

THE CORD REPORT

The Official Quarterly Newsletter of CORD



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STATEHOUSE UPDATE: REDISTRICTING, PRIMARY ELECTIONS, AND A HECTIC LEGISLATIVE AGENDA

Written by Andrew Huffman
Director of Legislative Affairs
Governmental Policy Group



Legislative Update -

Even through the redistricting process and a primary election attracting most of the attention for the first half of 2022, the Ohio General Assembly has remained extremely active, and CORD has stayed busy monitoring and testifying on legislation that will have an impact on its members.

CORD was successful in advocating for SB 15, legislation that would protect treasurers and fiscal officers of public entities from lost public funds if they performed their required duties “with reasonable care.” Under the bill, fiscal officers and treasurers would only be liable for funds lost due to negligence or a wrongful act. Originally, the bill applied to county treasurers, but in working closely with the bill’s sponsor, Senator Steve Wilson, the Ohio Auditor’s Office, the County Treasurers Association of Ohio, and members of the legislature, CORD was able to secure an amendment that would expand the protections to fiscal officers of 6119 regional districts. The bill, with the accepted amendment, was passed by the House and now awaits a concurrence vote in the Senate.

CORD has also pushed back against SB 193, which would remove the ability for all public water and wastewater systems from certifying delinquent charges for unpaid water and wastewater services. Senator Sandra Williams introduced the bill in response to complaints from her district that liens were being placed on properties without the owner’s knowledge and, further, that homes were going into foreclosure due to unpaid water and sewer bills. CORD provided opponent testimony during the bill’s third hearing before the Senate Energy and Public Utilities Committee. The House has a similar measure (HB 422); however, it only applies to municipal systems, and still allows delinquent charges to be certified if the property owner contracted for the service and occupies the property. The measure was introduced after complaints from property owners who claim they are being held responsible for unpaid bills left by their tenants. CORD was successful in defeating a substitute bill that was offered before the House State and Local Government Committee that would have applied the bill to county systems and 6119 districts. HB 422 passed on the House floor on Wednesday, May 18th, and will now head to the Senate for further consideration.

Another bill CORD is closely monitoring is HB 385, which would propose additional fines for municipal waste systems found illegally discharging waste in Lake Erie’s western basin. The bill was introduced in response to the City of Maumee’s violations tied to dumping excess sewage into the Maumee River.

A substitute version of the bill was accepted during its second hearing on the bill in the House Agriculture and Conservation Committee. Changes to the bill include increasing fines for violating NPDES permits and the creation of an operation permit for systems not required to obtain an NPDES permit.

In total, CORD is monitoring over 80 bills and resolutions that have been introduced during the 134th General Assembly. CORD will continue to advocate on behalf of Ohio’s regional water and sewer districts before our elected officials, and we will be sure to inform members of any developments that will impact their operations.

Redistricting -

Ohio’s policymakers began 2022 and the second year of the 134th Ohio General Assembly with the pressing need to finalize new state legislative and congressional districts after failing to meet constitutional requirements in 2021.

The Ohio Constitution was amended in 2015 to create a new, multistep process for state legislative redistricting designed to make it more difficult for one political party to unfairly draw districts in their favor. The Ohio Constitution was then amended again in 2018 to say that congressional district boundaries must be drawn and approved by a sufficient bipartisan supermajority of the full General Assembly. If the required supermajority is not reached, the process is then passed to the Ohio Redistricting Commission. Unfortunately, both of these new processes have instead resulted in a nine-month saga of missed deadlines, ongoing litigation, and uncertainty about Ohio’s election process, all of which is still currently taking place.

The Ohio Redistricting Commission consists of a seven-member panel charged with drawing Ohio's 99 House Districts and 33 Senate Districts and, due to the failure of the Ohio General Assembly to finalize the congressional districts, the commission also drew and adopted Ohio's 15 congressional seats. So far, the commission has been unable to reach a bipartisan compromise on proposals for both state legislative and congressional maps.

