



STATEHOUSE REPORT

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2015-2016 CCAO legislative platform survey

CCAO is seeking your input as we begin development of CCAO's 2015-2016 Legislative Program for the 131st General Assembly.

We are asking all of our members to provide us with information regarding the important issues that you feel your county faces and offer specific legislative recommendations for amending current state law or providing new legislation that would improve or enhance current county operations and services.

You can [click here](#) to fill out our electronic survey. In addition, emails have gone out to all members and hard copies have been mailed to county commissioners, county executives and county council members.

We would ask that you complete and return the survey by **Tuesday, August 19, 2014.**

A copy of the current CCAO Platform can be found by [clicking here](#).

CCAO Standing Committees will be convening in September to review survey responses and make recommendations for the CCAO Board of Directors to consider at their November Board meeting. The full membership will take action on the measure at the CCAO/CEAO Annual Winter Conference in December. We strongly urge and appreciate your participation in this process.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact us at (614) 221-5627 or at sdulaney@ccao.org and csubler@ccao.org.



Water quality moves front and center

Ask anyone around Cap Square what the newest hot policy topic is, and they will tell you "water quality." Following the weekend-long water advisory issued by Toledo to approximately 400,000 Ohioans, lawmakers and regulators along with local officials are refocused on the persistent toxic algae problem blossoming in Lake Erie and other Ohio lakes as well as vital water treatment facilities. Officials are working to better understand what happened, if it will happen again and how to assure an adequate supply of safe drinking water is readily available.

The Committee will hear from experts and try to better pinpoint the source of Toledo's problem, whether it was overburdened waste water treatment plants, agricultural runoff exacerbated by heavy rain, or other factors. Chairman Dave Hall (R-Millersburg and former Holmes County Commissioner) has told *Gongwer News Services* that the hearings could potentially lead to an amendment in the mid-biennium review measure dealing with environmental and agricultural issues ([HB 490](#)).



The Lake Erie Legislative Caucus will host a special meeting August 15th to discuss algae and the recent northwest Ohio water crisis. The meeting, which is scheduled to begin 10 AM at Maumee Bay State Park, will offer members of the public the opportunity to make presentations and testify before the caucus. Officials from Ohio EPA also are invited to speak. The meeting will be hosted by Senator Randy Gardner (R-Bowling Green) and Representative Chris Redfern (D-Catawba Island and former Ottawa County Commissioner), who are two of the four co-chairs of the caucus.

Lucas County Board of Commissioners Thursday passed a resolution calling for [the implementation of the International Joint Commission's 2014 report](#) on reducing phosphorous loadings and harmful algal blooms in Lake Erie. Included in the report are 16 recommendations. A second resolution passed by the Commissioners calls for spending up to \$100,000 for implementation of the source water action plan that is part of the Toledo-Lucas County Sustainability Plan.

Hearings examine Ohio's structurally unbalanced unemployment compensation system

The Ohio House held its first of five hearings this fall on Ohio's structurally unbalanced unemployment system, which is about \$1.38 billion in the red. Ohio borrowed \$3.4 billion from the federal government to pay benefits in the most recent recession, and Ohio has paid off more than half a billion dollars in principle each year in 2011 and 2012, as well as more than a quarter of a billion in 2013 and another \$100 million in 2014.

Study committee Chairwoman Rep. Barbara Sears (R-Sylvania) said she intends for the study committee to look at the issues within the unemployment compensation system from a broad perspective and how the state can make it better function in this century. She agreed with witnesses that a long-term solution needs to be found.



Rep. Sears

The House Unemployment Compensation Debt & Reducing Burdens on Ohio Businesses Study Committee heard from ODJFS Director Cynthia Dungey, who simplified the situation - "At the end of the day, there are two ways to achieve solvency: increase revenues and/or decrease expenditures."

Seeking to clarify unemployment misconceptions, Director Dungey added that Ohio did not default on its trust fund debt and has been making diligent payments since 2011. She added that the debt wasn't caused by federal extended benefits in effect between 2008 and 2013; most claimants don't choose to stay on unemployment instead of working; and the appeals system isn't biased towards claimants.

