



STATEHOUSE REPORT

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

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Governor DeWine signs County Omnibus Bill, to take effect in April

On Wednesday, Governor DeWine signed [House Bill 497](#) (Representatives Brian Stewart and Roy Klopfenstein). The language in HB 497 will become effective 90 days after the Governor's signature, which places the bill's effective date on April 8, 2025.

As a reminder, the following provisions were included in the final version of HB 497:

Approval of plans for courthouse or jail projects

The bill adds a \$75,000 threshold for boards of commissioners to approve courthouse or jail renovation/repair projects without the approval of the clerk of the 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 exceeds the \$75,000 threshold, the current approval process in R.C. 153.36 remains in effect.

Contracts submitted to the 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.

County contract terms and conditions

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

Resolutions for disposing of 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 engineering services and defines them. The definition of “minor repairs” was copied from the Ohio Administrative Code.

Electronic notice requirements

The bill modifies notice requirements for county competitive bidding to allow publication in a newspaper, a newspaper’s website, the state public notice website, or the county’s website and social media account.

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.

Public records commission

The language allows the county public records commission to meet upon the chairperson's call rather than at least every six months.

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.

Coroners

The final bill now includes provisions related to county coroners contained in [SB 255](#), including language defining private practice of medicine to include the performance of an autopsy at the request of another person, including another coroner, a hospital, a business entity, an institution of higher education, or any other person. The bill also aligns the fees at \$350 per hour that a coroner or deputy coroner can charge for providing expert testimony at a trial, hearing, or deposition in a civil action.

Children services caseworker educational requirements

The bill provides more flexible educational requirements upon hiring a children services caseworker and gives a PCSA director the permissive authority to waive the requirement that an employee in good standing obtain a job-related bachelor’s degree within five years of employment.

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.

Erie County Municipal Courts

The language adds municipal courts in Erie County to the list of courts with territorial jurisdiction of the international boundary on Lake Erie in R.C. 1901.023.

Land Conveyances

The bill includes two land conveyance measures in Montgomery and Knox Counties.

CCAO will release a County Advisory Bulletin (CAB) on this bill prior to its effective date. Additionally, the policy team will release CABs on other bills passed and enacted during the 135th General Assembly Lane Duck Session.

If you have questions about HB 497, please contact the Policy Team at policy@ccao.org.

Governor DeWine signs bills

The County Omnibus Bill was not the only one the governor signed this week. Other bills he signed containing provisions of interest to counties include the following:

House Bill 265: Public Records Modifications

HB 265 (Representatives Scott Wiggam and Thomas Hall) exempts work schedules and certain other personnel records of designated public service workers from release under public records law. The bill also includes a three-day cure period for alleged public records law violations and restrictions on public records requests by vexatious litigators.

(Another notable change to public record law was included in House Bill 315, discussed in a prior issue of Statehouse Report. It authorizes state and local law enforcement agencies to include in their public records policy the requirement that an individual requesting a video record pays the estimated actual cost of preparing the record before the agency begins the process. This estimated actual cost may not exceed \$75 per hour of video or \$750 in total.)

House Bill 257: Virtual Meeting Authority

HB 257 (Representatives Jim Hoops and Thaddeus Claggett) allows public bodies generally to meet virtually if certain conditions are met. Public bodies comprised of individuals elected by the general public to be members of that body are not permitted to meet virtually. This exception includes boards of county commissioners and county councils. Additionally, public bodies in which individuals are compensated for their position as members of that body would not be able to meet virtually. "Compensation" does not include reimbursements for actual expenses incurred while fulfilling duties.

Under the bill, a public body is prohibited from meeting virtually if the meeting or hearing is held to vote on a significant non-routine expenditure, significant hiring decision, or tax-

related matter. In all other circumstances, the public body is permitted to meet virtually so long as other conditions outlined in the legislation are followed.

If an elected official is part of a “multi-party meeting,” they would, however, be able to meet virtually if the meeting or hearing does not involve the following: to vote on a significant nonroutine expenditure, significant hiring decision, or tax-related matter. A multi-party meeting is one in which the members of a public body and the members of at least one other public body are participants.

House Bill 331: Village Dissolution and Public Notification

HB 331 (Representatives Adam Mathews and Tom Young) modifies the law regarding village dissolution by creating a method by which, after every federal decennial census, the county auditor, county treasurer, and one county commissioner would evaluate every village within the county and determine if it meets at least five of ten criteria based on what services it provides and if each elected position had a candidate running in the race over the prior decade. Villages may contract with a regional council of governments that includes at least three governments, at least two of which must be municipalities, to satisfy the service delivery provision.

If these conditions are not met, a ballot issue to potentially dissolve the village is automatically placed on the ballot at the next even-numbered general election year. If the electorate votes to dissolve the village, the existing statutory process for village dissolution is initiated.

The bill also modifies notification requirements for civil asset forfeiture. The new requirements align with the updated county competitive bidding language in HB 497. Proper notice can be provided through publication in a newspaper, a newspaper’s website, the state public notice website, or the county’s website and social media account.

House Bill 74: Election Provisions

HB 74 (Representatives Thomas Hall and Mary Lightbody) requires election boards to conduct post-election audits for all elections instead of just general and primary elections held in even-numbered years. It also prohibits the Secretary of State and boards of elections from acquiring a voter registration system or ballots-on-demand voting system that has not been appropriately certified under new provisions. A grandfather clause allows counties that are using such a system to continue doing so.

136th General Assembly officially begins, features 14 CCAO formers

Monday, January 6th, was the 136th General Assembly’s official opening day. The day featured the full House of Representatives and the newly-elected senators undergoing their swearing-in ceremonies and procedural votes on chamber and caucus leadership teams. The leadership slates listed at the end of last week’s [Statehouse Report](#) all received the necessary votes.

Standing committees and their membership have not been announced yet. These appointments will likely be made by the end of the month.

The General Assembly will feature 14 CCAO formers, 11 in the House and three in the Senate.

- Representative Brian Stewart, 12th House District
 - Former Pickaway County Commissioner
- Representative Dan Troy, 23rd House District
 - Former Lake County Commissioner
 - Former CCAO Board of Directors President (2008 and 2018)
- Representative Bill Roemer, 31st House District
 - Former Summit County Council Member
- Representative Veronica Sims, 33rd House District
 - Former Summit County Council Member
- Representative Rodney Creech, 40th House District
 - Former Preble County Commissioner
- Representative Sharon Ray, 66th House District
 - Former Medina County Commissioner
- Representative Marilyn John, 76th House District
 - Former Richland County Commissioner
- Representative Roy Klopfenstein, 82nd House District
 - Former Paulding County Commissioner
- Representative Bob Peterson, 91st House District
 - Former Fayette County Commissioner
- Representative Jason Stephens, 93rd House District
 - Former Lawrence County Commissioner
- Representative Kevin Ritter, 94th House District
 - Former Washington County Commissioner
- Senator Shane Wilkin, 17th Senate District
 - Former Highland County Commissioner
- Senator Jerry Cirino, 18th Senate District
 - Former Lake County Commissioner
- Senator Al Landis, 31st Senate District
 - Former Tuscarawas County Commissioner

Her colleagues elected Representative Marilyn John as the Majority Floor Leader.

Congratulations to our formers! We look forward to working with you and your colleagues to advance county government in the 136th General Assembly.