So far, the commission has been unable to reach a bipartisan compromise on proposals for both state legislative and congressional maps. The commission's first attempt to approve a set of maps was in September of 2021. The first set of maps were later ruled unconstitutional by the Ohio Supreme Court, who then ordered members of the Ohio Redistricting Commission to produce and adopt a new set of maps within 10 days. The court's rejection was only the beginning of what became months of back-and-forth between the Ohio Redistricting Commission attempting to produce and adopt maps, only for the Ohio Supreme Court to continuously reject them.

Ohio General Assembly Maps -

In March of 2022, without the state legislative districts being finalized, Secretary of State Frank LaRose ordered the Ohio House and Senate races be removed from the May 3rd Primary Election ballot. After weeks of heated debate between Republican and Democratic members of the Commission, the issue of the primary election finally made its way to federal court. On March 18th, a panel of three federally appointed judges (two Republicans and one Democrat) ruled 2-1 that if the Ohio Redistricting Commission and the Ohio Supreme Court could not reach an agreement on state legislative maps by May 28th, they would impose a set of legislative maps to be used for a second primary election set to be held on August 2nd. The federally imposed maps are the Ohio Redistricting Commission's third attempt at state legislative maps, which were invalidated by the Ohio Supreme Court as unconstitutional. The maps favor Republicans 54-45 in the House and 18-15 in the Senate.

Ohio Congressional Maps -

On March 2nd, the Ohio Redistricting Commission voted 5-2 along party lines to adopt a third attempt at congressional maps after previous attempts were ruled unconstitutional by the Ohio Supreme Court. The adopted maps favor Republicans in at least 10 of the 15 districts, with only three Democratic-safe seats and two seats "leaning" Democrat. While the third and most recent proposal has also been challenged before the Ohio Supreme Court, the maps remained in place for the first 2022 Primary Election on May 3rd. Challengers of the map are still charging mapmakers with creating the plan outside of the public view and without Democratic input and could potentially seek to block the map for the 2024 election cycle.

2022 Primary Election -

Despite the chaos and controversy surrounding Ohio's redistricting process, the first of two primary elections took place on Tuesday, May 3rd without state legislative races on the ballot. Incumbent Governor Mike DeWine won the GOP nomination for Ohio's gubernatorial race and will be facing Democratic nominee Nan Whaley in November's General Election. Whaley won the Democratic nomination with overwhelming support and became the first woman in Ohio's history to win a major party's nomination for governor. Incumbents for Ohio's other statewide offices also prevailed in the primary races.

The entire nation was closely following the highly competitive U.S. Senate primary race to replace long-time U.S. Senator Rob Portman. Former President Donald Trump showed his lasting influence in Ohio as his endorsed candidate, J.D. Vance, went on to be victorious. Vance defeated a crowded primary field and ended the night with over 32% of the votes. He will now go on to face current U.S. Rep. Tim Ryan, who won the Democratic nomination with nearly 70% of the votes counted.

Of the 15 congressional seats on the ballot, incumbent members in 13 districts were successful in the primary (10 Republicans and three Democrats). In Ohio's 7th House District, U.S. Rep. Bob Gibbs did not seek re-election, leading to Max Miller securing the GOP nomination with over 70% of votes. Miller will be facing Matthew Diemer, who won the Democratic nomination. Ohio's 13th House District was also left vacant due to incumbent U.S. Rep. Tim Ryan running for U.S. Senate. State Rep. Emilia Sykes, who was the only Democratic candidate in the primary, will be facing Republican nominee Madison Gesiotto Gilbert come November. Similarly, Ohio's 9th House District also had only one Democratic candidate, incumbent U.S. Rep. Marcy Kaptur. The GOP nominee for the 9th District will be J.R. Majewski, who beat State Senator Theresa Gavarone, State Rep. Craig Riedel, and two other Republican candidates for the nomination.