Benefits in Ohio are available only to those who: lose their jobs through no fault of their own, are able and available to work and are actively seeking work. To be eligible, unemployed Ohioans must also have earned a minimum weekly amount for at least 20 weeks, the director said, adding that this amount was \$233 in 2014.

She estimated that just 20% of unemployed Ohioans receive unemployment compensation, which is financed by employers.

Counties and other public employers are reimbursing employers, meaning that rather than pay quarterly taxes calculated on things like payroll and use of the system, they reimburse the trust fund dollar for dollar in terms of benefits paid out chargeable to them.

Some members of the committee asked questions specifically around the status of reimbursing employers, including the history behind reimbursing employer status, and if an employer could switch back and forth between contributory and reimbursing status depending on which would be most beneficial to their business model.

Pointing to the inactivity of the Unemployment Compensation Advisory Council, Rep. Denise Driehaus (D-Cincinnati) asked why the panel hasn't met, and if their work could be shared with the study committee.

ODJFS Assistant Director of Employment Services Bruce Madson said the council never made much progress in addressing the program's structural issues. He added that in 2006 a legislative initiative seeking to address the issue was presented to the General Assembly, but never brought up for a vote.

Rep. Bob Hackett (R-London and former Madison County Commissioner), who served on the advisory council, argued that the panel was stuck at an impasse during the recession as it didn't want to increase business payments or cut benefits.

Focusing on the classification of "able to work," Rep. Sears said the state is unable to test or identify drug addicted individuals to refer to employment assistance programs and asked how Ohio can build a better relationship with businesses to address this issue.

Mr. Madson said the issue is tricky because the state doesn't want to identify individuals and classify them as "unable to work" due to drug use, but then have nowhere to place them or any unemployment benefits to provide them.

Rep. Sears told reporters that she believes the issue of drugs addictions in the workforce needs to be look at in the legislature as part of the broader discussion on unemployment compensation. "I don't want this to be punitive, I think we need to put a positive program together that says 'we want you to be at the top of the ability that you have,'" she said. "We don't want you to be in a place where you shouldn't be."

There are some people who are never going to be capable of returning to work - there are going to be some people who are never going to be able to get over their addiction. But there are a lot of folks who just need the nudge and we've got to identify them."

The Committee has scheduled four additional hearings statewide, as follows:

- Aug 19 – Mansfield
- Sept 9 – Springfield
- Sept 29 – Miamisburg
- Oct 14 - Toledo

For additional information, please contact CCAO Staffer Laura Abu-Absi at labu-absi@ccao.org.

Work continues in Children and Adult Protective Services funding workgroups

Both the children services funding workgroup and adult protective services workgroup convened this week to continue conversations around

- recommendations for the expenditure of \$6.8M and \$10M for each program, respectively, that are to be submitted to ODJFS by September 30, 2014; and
- longer-term identification of and recommendations around funding and programmatic gaps in each system.

CCAO participates in both workgroups, led by ODJFS Director Cynthia Dungey and Governor's Office of Health Transformation Director Greg Moody, respectively.

(For additional background information on the charge and scope of the groups, please see the [August 1 edition](#) of Statehouse Report.)

Director Dungey expressed the goal of yesterday's meeting to be "level-setting" in terms of understanding the child welfare system today. State experts presented on current caseloads and processes in the system statewide as well as an overview of federal, state and local funds in the system. The Public Children Services Association of Ohio then presented on current best practices in child welfare as well as identified funding gaps in the system.

The Adult Protective Services Funding Workgroup spent time in robust discussion around current gaps in the system as well as emerging best practices, including i-teams or interdisciplinary teams.

Next week, CCAO will present to both groups an overview of county government budgets, touching on both other mandatory spending programs and revenues.

Please contact CCAO policy analyst Laura Abu-Absi at labu-absi@ccao.org for additional information or to share your thoughts on either the short- or longer- term work of the group.