



STATEHOUSE REPORT

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General Assembly passes capital budget containing \$50 million for county jails, additional funding for projects across the state

On Wednesday, the House of Representatives and Senate each held their final session before the General Assembly takes a summer break. Among the many bills the chambers passed was the state capital budget, [House Bill 2](#) (other bills of note that passed a chamber this week, including the County Omnibus Bill, are discussed in the following articles). HB 2 passed the Senate by a vote of 30-1 and the House concurred on the bill by a vote of 90-5. Governor Mike DeWine signed the bill on Friday afternoon. Since the bill included an emergency clause, it took effect immediately upon his signature.

House Bill 2 makes a total appropriation of about \$4.3 billion in appropriations, of which \$3.23 billion is capital appropriations supported by debt, \$280.0 million is for capital appropriations supported by cash, and \$717.8 million is for projects funded by the One Time Strategic Community Investment Fund (OTSCIF) created in the operating budget. Finally, \$22.4 million is for Temporary Aid for Needy Families Block Grant purposes that were originally authorized in the state operating budget.

Among the appropriations made in the capital budget is \$50 million for construction and renovation of county jails. This funding will be distributed through a Department of Rehabilitation and Correction (DRC) process similar to prior iterations of capital budget jail grants. The bills do not include a formula or a prescribed match amount for potential projects.

[CCAO provided written testimony](#) regarding the bill thanking the General Assembly and the DeWine-Husted Administration for the jail project funding while reiterating the significant need across the state. CCAO hopes to continue the strong partnership with the state in future legislation and state budgets.

Regarding the \$50 million in the capital budget, DRC is required to do the following in determining projects to fund:

1. Target county jails that the Department of Rehabilitation and Correction determines to have the greatest need for construction or renovation work;
2. Improve substantially the condition, safety, and operational ability of the jail; and
3. Benefit jails that are, or will be, used by multiple counties.

The capital budget also includes about \$150 million for traditional bonded community projects (separate from the \$700 million allocated from the OTSCIF). A list of projects in the community projects list [can be found here](#). Below are a few county projects that received funding. In addition to the below, nine county fairs received an aggregate of about \$1.2 million.

- Clark County: \$500,000 for the Clark County Family Justice Center
- Hancock County: \$200,000 for the county ADAMH Board
- Lucas County: \$100,000 for Juvenile Justice Center/Youth Treatment Center
- Morgan County: \$300,000 for county jail improvements
- Tuscarawas: \$200,000 for the county emergency management agency

As a note regarding the community project funding that Morgan County received for its jail project, the county identified need in the CCAO-BSSA Jail Project Survey conducted earlier in the year. The funding received through the community project funding appears to address a significant portion of the cost of the project it reported in the survey.

The bill also includes the OTSCIF which allocates \$700 million for projects across the state. The full list of projects [can be found here](#). A total of 654 projects received funding, of which about 75 are county projects. The county projects received a total of \$117 million. Below are a few county projects that received funding. In addition to the below, eleven county fair projects received an aggregate of \$11 million.

- Columbiana County: \$2.9 million for a county drug task force building
- Erie County: \$200,000 for county jail surveillance upgrades
- Jackson County: \$600,000 for county courthouse building and grounds renovation
- Medina County: \$300,000 for jail safety enhancements
- Scioto County: \$696,000 for the county safety operations center

As a note regarding the OTSCIF funding that Erie County and Medina County received for jail projects, both counties identified need in the CCAO-BSSA Jail Project Survey conducted earlier in the year. The funding received through OTSCIF appears to address about 50% of the cost for each of these renovation projects.

County Omnibus Bill reported, passes House unanimously

On Wednesday afternoon, the House passed [House Bill 497](#) (Representatives Brian Stewart and Roy Klopfenstein), the county omnibus bill unanimously. The day before, the House State and Local Government committee favorably reported HB 497 unanimously. Prior to passage, the committee adopted a technical amendment to clarify that the coroner expert witness fee is \$350 “per hour.”

As a reminder, the following provisions are included in HB 497:

Approval of plans for courthouse or jail projects

The bill allows boards of commissioners to approve courthouse or jail renovation/repair projects that fall under \$25,000 without the approval of the clerk of court of common pleas, the sheriff, the probate judge, and the appointee of the judge of the court of common pleas. The board of commissioners may seek the advice of these elected officials. If the project is over the \$25,000 threshold, the current approval process in R.C. 153.36 remains in effect.

