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| **GOVERNMENTAL POLICY GROUP, INC.**  17 SOUTH HIGH STREET – SUITE 245  COLUMBUS, OHIO 43215-3413  PHONE: 614-461-9335  FAX: 614-461-9336  **Coalition of Ohio Regional Districts**  Legislative Activities Report  **March 2021** |

The legislature wasted little time before starting into a full legislative agenda, which was highlighted by the unveiling of the FY 22-23 state operating budget (HB 110) last month. The $171.6 billion total spending package calls for funding from the General Revenue Fund (GRF) at $35.39 billion for FY 22 and $39.27 billion for FY 23 for a total of $74.66 billion in GRF spending. The budget proposal does not increase taxes and does not borrow from the state’s “rainy day” fund. The five House Finance subcommittees are currently in the process of reviewing budget testimony in the lower chamber. House Speaker Bob Cupp (R-Lima) has stated that deadlines have not yet been established for those panels to conclude their work or for the full committee. He did indicate that he would like to pass the measure and send it to the Senate sometime in mid-to-late April. The main operating budget must be passed and signed by the governor no later than June 30th. In addition to the budget bill, we have seen over 200 bills already introduced this session. While the main operating budget will steal the focus for the next five months, we do expect numerous other legislative initiatives to move during this time.

Governor Mike DeWine is asking state lawmakers to double down on their financial commitment to tackle water quality efforts via the H2Ohio Fund. His state operating budget proposal includes $242 million over the biennium for H2Ohio programs across three state agencies. Governor DeWine had previously promised his budget proposal would maintain funding for H2Ohio, but his recommendations go further, calling for an increase over the $172 million in H2Ohio funding provided for in the last budget. Despite other pressing concerns – namely the state's COVID-19 recovery – the governor said the state "can't take a break" on work to address harmful algal blooms, lead pipes and wetland preservation. Once again, the support would be divvied up among the departments of Agriculture and Natural Resources, and the Environmental Protection Agency – with another $125,000 each fiscal year for the Lake Erie Commission to coordinate between those agencies.

The Ohio EPA would receive $92 million in H2Ohio funding for continued water and wastewater infrastructure work projects. Those resources would facilitate the replacement of 1,500 lead service lines and 600 aging home treatment systems in seven counties. To date, 185 lead lines and 180 home systems have been addressed by the agency. Budget Director Kimberly Murnieks said the OEPA line represents the biggest expansion from the previous biennium. "The demand and the need in that area was, frankly, more than anticipated when we initiated the H2Ohio program, and it is crucial for our communities and our citizens both from a public health and a community development standpoint," she said. "We are increasing the funding for that program so we will be able to improve the quality of drinking water across the state."

Senator Sandra Williams recently introduced a proposal which would ban utility service shutoff during the remainder of the COVID-19 pandemic. SB 96, which has yet to be assigned to a committee, would prohibit public utilities, cooperatives, propane supply companies, submetering companies, unregulated utilities, landlords, and manufactured home park operators from, or taking any action that effectively leads to, curtailing, disrupting, or disconnecting utility services until 6 months after the COVID-19 state of emergency ends. "Ohioans need our help now. There are a lot of people who are still unemployed and are unable to pay their bills," Sen. Williams said in a statement. "Ultimately, if they have no income, there is no way to prevent disconnection. This issue is only exacerbated by these harsh winter months. No one should ever have to make the decision between paying rent, feeding their family, or keeping the lights and water on, especially during a pandemic."

The Ohio EPA recently issued requests for nominations for drinking water infrastructure improvements that need financial assistance through the state's Water Supply Revolving Loan Account. The Program Year 2022, which runs July 1 through June 30, 2022, includes about $10 million in principal forgiveness for priority areas currently using contaminated private wells or wells with inadequate supply; more than $15 million in principal forgiveness for lead service line replacement projects; and no interest loans will be offered to projects focused on PFAS remediation, lead service line replacement, system regionalization, project planning and design, and harmful algal bloom issues, the agency announced. To be considered for the next round of funding, project nomination forms and supporting information must be submitted by email to [defamail@epa.ohio.gov](mailto:defamail@epa.ohio.gov) by March 3. Planning and design, PFAS remediation, lead service line replacement, and HAB projects may be nominated any time during the program year. Projects may be nominated by following instructions and forms available on the agency's [website](https://epa.ohio.gov/defa/ofa). "While Governor DeWine's H2Ohio initiative continues to help improve water quality throughout the state, this financing program specifically helps improve access to safe drinking water," Ohio EPA Director Laurie Stevenson said in a release. "Community leaders across Ohio should consider using the state revolving loan account to make infrastructure improvements that may be needed to ensure their residents continue to have safe drinking water."

