



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

November 22, 2024

Fairfield County Commissioner Fix testifies in support of County Omnibus Bill

On Tuesday, Substitute House Bill 497 (Representative Stewart and Representative Klopfenstein), the county omnibus bill, received its second hearing before the Senate Local Government Committee. Fairfield County Commissioner Jeff Fix testified in support of the legislation on behalf of CCAO.

Commissioner Fix's testimony focused on the increased efficiency HB 497 will bring to county government operations if enacted. He highlighted provisions of the bill that will:

- Require review and sign off from a committee of elected officials for any projects or change orders over \$25,000 during a courthouse or jail construction or renovation project, rather than for all as in current law.
- Require the county prosecuting attorney to review and certify all contracts \$20,000 or higher, updating the threshold which has not been increased since 1953.
- Streamline the process for the county to sell or donate unnecessary or obsolete personal property and increase the threshold for these donations to \$5,000.

Following testimony, Senator Manning asked Commissioner Fix if there would be interest in raising the threshold for courthouse or jail projects. Commissioner Fix responded that CCAO is interested in discussing this. We will continue to have conversations with Chair O'Brien and the Committee members about possible amendments to the legislation.

The Knox County Prosecuting Attorney also submitted written proponent testimony.

We appreciate the bill sponsors, co-sponsors, and the members of the Senate Local Government Committee for the opportunity to bring these commonsense issues forward. The Committee is not meeting next week, but will likely resume meeting the week following

Thanksgiving. If you have questions about HB 497, or wish to testify at a future hearing, please contact the CCAO Policy Team at policy@ccao.org.

Public Works reauthorization passes Senate, is heard in House

This week, the Senate unanimously passed [Senate Joint Resolution 4](#) (Senators Brian Chavez and Hearcel Craig), which would put a constitutional amendment on the May 2025 ballot to reapprove the Public Works Commission's State Capital Improvement Plan (SCIP).

Also this week, the House held its first hearing on [House Joint Resolution 8](#) (Representatives Scott Oelslager and Dan Troy), the House equivalent.

The SCIP is traditionally authorized in ten-year increments, and SJR 4 would continue at that pace. The approval would allow the state to issue \$2.5 billion in general obligation bonds (\$250 million annually) for public improvement projects across the state. The figure would be an increase of \$625 million compared to the existing authorization, which expires on July 1, 2025.

Clermont County Commissioner and First Vice President of CCAO David Painter provided [proponent testimony](#) on the resolution in both chambers. In addition to his perspective as a county commissioner and an officer in CCAO, Commissioner Painter highlighted his role as a past president of the Ohio-Kentucky-Indiana Regional Council of Governments.

During his testimony, Commissioner Painter discussed some of the tangible effects of SCIP on Clermont County. In the round of awards released in June 2024 alone, the county received \$2.6 million to support three projects: one replacing a water main, one replacing a bridge and culvert, and one making critical repairs to a county road. Without the state funds facilitated by the existing SCIP authorization, these projects would either not have been completed or would have been completed over a much longer time span.

Bills to increase group home accountability, increase Ohio Police and Fire Pension contributions get hearings

OP&F
Group Home

Leadership teams announced for 136th General Assembly

This week, the incoming 136th General Assembly Republican and Democratic caucuses in the House of Representatives and the Senate voted for their leadership teams. In the House, the Republican leadership team is:

- Speaker of the House: Rep. Matt Huffman (R-Lima)
- Speaker Pro-Tempore: Rep. Gayle Manning (R-Lorain)
- Assistant Speaker Pro-Tempore: Rep. Phil Plummer (R-Dayton)

- Majority Floor Leader: Rep. Marilyn John (R-Shelby)
- Assistant Majority Floor Leader: Rep. Adam Bird (R-Cincinnati)
- Majority Whip: Rep. Riordan McClain (R-Upper Sandusky)
- Majority Whip: Rep. Steve Demetriou (R-Chagrin Falls)
- Majority Whip: Rep. Nick Santucci (R-Warren)
- Majority Whip: Rep. Josh Williams (R-Oregon)

Before her career in the General Assembly, Representative John served as a Richland County Commissioner.