Contracts submitted to prosecuting attorney

The bill increases the dollar threshold for contracts the board of commissioners must submit to the county prosecutor for approval to \$20,000. This statute was last updated in 1953.

Resolutions for disposing unneeded personal property

The bill raises the dollar threshold for a board of county commissioners’ requirement to pass a resolution to sell or donate unnecessary or obsolete personal property to \$5,000.

Design services for county improvements

The bill exempts “minor repairs” from needing professional design or engineer services and defines “minor repairs.” The “minor repairs” definition was copied from the Ohio Administrative Code.

Locations of construction plans

The bill changes the location for holding construction plans, drawings, representations, bills of material, specifications of work and estimates for public improvements, the building of a county home, the building of a children’s home, and courthouse or jail renovation/repair projects under \$25,000 to the board of commissioners. Current law requires the county auditor to keep these items.

Transportation Improvement District legal services

The bill allows Transportation Improvement Districts (TIDs) to contract with the county prosecuting attorney for legal services.

County contract terms and conditions

The amended bill makes certain terms and conditions unenforceable if they are included in county contracts, including an indemnity clause; a requirement for binding arbitration; and, naming a court or venue for legal action outside of the county. The language is based on an existing law that applies to state contracts.

Designating county depositories

The bill allows commissioners to add additional public depositories one additional time during the four-year designation period in current law.

Competitive bidding notification requirements

The bill updates competitive bidding notification requirements to align with changes made in the state operating budget last year. Current law requires counties to provide notice of competitive bidding opportunities for any project estimated to cost more than \$50,000, instead of the updated competitive bidding threshold enacted by the operating budget.

Definition of “private practice of medicine”

The bill clarifies that “private practice of medicine” does not include performing an autopsy at the request of another coroner.

Coroner expert witness fees

The bill aligns the fees at \$350 per hour that a coroner or deputy coroner can charge for providing for expert testimony at a trial, hearing or deposition in a civil action.

Juvenile court transfer

The bill specifies that any court cost, fine, restitution, or other monetary penalty imposed at the time of a transfer to the juvenile court of the child’s residence is not a final, appealable order.

CCAO thanks Reps. Stewart and Klopfenstein for sponsoring HB 497. We also thank Chairman Scott Wiggam, Vice Chair Bill Dean, Ranking Member Sean Brennan and the members of the [House State and Local Government Committee](#) for a thorough and thoughtful committee process. Finally, thank you to Speaker Jason Stephens, Leader Allison Russo, and members of the House for advancing the commonsense changes in HB 497.

The bill now heads to the Senate for consideration. If you have questions about HB 497, please contact the CCAO Policy Team at policy@ccao.org.

CCAO-backed bill to re-establish the Water and Sewer Fund introduced

Earlier this week, Representative D.J. Swearengin introduced [House Bill 635](#) which will reestablish the Water & Sewer Rotary Loan Program that was eliminated nearly a decade ago. The intent of the bill is to reinstitute the program that once benefited counties, municipalities, and 6119 sewer districts.

HB 635 will allow a provide a 0% loan to counties, municipalities, and 6119 water and sewer districts on behalf of agricultural landowners to defer special assessments relating to water and sewer extension projects. In some cases, especially in rural areas, water and sewer extension projects are funded by special assessments. This program would allow those projects to get funded through a 0% loan from the state which would cover the deferred agricultural assessment with zero upfront cost by the agricultural landowner.

The current bill will also recreate the Water and Sewer Commission as a seven-person board that would feature four different state agency directors. along with three appointments by the governor with strict guidelines of who can be appointed. The Water and Sewer Commission will be under the Ohio Water Development Authority for administrative purposes, with the executive director being on the commission as well. This commission will be tasked with approving the specific water and sewer extension projects that are submitted.

The program will provide gap construction funding for deferred agricultural lands, which allows industrial, commercial, and residential development to occur while also protecting agricultural farmland.

CCAO has collaborated closely with Commissioner Mark Stahl from Ottawa County along with the Sanitary Engineers Association on HB 635.

If there are any questions relating to this legislation, please contact CCAO Policy Analyst, James Kennedy at jkennedy@ccao.org.

Overview: Other county-related bills passed out of chamber

In addition to the capital budget and the County Omnibus Bill, the House and Senate each voted on more than three dozen other bills. These bills are discussed in brief below. Bills that recurred a concurrence vote of the original chamber are listed under the original chamber. Bills that will go to Governor Mike DeWine for signature are indicated by a leading asterisk.

