STATEHOUSE REPORT

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CCAO Operating Budget Advocacy Preview

On February 3rd, Governor Mike DeWine will release the "Blue Book," as the Executive Budget Proposal is often called, and the 136th General Assembly's operating budget process will begin. While this budget will present challenges, there is also a lot of opportunity for CCAO to advocate for our budget priorities. As we always say, CCAO's members are the best advocates for the Association. Our goal from the policy team is to provide our members with the tools to be effective and ultimately effective advocates.

Earlier this week, we finalized our Budget Priorities pocket card that the Policy Team will use for our legislative budget meetings. The pocket card contains our budget priorities, but is not an exhaustive list of items that the Association will advocate for inclusion in the operating budget.

In addition to the pocket card, we will send out one page advocacy documents for each of our budget priorities. The documents will contain a bullet point style summary of the policy, as well as talking points for our members. We hope this information helps our members with their conversations with legislators during the budget process.

Next, Commissioners Denise Driehaus (Hamilton County) and Casey Kozlowski (Ashtabula County) have been gracious enough to once again head up the CCAO Advocacy Task Force. We plan to have short, bimonthly virtual meetings of this committee throughout the budget process. Additional details about the dates and times of the task force will be forthcoming, but we plan to start in early to mid-February.

The meetings will provide our members with up-to-date information about our budget advocacy and provide opportunities for members to volunteer for written and in person testimony in the legislature. We are also focusing heavily on building coalitions around our budget priorities and we hope to have our coalition partners present on some of the task force meetings.

The CCAO Policy Team looks forward to working hand in hand with our members to advocate for support for county government in the upcoming operating budget. If you have any questions or need additional information, please contact the policy team at policy@ccao.org.

Senate, House each introduce first round of bills

On Wednesday, thirty-two bills were introduced to the Senate and eighteen in House, the first bill introductions of the 136th General Assembly. Most of the introductions are bills that received hearings last term but were not enacted. Descriptions of the bills that may be of interest to counties are below.

Senate

Senate Bill 2 (Senator Bill Reineke): To provide increased power generation and improved affordability and reliability for Ohio's electric grid.

- An intent bill, the bill currently does not have any substantive language.

Senate Bill 3 (Senators George Lang and Stephen Huffman): To phase-down the state income tax to a flat rate of 2.75% over two years.

- Reduces the marginal tax rate for the state's top income tax bracket from 3.5% in Tax Year 2024 to 3.125% in Tax Year 2025 and eliminates the top bracket for Tax Year 2026 onwards. This would leave a single tax bracket with a marginal rate of 2.75% on taxable income in excess of $27,350.

Senate Bill 4 (Senator Theresa Gavarone): To establish the Election Integrity Unit in the Office of the Secretary of State and to modify the law governing the prosecution of Election Law violations.

- Creates the Election Integrity Unit to investigate allegations of election fraud and voter suppression upon its own initiative or upon a complaint and refer allegations to a prosecutor, law enforcement agency, or other agency.
- If a prosecutor does not prosecute an alleged violation referred to them within 12 months, the Attorney General may proceed with prosecution.

Senate Bill 5 (Senators Andrew Brenner and Stephen Huffman): To provide for the expedited removal of unauthorized occupants from residential property and to prohibit the use and sale of fraudulent deeds.

- Allows the owner of real property or their designated agent to request the county sheriff, a police officer, constable, or bailiff to immediately remove a person unlawfully occupying a residential premises under certain circumstances.
- The law enforcement officer may charge a fee and are not liable to the unauthorized occupant or any other party for damage, destruction, or loss to property.

Senate Bill 8 (Senator Stephen Huffman): Prohibit a public employer from providing paid leave or compensation for a public employee to engage in certain union activities.

- Prohibits any public employer to agree to a collective bargaining agreement that provides paid leave or any other form of compensation for a public employee who

engages in union activities that involve advocating for or against a political candidate or for or against any federal, state, or local ballot measure.
- Use of accrued personal leave for these purposes is not a violation of the bill's provisions.

Senate Bill 22 (Senators Lou Blessing, III, and Hearcel Craig): To authorize a refundable income tax credit or rebate for homeowners and renters whose property taxes or a portion of their rent exceed five per cent of their income.
- Allows eligible individuals to claim an income tax credit if their property tax due or rent-equivalent tax paid exceeds 5% of their total household income.
- Typically referred to as a "circuit breaker."

Senate Bill 26 (Senator Terry Johnson): To create the Joint Law Enforcement Oversight Committee and to make an appropriation.
- Creates the Joint Law Enforcement Oversight Committee to evaluate training standards and programs required to be completed by peace officers in the state and review bills regarding peace officer training standards.
- The committee is made up of three members from the House of Representatives and three members from the Senate, with no more than two members per chamber representing the same political party.

Senate Bill 32 (Senators Michele Reynolds and Tim Schaffer): To establish the Child Care Cred Program and to make an appropriation.
- Creates the Child Care Cred Program within the Department of Children and Youth, under which an employee's child care costs shall be covered equally by the employee, the employee's employer, and DCY.

House

House Bill 1 (Representatives Angela King and Roy Klopfenstein): To modify the law that prohibits certain governments, businesses, and individuals from acquiring certain real property.
- Prohibits county auditors from approving property conveyances if the property is agricultural land or within 25 miles of an armed forces facility or a piece of critical infrastructure and the entity the property being transferred to is owned or controlled by a foreign adversary.

House Bill 2 (Representative Mark Johnson): To establish the Child Care Cred Program and to make an appropriation.
- Creates the Child Care Cred Program within the Department of Children and Youth, under which an employee's child care costs shall be covered equally by the employee, the employee's employer, and DCY.

House Bill 7 (Representatives Andrea White and Sharon Ray): To make foster caregivers and kinship caregivers eligible for publicly funded child care.

- Extends eligibility for publicly funded child care to foster caregivers and kinship caregivers provided certain conditions are met.

House Bill 15 (Representative Roy Klopfenstein): To amend the competitive retail electric service law, make changes regarding electric company property taxation, and repeal parts of H.B. 6 of the 133rd General Assembly.

- Makes several changes to Ohio's retail energy law, including the following:
  - Requires electric distribution utilities (EDUs) to establish standard service offer prices through market-rate offers
  - Prohibits EDUs from owning generation or bidding into wholesale markets using ratepayer funds.
  - Shifts the requirement to pay tangible property taxes from the generating facilities to transmission and distribution systems.
  - Establishes a program under the Public Utilities Commission of Ohio that allows supplies to consolidate billings.

House Bill 17 (Representative Brian Lorenz): To classify certain storage condominiums as residential property for tax purposes.

- Defines a "storage condominium" as real property where all persons with ownership interest are individuals with an undivided interest in common elements of the property and as property where the units in the property are dedicated to the storage of motor vehicles, boats, trailers, other recreational vehicles, or household items, and each.
- Defines storage condominiums as residential property rather than commercial property.

While CCAO these bills have not been discussed by CCAO's standing committees yet, it is worth noting that the circuit breaker concept in SB 22 and the publicly funded child care eligibility extension in HB 7 are both positions in CCAO's Legislative Platform.

If you have questions about any of the bills introduced this week, please contact the Policy Team at policy@ccao.org.