With his selection as Speaker of the House, Representative Huffman will be only the 9th person in Ohio history to hold both the Speaker and Senate President (or equivalent, as the name of this position has changed through history) in their career and only the second to hold the positions in consecutive terms. The last person to do it was Elbert Lampson, who served as Speaker from 1888-1889 and Senate President Pro Tempore (then the highest office in the chamber) from 1892-1893.

The House Democratic Caucus voted to retain their leadership team from the current General Assembly:

- Minority Leader: Rep. Allison Russo (D-Upper Arlington)
- Assistant Minority Leader: Rep. Dontavius Jarrells (D-Columbus)
- Minority Whip: Rep. Dani Isaacsohn (D-Cincinnati)
- Assistant Minority Whip: Rep. Michele Grim (D-Toledo)

In the Senate, the Republican Caucus' leadership team is:

- Senate President: Sen. Rob McColley (R-Napoleon)
- President Pro-Tempore: Sen. Bill Reineke (R-Tiffin)
- Majority Floor Leader: Sen. Theresa Gavarone (R-Bowling Green)
- Majority Whip: Sen. George Lang (R-West Chester)

The leadership team for the Senate Democratic Caucus is largely unchanged, with the only change being Senator-elect Beth Liston serving as Assistant Minority Whip. Senator Paula Hicks-Hudson currently holds the position. The full team is:

- Minority Leader: Sen. Nickie Antonio (D-Lakewood)
- Assistant Minority Leader: Sen. Hearcel Craig (D-Columbus)
- Minority Whip: Sen.-Elect Kent Smith (D-Euclid)
- Assistant Minority Whip: Sen. Beth Liston (D-Dublin)

Legislative Activity

Floor Actions

This week, the following chamber(s) of the General Assembly met and considered the following bills that may be of interest to counties:

Senate

- [House Bill 5](#) (Representatives Sharon Ray and Rachel Baker): To modernize adoption laws.
 - **PASSED, 31-0**
 - Now heads back to the House of Representatives for concurrence to Senate amendments

Committee Hearings

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

House Civil Justice

- [Senate Bill 173](#) (Senators Bill DeMora and Theresa Gavarone): To specify that election officials are designated public service workers for purposes of the public records law.
 - First hearing, sponsor testimony
- [House Bill 632](#) (Representative Jack Daniels): Relating to real property foreclosures.
 - Second hearing, proponent testimony from Auction.com, Ohio Auctioneers Association, Ohio Sheriff Sales, Ohio Mortgage Bankers Association, and Roup LLC.
 - **SUBSTITUTE BILL ACCEPTED:** Private selling agents for public auctions of land cannot be affiliated with a mortgagee or mortgage servicer, and caps the cost of advertisement in newspaper of general circulation of a foreclosure auction at \$50.

House Economic and Workforce Development

- [House Bill 375](#) (Representatives Steve Demetriou and Tom Patton): To make changes to the law relating to tax foreclosures and county land reutilization corporations.
 - Fourth hearing, opponent testimony from the Ohio Manufactured Homes Association
 - **AMENDED:** Allows the board of county commissioners to exempt up to 50% of the value of real property conveyed by a land bank for up to five years and instead require payments in lieu of taxes for the same amount to be used for the land bank, among other amendments.

House Ways and Means

- [House Joint Resolution 6](#) (Representatives Beth Lear and Scott Wiggam): Proposing to enact Section 23 of Article I of the Constitution of the State of Ohio to limit property tax increases for a property owner to not more than four per cent per year.
 - First hearing, sponsor testimony.
- [House Bill 402](#) (Representative Jean Schmidt): To authorize a property tax reduction in 2023 for properties with increased tax liability relative to 2022.
 - First hearing, sponsor testimony
- [House Bill 579](#) (Representatives Sean Brennan and Cindy Abrams): To allow a township to levy a tax to pay for school district resource officers.