House of Representatives

- [House Bill 87](#) (Representatives Nick Santucci and Steve Demetriou): To prohibit the state or a political subdivision from purchasing a United States or Ohio flag that was not made in the United States.
 - The Legislative Service Commission (LSC) estimates a minimal, if any, fiscal effect due to the likelihood political subdivisions are already purchasing U.S. and Ohio flags from domestic sources.
- [House Bill 315](#) (Representatives Thomas Hall and Bill Seitz): To make various township law changes and to make an appropriation.
 - The key county-related provision is the inclusion of \$3.0 million in grants to political subdivisions to aid in modernizing regulations and processes tied to zoning.
 - [CCAO Senior Policy Analyst Jon Honeck](#) provided interested party testimony, primarily requesting a provision pertaining to New Community Authorities be removed from the bill, which it later was.

- [House Bill 349](#) (Representatives Tim Barhorst and Don Jones): To authorize the creation of areas within which incentives are available to encourage the development of natural gas pipelines and other infrastructure and to make an appropriation.
 - Appropriates \$20.0 million for loans to local governments (and other entities) to purchase or lease easements for the development of natural gas pipelines.
 - Authorizes local governments to create EnergizeOhio zones, which may be used to grant a partial property tax exemption for natural gas company personal property.
 - [Washington County Commissioner Charlie Schilling](#) and [CCAO Policy Analyst James Kennedy](#) each provided proponent testimony.
- [House Bill 390](#) (Representatives Richard Brown and D.J. Swearingen): To revise the law relating to the notice of excess funds in real property foreclosure sales.
 - Makes changes to the notice requirements that clerks of court must make when there are excess funds in a foreclosure sale. LSC estimates the fiscal effect will be minimal and may be offset by a change in notification requirements.
 - [CCAO Senior Policy Analyst Jon Honeck](#) provided interested party testimony expressing concerns with a potential amendment to the bill that ultimately was not adopted.
- [House Bill 496](#) (Representative Jim Hoops): To revise the law governing property taxes and county auditors.
 - Makes cleanup changes to county auditor provisions, such as allowing the auditor to complete documentation regarding loss in value of manufactured homes in the homeowner's behalf, as they can for real property.
- *[House Bill 56](#) (Representatives Phil Plummer and Andrea White): To prohibit causing the death of or serious physical harm to another while operating a utility vehicle or mini-truck, to require law enforcement entities to train officers related to the pursuit of a motor vehicle, to increase penalties for fleeing from law enforcement and forms of stunt driving, and to make changes to the distribution of certain driving-related fees.
 - Requires county sheriffs (and other law enforcement entities) to consider pursuit policy standards and train its officers on the policy.
 - Restores a provision that was altered due to veto language from House Bill 33 that will have the effect of increasing revenue to the Indigent Defense Support Fund, which is used to provide some county indigent defense reimbursement costs. The exact size of the effect is uncertain.
 - House concurred with Senate changes.
- *[House Bill 301](#) (Representative D.J. Swearingen): *[Omnibus bill concerning court jurisdictions, cemeteries, soldiers' memorial authority boards of trustees, and certain financial institutions]*
 - Beginning in 2031, replaces two part-time judges of the Ashtabula County County Court with one full-time judge and, beginning in 2025, makes changes

to the jurisdictions of the Ashtabula County County Court and the Conneaut Municipal Court.

- Originally contained in House Bill 413, for which [Ashtabula County Commissioner Casey Kozlowski](#) and the full [Ashtabula County Board of Commissioners](#) both provided proponent testimony.
- Requires the Criminal Sentencing Commission to re-establish its standing juvenile committee. The bill does not prescribe the members of the standing committee but includes the CCAO representative on the recommended members.
 - The current CCAO representative on the Criminal Sentencing Commission is Jackson County Commissioner Donnie Willis.
- Allows the Board of Trustees of a political subdivision soldiers' memorial to make rules and regulations for entertainment, retail, educational, sporting, social, cultural, or arts opportunities at the memorial, and permits the Board, with approval of the Board of County Commissioners of the applicable county, to enter into contracts with political subdivisions or nonprofit organizations for use of other facilities separate from the memorial itself.
 - The language does not specify which board of county commissioners must sign off if the Board of Trustees is of a cross-county political subdivision.
- House concurred with Senate changes.

