



STATEHOUSE REPORT

Published by: County Commissioners Association of Ohio

209 East State Street • Columbus, Ohio 43215-4309
Phone: 614-221-5627 • Fax: 614-221-6986 • www.ccao.org

February 24, 2023

House Finance accepts substitute transportation budget without changes to force account limits

The substitute version of [House Bill 23](#) (Rep. Edwards) received hearings this week in the House Finance Committee. The largest change in the bill was the addition of a \$1 billion Rural Highway Fund using expected FY 2023 year-end budget surplus funds. Eighty percent of the funds will be used to finance projects on rural state highways and twenty percent will be used to provide local governments with matching funds for ODOT TRAC projects. The budget did not include changes to county engineer force account limits. CCAO will continue to work with the County Engineers' Association to obtain a force account amendment in future versions of the bill.

The substitute bill also made several changes to the law governing Transportation Improvement Districts. The changes allow a TID to enter into an agreement with a group of contiguous counties, if the project is partially contained in each of the counties and has received federal funding. Also, a community that is not part of a TID is permitted to contribute to the financing of a TID project.

CCAO is opposed to a provision in the bill that obliges a county or township to allow aggregate surface mining in any zoning district when those activities are added to an existing mining operation authorized by an ODNR permit. This provision completely overrides local zoning authority, including in residential areas.

Members with questions should contact Senior Policy Analyst Jon Honeck, jhoneck@ccao.org.

Subcommittee testimony provides first look at Healthy Aging Grant distributions

Ohio Department of Aging Director Ursel McElroy and other aging advocates provided testimony on [House Bill 33](#) (Representative Jay Edwards), the main operating budget, on Thursday. Among the topics discussed with the director was the proposed \$40 million Healthy Aging Grant that would flow from the Department of Aging to counties for distribution by commissioners for projects that aim to keep senior in their homes.

CCAO joined many other organizations in a [letter supporting](#) the Healthy Aging Grants concept ahead of Director McElroy's testimony.

[Included in the testimony](#) (Appendix B) is the first look the Department has provided on how these funds may be distributed. The funds are allocated by a formula where each county receives \$100,000 with the remaining \$30.2 million distributed based on the share of seniors living below the poverty line who are not on Medicaid who reside in each county (the table shows a total of \$39 million, suggesting the remaining \$1 million will be used for administering the program or other usages). Individual allocations range from \$124,341 (Wyandot County) to \$4,108,605 (Franklin County).

A complete table with allocations under the currently proposed distribution method [can be found here](#).

The Legislative Service Commission's [Redbook on the Department of Aging](#)'s budget was also released ahead of the subcommittee hearing on Thursday.

Operating Budget testimony round-up: Secretary of State and Administrative Services

Agency testimony on [House Bill 33](#) (Representative Jay Edwards), the main operating budget, continued this week in the House Finance subcommittees.

[During his testimony](#) in front of the House Finance Subcommittee on Higher Education, Secretary of State Frank LaRose highlighted areas of recent partnership with counties on election administration issues, such as funding for new voting machines in the 132nd General Assembly, funding for replacement e-pollbooks last General Assembly, and providing funding to help counties conduct multiple primary elections in 2022.

[The comments](#) came in response to a question concerning Secretary of State appropriation item 050407, Poll Workers Training. The appropriation item previously had been used by the Secretary of State to reimburse counties for the initial and ongoing training of poll workers and presiding judges. The As Introduced version of the budget changes the model from an up-front grant to counties instead of a reimbursement.

According to the [LSC Redbook](#) for the Secretary of State, as of this month, no counties have utilized the funding made available for replacement electronic pollbooks, but the Redbook does note that "some county boards of elections are beginning the process of acquisition now." We encourage commissioners, county executives, and county council members to reach out to their boards of elections to inquire if they are planning to acquire new e-pollbooks.

[Also testifying](#) in front of the Higher Education subcommittee was Kathleen Madden, the Director of the [Department of Administrative Services](#) (DAS). DAS is responsible for a wide swath of duties regarding the state government, but perhaps its key responsibility of interest to counties is the management of the Multi-Agency Radio Communication System (typically referred to as MARCS).

Currently, MARCS is funded through user subscriber fees of \$10 per month per radio. The As Introduced budget shifts the funding stream for MARCS from the user fee model to an appropriation from the state GRF. Director Madden highlighted in her testimony that local government first

responder agencies have previously cited the user fee model as a barrier to their use of MARCS. The state hopes that by removing the user fee, more agencies will join the system.

Also discussed during Director Madden's testimony was the transition to Next Generation 9-1-1 services. The budget includes \$28.2 million in SFY 2024 and \$17.8 million in SFY 2023 to support the installation of Next Gen 9-1-1 infrastructure. This does not, however, include any operating funds. The budget makes no changes to the current operating funding stream, a user fee on devices of \$0.25. There is separate legislation that has been introduced to increase that fee to \$0.70 but it is not a part of the budget.

Legislative Activity

The House held hearings in Finance Committee and the Finance subcommittees concerning the operating budget and the transportation budget. Additionally, the Senate Transportation Committee heard informal testimony on the transportation budget.

Several bills of interest to counties received hearings this week across different committees.

Senate Government Oversight Committee

- [Senate Bill 23](#) (Senator George Lang): Expand political subdivision joint purchasing authority.
 - First hearing; Sponsor testimony

Senate Ways and Means Committee

- [Senate Bill 39](#) (Senator Tim Schaffer): Exempts children's diapers, car seats, strollers, cribs, and baby monitors from the sales and use tax.
 - Third hearing; Proponent testimony from the American Academy of Pediatrics.
- [Senate Bill 43](#) (Senator Andrew Brenner): Modifies the homestead exemption for surviving spouses of disable veterans.
 - Second hearing; Proponent testimony from the Delaware County Auditor, the Ohio Manufactured Homes Association, and the Ohio State Association of Veterans Service Commissioners.
- [Senate Bill 52](#) (Senator Theresa Gavarone): To exempt sales of United States and Ohio flags from the sales and use tax.
 - Second hearing; no additional testimony.

House Government Oversight Committee

- [House Bill 21](#) (Representative Dan Troy): Require Ohio's presidential primary election to be held in May.
 - First hearing; Sponsor testimony

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

- [House Bill 60](#) (Representative Dan Troy): To increase the amount of and expand the income qualifications for the homestead exemption.