ENHANCED COLLABORATION WITH OHIO RURAL WATER ASSOCIATION

**Written by John Albers,
CORD Board Member,
Attorney, Albers & Albers**

CORD and the Ohio Rural Water Association (ORWA) have traditionally worked closely on legislative issues in the Ohio General Assembly. Indeed, a number of Regional Districts are members of both CORD and ORWA. ORWA and CORD financially share representation in the Ohio General Assembly from the Governmental Policy Group, Inc. where Andrew Huffman, Senior Director of Legislative and Government Affairs, provides daily representation.

Earlier this year leaders of both CORD and ORWA had the opportunity to meet to discuss how collaboration could be even further advanced. In attendance at this meeting were Tom Reese (ORWA President); Jerry Greiner (Northwestern Water & Sewer District); John Simpson (Le-Ax Water District); John Albers (CORD Board); Eric Stuckey (Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District); Joe Pheil (ORWA Executive Director); Catina Taylor (CORD Executive Assistant); and Larry Long (CORD Director of Membership Development).

One result of this meeting, John Albers participated at the ORWA Annual Training Conference in Dublin on May 11 along with Andrew Huffman. Albers discussed cooperation between ORWA and CORD and shared selected legislative victories including:

- Enacted legislation to allow elected officials to serve on District boards.
- Defeated attempts to require storm water fees to be voted taxes rather than a fee.
- Assisted in the development of the H2Ohio program at request of Governor.
- Defeated legislation to exempt county fairs from paying stormwater fees.
- Spearheaded efforts to authorize OWDA to refinance water and sewer loans.
- Defeated efforts to exempt homeowners with septic systems from connecting to public sewers.
- Protected Districts from legislation to dictate selection of piping materials by local governments and design professionals'.
- Ensured water and sewer infrastructure was defined as "critical infrastructure" when penalties were increased for tampering with or damaging critical infrastructure facilities.

Albers also stressed the need to oppose renewed efforts to prohibit public jurisdictions from certifying delinquent water and sewer bills to the county auditor for collection with property taxes. This is a recurring legislative problem that seems to never go away. Albers also shared with ORWA members legislative priorities that CORD has established.

Discussions between ORWA and CORD will continue. ORWA has agreed to offer CORD members the opportunity to attend their Annual Training Conference at member rates. The two groups are also seeing how they may work together in other ways such as joint memberships, joint training, protecting interests by filing amicus briefs on important court cases that could establish precedents, and possible joint meetings of the boards of the two organizations. CORD looks forward to working with ORWA and its members.



The Ohio Rural Water Association offices in Zanesville

STATE AUDIT ISSUES FOR REGIONAL DISTRICTS

Written by Keith Faber
Auditor of State

While reviewing your financial records, state auditors found some problems and issued a few citations and recommendations for improvement. Maybe your agency mistakenly overpaid an employee or spent money on equipment or services that were not considered a valid public purpose, and auditors formally called for those funds to be repaid.

Time to panic, right? Wrong. Issues frequently arise as part of audits of the financial activities of public offices, including the 6119 regional water and sewer districts (named for the section of state law that authorizes their formation) that are members of the Coalition of Ohio Regional Districts.

The best course of action is to review citations and findings and address them proactively. Thankfully, there are comprehensive resources readily available to do just that.

The Auditor of State's Office is responsible for reviewing the financial activities of more than 5,900 public agencies and entities – the list includes cities, counties, villages, townships, and, notably, 71 water, sewer, and sanitary districts – and ensuring public resources are being used efficiently, effectively, and legally.



Generally, the process is routine, with auditors reviewing spending and other budget matters and noting local officials' compliance with state and federal requirements or issues that need to be corrected. The resulting reports are open to public review and are readily accessible, via the audit search section of the Auditor of State's Website (online at <https://ohioauditor.gov/auditsearch/search.aspx>).

Auditors outline non-compliance with different laws, regulations, contracts, or grant agreements in citations that are included in audit reports or as part of separate management letters. Audits released in 2021 included 6,589 such citations, including 1,094 issues related to the availability of public records for inspection and copying, by far the most frequently cited issue.