- First hearing, sponsor testimony

Senate Agriculture and Natural Resources

- [House Concurrent Resolution 14](#) (Representatives Michael Skindell and Tom Patton): To urge the United States Congress to enact the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative of 2024.
 - First hearing, sponsor testimony
- [Senate Bill 286](#) (Senator Shane Wilkin): To create the Ohio River Commission.
 - Third hearing, no testimony

Senate Finance

- [House Bill 7](#) (Representatives Andrea White and Latyna Humphrey): To support strong foundations for Ohio mothers and babies in their first one thousand days to address maternal and infant mortality, to improve health, developmental, and learning outcomes for babies and mothers through expanded prenatal, postnatal, infant, and toddler health care and early intervention and wraparound services and supports; to designate those provisions the Strong Foundations Act; to require health plan issuers to cover hearing aids and related services for persons age twenty-one and younger; and to make appropriations.
 - First hearing, sponsor testimony

Senate General Government

- [Senate Bill 87](#) (Representative Kent Smith): To establish the day of each general election as a legal holiday for which government employees receive paid leave.
 - First hearing, sponsor testimony
- [Senate Joint Resolution 3](#) (Representative Paula Hicks-Hudson): Proposing to amend Section 1 of Article V of the Constitution of the State of Ohio to permit an elector to register to vote on Election Day and to vote in that election
 - First hearing, sponsor testimony

House Government Oversight

- [House Bill 552](#) (Representative Josh Williams): 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.
 - Second hearing, proponent testimony from the Election Integrity Network, and five private individuals.

House Homeland Security

- [House Bill 333](#) (Representatives Bride Rose Sweeney and Kevin Miller): To prohibit law enforcement agencies from using quotas for arrests and citations.
 - Third hearing, opponent testimony by the Central Ohio Chiefs Association

House Public Health Policy

- [House Bill 602](#) (Representatives Sarah Fowler Arthur and Riordan McClain): To exempt home education groups from child care regulations, county and township zoning regulations.
 - Fourth hearing, no testimony.

- FAVORABLY REPORTED

House State and Local Government

- [House Bill 304](#) (Representatives Thomas Hall and Melanie Miller): To create the State and Municipal Government Commission.
 - First hearing, sponsor testimony.

House Technology and Innovation

- [House Bill 507](#) (Representative Brett Hillyer): To extend legal safe harbor to political subdivisions that implement a specified cybersecurity program.
 - Third hearing, no testimony.

Senate Ways & Means

- [Senate Bill 216](#) (Senators George Lang and Stephen Huffman): To phase-out the income tax on nonbusiness income over six years and to repeal the commercial activity tax after 2029.
 - First hearing, sponsor testimony
- [House Bill 378](#) (Representatives Brian Lorenz and Nick Santucci): To authorize a full homestead exemption for surviving spouses of members of the uniformed services killed in the line of duty and to abate property taxes on certain municipal and community improvement corporation property.
 - First hearing, sponsor testimony
- [House Bill 496](#) (Representative Jim Hoops): To revise the law governing property taxes and county auditors.
 - Second hearing, proponent testimony from the Count Auditors Association of Ohio.

Senate Health

- [House Bill 303](#) (Representatives Thomas Hall and Nick Santucci): To establish a process for the revision of training subjects for EMS personnel.
 - Second hearing, proponent testimony from the Ohio Fire Chiefs Association.
- [House Bill 236](#) (Representatives Beth Lear and Melanie Miller): To prohibit a congregate care setting from denying a patient or resident access to an advocate during public health emergencies.
 - Second hearing, proponent testimony from the Ashland City Council, the Ashland County Council on Aging, Richfield Bible Baptist Church, the Ohio Christian Alliance, Ohio Advocates for Medical Freedom, and 12 private individuals.

Introduction of Bills

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

- [Senate Bill 332](#) (Senator Tim Schaffer): To create the Tri-Share Child Care Pilot Program.

- [Senate Bill 333](#) (Senators Bill Blessing, III and Catherine Ingram): To require voice communication services for inmates, delinquent children, and youthful offenders, and to make an appropriation.