Senate

- [Senate Bill 173](#) (Representatives Bill DeMora and Theresa Gavarone): To specify that election officials are designated public service workers for the purposes of the public records law.
 - Defines the members of a county board of elections, the director and deputy director of a board of elections, and full-time employees of a board of elections as designated public service workers for the purposes of residential and familial information redaction on public records.
 - May increase costs to county recorders due to an increased need to redact public records upon request.
- *[Senate Bill 94](#) (Senators Andrew Brenner and Al Landis): *[Omnibus bill including provisions about court modernization, recording fees for document preservation, community reinvestment area claw backs, and other non-county provisions]*
 - Removes the requirement that funds for the offices of the clerk of the county court of common pleas must be authorized by the court instead of the clerk (provided the clerk has been elected and not appointed to fill a vacancy); also specifies that in counties where the clerk of courts is an appointed position, use of the funds must be authorized and disbursed by the county executive.
 - Requires county recorders to provide an electronic means of recording instruments and accessing said instruments by June 30, 2026, and allows the recorder to charge a surcharge for document preservation.
 - The bill appropriates \$6.0 million to reimburse counties for the implementation of these provisions.

- The document preservation surcharge may be for an amount up to \$5, the revenue from which is deposited entirely in the county general fund.
 - Provides more flexibility to counties (and other subdivisions) that are a party to a community reinvestment area (CRA) to claw back exempted taxes if the property owner does not comply with the provisions of the CRA.
 - Senate concurred with House changes.
- *[Senate Bill 98](#) (Senator Michael Rulli): *[Omnibus bill including provisions concerning property tax exemptions and abatements, judge pay reimbursements, vehicle inspection authorization, and other non-county provisions]*
 - Expands two property tax exemptions:
 - Expands the charitable use property tax exemption to properties where the property owner or lessee is a religious institution or if the property is used by the owner or lessee for public worship.
 - Expands an existing property tax exemption tailored to apply to the City of Mason (Warren County) to apply to convention centers or arenas constructed by or acquired by the city.
 - Permits temporary tax abatements for certain circumstances where governments did not file required paperwork in a timely manner. These apply to:
 - City of Trotwood (Montgomery County)
 - Highland County
 - Cleveland Metroparks
 - Requires county treasurers to submit reimbursement requests for the county portion of acting/assigned county or municipal court judges' per diem within one year of when the per diem was paid. Requires the Ohio Supreme Court to not pay reimbursement requests later than one year.
 - Allows a clerk of the court of common pleas to conduct the physical inspection of certain motor vehicles and allows the clerk to charge the same \$5 service fee as the deputy registrar or dealer may.
 - Senate concurred with House changes.

If you have questions about any of these bills, please send them to policy@ccao.org.

Senate Ways and Means Committee hears multiple property tax bills

This week, the Senate Ways and Means Committee heard two pieces of legislation intended to address the impact of rising property taxes.

[Senate Bill 271](#) (Senators Bill Blessing and Hearcel Craig) authorizes a credit or “circuit breaker” for eligible homeowners and renters whose property taxes, or portion of rent attributable to property taxes, exceeds 5% of their income. The credit would be claimed by filing an income tax return and would be capped at \$1,000 per year initially with inflation adjustments in later years. The credit would be limited to homes under a certain value (\$438,000 in the first year) and rental units under a specified median monthly rent (\$1,370).

CCAO submitted written [proponent testimony](#) supporting the bill but also asking that the legislature first expand the exemption available through homestead credit. CCAO also reminded the committee that any property tax credit or deferral program should continue to reimburse counties and other local governments for lost revenue.

Other organizations submitting proponent testimony included the [County Auditors Association](#), [AARP](#), [Franklin County Auditor](#), [Policy Matters Ohio](#), [OASBO/OSBA](#), [Legal Aid Society of Southwest Ohio](#), and [COHHIO](#).

The committee also heard proponent testimony for [Senate Bill 244](#) (Senators Michele Reynolds and Hearcel Craig), which establishes the Residential Stability Zone program that allows counties, home rule townships, and municipalities to provide property tax relief to certain low-income homeowners in designated neighborhoods. Such zones could be designated for a ten-year period but could be renewed. Within the zone, homeowners who meet income and financial asset tests would be exempted from a designated percentage of increased property valuation due to market conditions. New construction would not be exempted.

CCAO is an interested party for this legislation due to concerns about the lack of state reimbursement for potential lost revenue for inside millage and shifting of tax burdens within the county for voted levies.

Proponent testimony is available on the [committee website](#).