In cases where public monies have been misspent or otherwise misused, the Auditor of State issues findings for recovery seeking the repayment of those improper disbursements. In 2021 alone, state auditors issued total findings for recovery of more than \$20 million, including nearly \$11 million during regular audits and \$9.1 million identified during special audits.

However, most findings for recovery are repaid without criminal prosecution, and public agencies change their policies and practices to prevent further issues. (For context, of the 8,578 total audits released in 2020 and '21, only 197 included findings for recovery. And of the 313 audits of water, sewer and sanitary districts released since 2015, only four included findings for recovery.)

State law outlines the process for addressing citations and findings for recovery issued; the actual language is found in Ohio Revised Code, Section 117.28. The Auditor of State's Office is ready to assist to ensure areas of noncompliance are corrected, via a host of resources available through its Local Government Services operations (online at <https://ohioauditor.gov/local.html>).

What can you do to avoid citations and findings for recovery in the first place? A good place to start is avoiding some of the issues that frequently arise as part of the state audit process.

Along those lines, the Top 10 citation areas included in all audits released in 2021 were:

1. Availability of public records for inspection and copying, 1,094 citations.
2. Annual financial reporting, 509 citations.
3. Certification of expenditures/blanket certificates, 321 citations.
4. Use of revenues, 282 citations.
5. Expenditures exceeding appropriations, 236 citations.
6. Appropriations limited by estimated revenues, 184 citations.
7. Public records training programs, model public records policy, 177 citations.
8. Deposits of public money, 143 citations.
9. Annual financial reporting, 134 citations.
10. Errors in Completing and Reporting of Federal Awards, 128 citations.

(Water, sewer and sanitary districts, specifically, were cited a total of 24 times last year. As is the case in audits generally, issues related to the availability of public records for inspection and copying led the citations list, at 5.)



STAR OHIO: A SOUND INVESTMENT OPTION FOR REGIONAL DISTRICTS

Written by Robert Sprague
Ohio Treasurer of State

Calling our nation's current economic situation "complicated" would be an understatement. From skyrocketing inflation and rising energy prices to ongoing supply chain issues, Ohio's families, job creators, and local governments are facing unprecedented challenges.

In the Treasurer's office, we closely monitor economic conditions and how they impact the financial health of Ohio's communities and government subdivisions. As you know, public entities at every level are having to navigate this inflationary environment, all while preparing for further increases in interest rates. We understand how this might complicate your ability to plan.

One of the most important tools our office provides to municipalities and other government entities – including regional water and sewer districts – is the State Treasury Asset Reserve (STAR) of Ohio. STAR Ohio is an investment pool that allows government subdivisions to invest in high-grade, short-term securities while offering safety, penalty-free liquidity, and comparatively higher yields. As of May 12, 2022, the annualized yield was 0.82%.

The Ohio Treasurer's office serves as the investment advisor and administrator of STAR Ohio, managing the investment and re-investment of the fund's assets. STAR Ohio invests in high-grade financial instruments authorized by Ohio law to meet the following objectives for our local government clients: preservation of capital, maintenance of liquidity, and provision of current income.

For nearly three decades, STAR Ohio has proven to be a sound and reliable investment option for public entities across the Buckeye State. Since 1995, the fund has maintained Standard & Poor's highest rating of AAAm, and I am proud of our continued efforts to protect these funds and invest wisely in Ohio's future.

This soundness has proven to be vital as local governments and public institutions have had to navigate a challenging economic environment. Despite these challenges, participation in STAR Ohio grew to nearly 2,800 total accounts in 2021. In fact, many of Ohio's local governments turned to STAR Ohio to invest a portion of their federal CARES Act dollars. In August 2021, STAR Ohio reached a new all-time high of nearly \$19.5 billion and distributed more than \$26 million in investment earnings to participating entities in the State's Fiscal Year 2021. As of April 30, 2022, 46 regional districts invest nearly \$415 million across 118 STAR Ohio accounts.