Bob Paduchik was elected to chair the Ohio Republic Party this month. The longtime GOP strategist was elected via secret ballot by the party’s State Central and Executive Committee, beating former Rep. John Becker to succeed former chair Jane Timken. Mr. Paduchik was viewed as the front runner after former President Donald Trump endorsed him. Mr. Paduchik spearheaded Trump’s 2016 and 2020 campaigns in Ohio. He identified the party’s biggest growth opportunity as urban communities and that he wants to focus the party on addressing areas that present the “biggest challenges.”

Below is a list of legislation we are tracking during the 134th Ohio General Assembly:

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| **HB13** | **MODIFY THE CAMPAIGN FINANCE LAW** (GRENDELL D, FRAIZER M) To modify the campaign finance law and to declare an emergency. | |
|  | ***Current Status:*** | 2/4/2021 - Referred to Committee House Government Oversight |
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| **HB20** | **PROHIBIT FORECLOSURES, EVICTION DURING COVID-19** (LELAND D, CROSSMAN J) To prohibit foreclosure activity and the eviction of residential and commercial tenants during the state of emergency declared regarding COVID-19, to refer such proceedings caused by the state of emergency to mediation, and to declare an emergency. | |
|  | ***Current Status:*** | 2/9/2021 - House Civil Justice, (First Hearing) |
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| **HB43** | **PUBLIC BODIES - ELECTRONIC MEETINGS** (SOBECKI L, HOOPS J) To authorize public bodies to meet via teleconference and video conference. | |
|  | ***Current Status:*** | 2/11/2021 - House Government Oversight, (First Hearing) |
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| **HB63** | **AMEND EMINENT DOMAIN LAWS** (CUTRONA A, STOLTZFUS R) To amend the law regarding eminent domain and to declare an emergency. | |
|  | ***Current Status:*** | 3/2/2021 - House Civil Justice, (Second Hearing) |
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| **HB90** | **OVERSIGHT OF GOVERNOR'S AND HEALTH ORDERS** (WIGGAM S, EDWARDS J) To establish legislative oversight of the Governor's executive orders, certain public health orders, and emergency rules, including by establishing the Ohio Health Oversight and Advisory Committee. | |
|  | ***Current Status:*** | 2/24/2021 - **SUBSTITUTE BILL ACCEPTED**, House State and Local Government, (Third Hearing) |
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| **HB91** | **AUTHORIZE CERTAIN PUBLIC-PRIVATE INITIATIVES** (PATTON T) To authorize certain public entities to enter into public-private initiatives with a private party through a public-private agreement regarding public facilities. | |
|  | ***Current Status:*** | 2/10/2021 - Referred to Committee House Infrastructure and Rural Development |
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| **HB103** | **REGARDS ADOPTION/DURATION EMERGENCY RULES** (MERRIN D) Regarding the adoption and duration of emergency administrative rules. | |
|  | ***Current Status:*** | 2/24/2021 - House State and Local Government, (First Hearing) |
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| **HB110** | **OPERATING BUDGET** (OELSLAGER S) To make operating appropriations for the biennium beginning July 1, 2021, and ending June 30, 2023, to levy taxes, and to provide authorization and conditions for the operation of state programs. | |
|  | ***Current Status:*** | 3/4/2021 - House Finance Higher Education Subcommittee, (Eighth Hearing) |
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| **HB146** | **REGARDS APPLYING PREVAILING WAGE LAW TO PUBLIC PROJECTS** (RIEDEL C, MANCHESTER S) To allow political subdivisions, special districts, and state institutions of higher education to elect to apply the Prevailing Wage Law to public improvement projects. | |
|  | ***Current Status:*** | 3/3/2021 - House Commerce and Labor, (First Hearing) |
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| **HR19** | **URGE CONGRESS TO CREATE NATIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE BANK** (SOBECKI L, STEPHENS J) To urge the United States Congress to create a National Infrastructure Bank to finance urgently needed infrastructure projects. | |
|  | ***Current Status:*** | 2/24/2021 - House Infrastructure and Rural Development, (First Hearing) |