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

Legislative Activity

Committee Hearings

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

House Commerce and Labor

- [House Bill 96](#) (Representatives Dontavius Jarrells and Ismail Mohamed): To increase the state minimum wage.
 - First hearing, sponsor testimony

House Criminal Justice

- [House Bill 325](#) (Representative Terrence Upchurch): To require municipal and county correctional facilities and state correctional institutions to provide inmates who are deaf, hard of hearing, or severely speech impaired with access to teletypewriters.
 - First hearing, sponsor testimony

House Families and Aging

- [House Bill 583](#) (Representatives Andrea White and Phil Plummer): Regarding residential facilities for foster children.
 - Second hearing, proponent testimony from Lt. Col. Eric Henderson of the Dayton Police Department and Margie Barilla of Journey Academy

House Finance

- [House Bill 580](#) (Representatives Andrea White and Sharon Ray): To make foster caregivers and kinship caregivers eligible for publicly funded child care.
 - First hearing, sponsor testimony

House Government Oversight

- [House Bill 552](#) (Representatives Scott Wiggam and Beth Lear): To enact the Voter Verification Act to require election officials to verify certain information in voter registration records and to require electors to provide corrected information.
 - First hearing, sponsor testimony
- [House Bill 526](#) (Representatives Beth Liston and Riordan McClain): Regarding the pass-through of support payments under the Ohio Works First program.
 - First hearing, sponsor testimony

House State and Local Government

- [House Bill 211](#) (Representative Jennifer Gross): To require a public body to permit members of the public to comment or testify about matters of public concern before the public body at its public meeting.
 - First hearing, sponsor testimony
 - **AMENDED** to prohibit state contracts from including usage of state funds to contract with or support certain entities involved in fact checking or identifying misinformation.

Senate General Government

- [House Bill 30](#) (Representative Latyna Humphrey): Regarding inmates' access to feminine hygiene products and showers by municipal and county correctional facilities and state correctional institutions.
 - First hearing, sponsor testimony

Senate Select Committee on Housing

- [Senate Bill 245](#) (Senators Michele Reynolds and Hearcel Craig): To revise the law governing eviction, real estate representation agreements, residential building code enforcement, and real estate property transfers.
 - Third hearing, interested party testimony from the Lakewood Division of Housing and Building, the Greater Ohio Policy Center, the Ohio Municipal League, and the Ohio Manufactured Homes Association and opponent testimony from the Ohio Real Estate Investors Association.

House Technology and Innovation

- [House Bill 507](#) (Representative Brett Hillyer): To extend legal safe harbor to political subdivisions that implement a specified cybersecurity program.

- Second hearing, proponent testimony from the Association of Ohio Drinking Water Agencies and the Association of Ohio Metropolitan Wastewater Agencies.

Senate Health

- [Senate Bill 255](#) (Senators Steve Huffman and Terry Johnson): To revise the law governing coroners and death certificates.
 - First hearing, sponsor testimony

Senate Judiciary

- [House Bill 265](#) (Representatives Scott Wiggam and Thomas Hall): To exempt redaction request forms, affidavits, and the records of the work schedules of designated public service workers from disclosure under public records law.
 - First hearing, sponsor testimony
- [Senate Bill 25](#) (Senator Bob Hackett): Relating to property tax foreclosures.
 - Fifth hearing, no testimony
- [House Bill 56](#) (Representatives Phil Plummer and Andrea White): To require law enforcement entities to train officers related to the pursuit of a motor vehicle and to increase penalties for fleeing from law enforcement and forms of stunt driving.
 - Fifth hearing, no testimony
 - **FAVORABLY REPORTED**

Senate Government Oversight

- [House Bill 257](#) (Representatives Jim Hoops and Thaddeus Claggett): To authorize certain public bodies to meet virtually.
 - Second hearing, proponent testimony from OPERS, the Northeast Ohio Public Energy Council, the Ohio Statewide Independent Living Council, the School Employees Retirement System of Ohio, the Ohio Association of School Business Officials, the Coalition of Ohio Regional Districts, the Regional Income Tax Agency, the Ohio Association of County Behavioral Health Authorities, the Ohio Association of Regional Councils, and Jefferson Health Plan.
- [Senate Bill 240](#) (Senator Tim Schaffer): To make various changes to public assistance benefits programs
 - Second hearing, proponent testimony from the Opportunity Solutions Project and interested party testimony from the Ohio Child Support Professionals Association.

Introduction of Bills

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

- [House Bill 632](#) (Representative Jack Daniels): Relating to real property foreclosures.
- [House Bill 635](#) (Representative D.J. Swearingen): To re-establish the Water and Sewer Commission and the Water and Sewer Fund.

- [Senate Bill 300](#) (Senators Andrew Brenner and Kent Smith): To require any increased county real estate and manufactured home conveyance fees to be allocated for county-specific housing purposes.