Ohio's regional districts, regardless of their investment size, are encouraged to take advantage of this trusted investment option. You can find more information about STAR Ohio on our website at www.tos.ohio.gov/STAROhio. If you are interested in opening a STAR Ohio account or if you have any other questions, please don't hesitate to call our office at 1-800-228-1102, option #4.

Thank you for your hard work to keep Ohio's communities strong. As always, we encourage you to stay up to date on news from the office through social media. Follow us on Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn and Instagram at @OhioTreasurer.



WINTER WATER AVERAGING: MAKING SURE CUSTOMERS ARE FAIRLY BILLED FOR SEWER CHARGES

Written by Theresa Pollick

Public Information Director Northwestern Water & Sewer District

Because there's no precise way to measure the amount of water flowing through residential drains, calculating the charges for sewer service must rely on the flow of water that can be measured. Every year, the sewer or wastewater charges assigned to each residential utility account are calculated using the average amount of water used during three months. For Northwestern Ohio, winter average occurs between February, March, and April because the vast majority of water used in homes during this time period is used indoors. Water used indoors, of course, flows through the sewer system. During the spring, summer and fall, many residential customers use their irrigation systems to water lawns and landscaping, which obviously does not make use of the sewer system, therefore calculating the sewer charges during those seasons would not provide an accurate total of water flowing through the sewers. Of course, fixing leaks, avoiding waste, washing only full loads of clothing or dishes, and limiting car washes at home also help keep consumption down, allowing for a more accurate sewer charge. Residents with swimming pools, large decorative fountains, or other high water-use items should refrain from filling them during the winter averaging period.



OSU RELEASES EDUCATIONAL DOCUMENTARY... AND WATER FOR ALL

**Written by Larry Long,
Director of Membership Development**

The School of Environment & Natural Resources at the Ohio State University released a documentary film on World Water Day (March 22nd) during the breakfast meeting of the Environmental Professional Network (EPN). The film, . . . And Water for All, is an educational documentary about water affordability and access to clean water in Ohio. The documentary features numerous local officials including Laura Kunze, CORD Board Member and President of the Mt. Air Water District.



Laura Kunze, Mount Air Water District and CORD Board Member.



Constance Haqq, Chief Administrative Officer, Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District

The film also features the challenges and programs of the Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District, including its affordability programs. Those featured in the film from the Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District include Kathryn Crestani, Superintendent, Southerly Wastewater Treatment Center, which processes over 100 mg/day of wastewater; Cheryl Soltis-Muth, Manager of Analytical Services; and Chief Administrative Officer Constance Haqq, who explains the District's affordability initiatives and recent changes.

The film acknowledges that building and maintaining drinking and wastewater infrastructure to treat and deliver high-quality, affordable water to Ohio's residents is costly. Further, the presentation shows how these critical investments can lead to conflict and competition in local and regional communities and that the ability to ensure clean water access relies on the financial capacity of system users.

During the last two decades, average drinking water and wastewater rates across the U.S. have increased by 136%, outpacing rates for other utilities such as electricity, natural gas, and phone service. At the same time, the overall median household income only grew by 35% over this same period, placing some low-income users in desperate straits where many cannot afford water or wastewater services.

A team of researchers, led by Dr. Ramiro Berardo, from the School of Environment and Natural Resources, spent a year conferring with water utility managers, users, and community advocates in communities big and small, urban, and rural, about the challenge of water affordability. The result is . . . And Water for All, an educational documentary examining the opportunities and challenges that governmental and non-governmental entities are facing today to secure clean and affordable water and what to expect in the coming decades. To view the documentary, follow this link: ...And Water for All (full movie) - YouTube.



Dr. Ramiro Berardo, PhD, from the OSU School of Environment and Natural Resources

CAN WE AFFORD CLEAN WATER?
CAN WE AFFORD LIFE ITSELF?

