula. While these details are not yet finalized, CCAO will share more information on the grant program as we learn more.

As the Policy Team continues to review the budget text and monitors hearings in the House Finance Committee, we will keep our members informed on important developments.

ODJFSA issues memo on SNAP enhanced benefits sunset and Medicaid unwinding

Since March of 2020, two major human services programs, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, sometimes referred to as food assistance or food stamps) and Medicaid, have operated under different federal rules due to the Public Health Emergency. These special procedures are coming to an end this spring.

In March, Ohioans receiving SNAP benefits will no longer receive an emergency allotment (at least an extra $95 a month per household). CMS will allow Ohio to begin removing people from the Medicaid rolls in April. The Ohio Job and Family Services Directors Association sent a memo to state lawmakers this week outlining the process for “unwinding” the Public Health Emergency and highlights some of the complexities county JFS agencies will experience during this transition.

CCAO welcomes James Kennedy as the newest addition to the Policy Team

On Monday, CCAO formally welcomed James Kennedy to the Association. He will work with the Policy Team as a policy analyst.

James brings a wealth of experience to the team and will be a vital asset to Ohio counties. He has worked as an intern with the American Legislative Exchange Council, the Buckeye Institute, and with the Tennessee Legislation Service. James also served for four years as a legislative aide for Ohio House Representative Derek Merrin (R-Moncolva).

He most recently worked for a year with the Martin County (Florida) Board of County Commissioners as the county’s legislative coordinator. In this role he worked closely with commissioners in Martin County, other local leaders, the state legislature, and federal officials such as Senator Marco Rubio.

One of his focus areas with Martin County was water quality issues, an important policy area for every Ohio county.

James has jumped right into his work with the team, participating in the Policy Team's meetings with legislators on CCAO budget priorities. We are glad to have him with the Association and are excited for our members to meet him at New Member Training and throughout the year.

Legislative Activity

The House held hearings in Finance Committee concerning the operating budget and the transportation budget, a review of which can be found above.

Several bills of interest to counties received hearings in Senate committees. All testimony was sponsor testimony.

- Senate Bill 41 (Senator Kristina D. Roegner): Makes changes to the law regarding building inspections in the form of creating a procedure to expediate appeals by the state board or a local board of building appeals.
- Senate Bill 39 (Senator Tim Schaffer): Exempts children's diapers, car seats, strollers, cribs, and baby monitors from the sales and use tax.
- Senate Bill 43 (Senator Andrew Brenner): Modifies the procedure through which a surviving spouse of a disabled veteran may receive a homestead exemption to their property taxes.

The following bills that may be of interest to counties were introduced:

- Senate Bill 47 (Senator Steve Huffman): Prohibits public employer from providing paid leave or compensation for a public employee to engage in certain union activities.
    - Generally, this applies to political activities related to advocating for or against political candidates or legislation/ordinances/ballot measures. It does not prohibit public employers from allowing an employee to use personal leave for those purposes.
- Senate Bill 48 (Senator Steve Huffman): To reduce the tax rate on certain motor fuel.
    - This bill would apply the $0.385 cents per gallon on gasoline to all forms of motor fuel.
- Senate Bill 50 (Senator Steve Wilson and Senator Kent Smith): To make changes to the law governing 9-1-1 service and to repeal program requirements for emergency-service-telecommunicator training.
    - This bill includes provisions pertaining to user fees for support of the Next Generation 9-1-1 system.
- Senate Bill 52 (Senator Theresa Gavarone): To exempt sales of United States and Ohio flags from the sales and use tax.