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| **SB9** | **REDUCE REGULATIONS** (MCCOLLEY R, ROEGNER K) To require certain agencies to reduce the number of regulatory restrictions in their administrative rules. | |
|  | ***Current Status:*** | 2/24/2021 - **REPORTED OUT**, Senate Government Oversight and Reform, (Fourth Hearing) |
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| **SB15** | **FISCAL OFFICERS-LIABILITY** (WILSON S) To change the circumstances in which certain fiscal officers may be held liable for a loss of public funds. | |
|  | ***Current Status:*** | 3/2/2021 - Senate Local Government and Elections, (Third Hearing) |
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| **SB19** | **WETLAND MITIGATION-PROPERTY TAX** (SCHAFFER T) To establish a property tax exemption for certain property used for wetland mitigation projects. | |
|  | ***Current Status:*** | 2/24/2021 - **PASSED BY SENATE**; Vote 31-0 |
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| **SB22** | **LEGISLATIVE OVERSIGHT-PUBLIC HEALTH ORDERS** (JOHNSON T, MCCOLLEY R) To establish legislative oversight of the Governor's executive orders and certain public health orders, including by establishing the Ohio Health Oversight and Advisory Committee. | |
|  | ***Current Status:*** | 2/24/2021 - Referred to Committee House State and Local Government |
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| **SB27** | **AUTOMATIC ENROLLMENT-DEFERRED COMPENSATION** (HOTTINGER J) To authorize automatic enrollment of new state government employees in the Ohio Public Employees Deferred Compensation Program. | |
|  | ***Current Status:*** | 2/24/2021 - **REPORTED OUT**, Senate Insurance, (Third Hearing) |
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| **SB39** | **COOPER'S LAW - CRIMES & RECORD RETENTION** (SCHAFFER T) To eliminate the 20-year statute of limitation for felonious assault and aggravated assault if the victim is a peace officer, to modify the law regarding records retention schedules developed by counties, municipal corporations, and townships, to modify the penalties for aggravated assault, tampering with evidence, falsification, and falsification in a theft offense, and to name this act Cooper's Law. | |
|  | ***Current Status:*** | 2/9/2021 - Senate Judiciary, (First Hearing) |
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| **SB56** | **INDEMNITY-DESIGN CONTRACTS** (BLESSING III L) To regulate the use of indemnity provisions in professional design contracts related to public improvements. | |
|  | ***Current Status:*** | 3/2/2021 - Senate Judiciary, (First Hearing) |
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| **SB78** | **JUNETEENTH-LEGAL HOLIDAY** (CRAIG H, BRENNER A) To establish the nineteenth of June as Juneteenth, a legal holiday for which government employees receive paid leave. | |
|  | ***Current Status:*** | 2/24/2021 - Referred to Committee Senate Government Oversight and Reform |
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| **SB83** | **BROWNFIELDS** (WILLIAMS S, RULLI M) To require the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency to conduct a study to determine where brownfield sites are located in this state and to make an appropriation. | |
|  | ***Current Status:*** | 2/24/2021 - Referred to Committee Senate Agriculture and Natural Resources |
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| **SB84** | **CLEAN OHIO REVITALIZATION FUND** (WILLIAMS S, RULLI M) To make changes to the law relating to the Clean Ohio Revitalization Fund. | |
|  | ***Current Status:*** | 2/24/2021 - Referred to Committee Senate Agriculture and Natural Resources |
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| **SB95** | **REGULATE UTILITY RESELLERS** (MAHARATH T) To require refunds to utility customers who have been improperly charged and to regulate certain resellers of utility service. | |
|  | ***Current Status:*** | 2/24/2021 - Introduced |
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| **SB96** | **PREVENT UTILITY DISTRUPTION-COVID** (WILLIAMS S) To prevent the disruption of utility service during the state of emergency declared regarding COVID-19 and to declare an emergency. | |
|  | ***Current Status:*** | 2/24/2021 - Introduced |