U.S. SENATOR EDMUND MUSKIE, 1972

JODI WOODS RETIRES: LEAVES LEGACY OF SERVICE TO RURAL LORAIN COUNTY WATER AUTHORITY AND CORD



Jodi Woods, Administrative Manager, Rural Lorain County Water Authority (RLCWA) and a CORD Board Member for over a decade recently retired. After 33 years with the Regional District, she deserves more time to spend with her husband Chris and her family. Jodi first went to work for RLCWA in 1988 and before assuming her current position, worked at several different positions for RLCWA, which gave her a broad understanding of the history and operations of the Authority.

The Authority was organized in 1974 upon a petition from sixteen townships and two villages. Prior to its establishment, residents of southern Lorain County and surrounding areas were unable to depend upon ground water or other sources of potable water and thus relied upon cisterns, individual wells, and tank deliveries to supply their water needs. Today the 680 square mile system serves twenty-eight townships, six villages, and one city primarily in Lorain County with over five million gallons a day of water. The board is comprised of twenty-six members, twenty-two from townships and four municipal representatives. Joe Waldecker is the General Manager of the District.

John Albers, CORD co-founder and current Board Member with the law firm of Albers & Albers in Columbus, describes Jodi as a person who is best remembered for her commonsense approach to address critical issues confronting Regional Districts in the

General Assembly. According to Albers, "Jodi always helped us focus on the implications of legislation on customers of districts and on the rates they pay for service. She is a great example of all the dedicated employees that help 6119 Districts be successful."

Concerning Jodi's retirement, Joe Waldecker, General Manager of the Rural Lorain County Water Authority, remembers that "Jodi's dedication to RLCWA contributed a great amount to the success and growth of the company. She is kind, humble, and has an amazing work ethic which inspired others to work hard and dedicate themselves to their work. We are all so grateful for Jodi's friendship and she is really going to be missed.

Jodi grew up in eastern Huron County in the Village of Wakeman and was a "Roughrider" at Western Reserve High School before attending Bowling Green State University. Jodi will now have more time to spend with family, traveling, boating, and snowmobiling. Thank you, Jodi, for a legacy of service locally and at the state level!





KNOWING THE CORD BOARD: MEET JASON LOREE

***ABC Water & Stormwater District Board Member and
Boardman Township Administrator***

Jason Loree has been a member of the CORD Board for 10 years. He was a driving force behind the establishment of the ABC Water and Stormwater District in Mahoning County. The ABC District is a strategic watershed partnership between Austintown, Boardman, and Canfield Townships. Jason serves as Boardman Township's representative on the ABC Water and Stormwater District wherein Trustees of each Township appoint one representative to the Board.

The ABC Water and Stormwater District was formed in 2009 in recognition that there was no funding mechanism allowing townships to effectively manage stormwater. The District uses a stormwater utility to fund projects. The fee is based on non-pervious surfaces, applies to all classifications of land use, and fees derived from any Township, in most cases, stays in the Township.

Jason is a lifelong resident of Boardman Township. He graduated from Boardman High School in 2000, and received a Bachelor's Degree in Political Science and a Minor in Pre-Law from Kent State University in 2004. He then completed a Master's in Public Administration from Kent State University in 2007.

While at Kent State he served as an Undergraduate Student Trustee, representing over 30,000 undergraduate students at Kent State's Main Campus for a 2-year term. Jason has also been selected to take part in Kent State University's Columbus Program for Intergovernmental Issues and had the opportunity to live and work in Ohio's state capital for a semester. While in Columbus, he worked for the Office of Budget and Management assisting budget analysts for the state.

Other than serving as a District and CORD Board member Jason's "day job" is the Township Administrator for Boardman Township. Jason began as an Intern in 2004, an Administrative Assistant in 2006, and he became the Township's fourth Township Administrator later that year. He also has been appointed to the Emergency Services Internet Protocol Network Steering Committee (ESINet) as the Ohio Township's Association Representative, which is tasked with setting up the next generation of 911 service all Ohioans.

Civically, Jason has helped create Marge Hartman's Dog Park, a 3.25 acre enclosed off-leash dog park in Boardman Township's Park. He also is a member of the local Lion's Club which helps to run a middle school food pantry, provides school scholarships for high school seniors, a "coats for kids" program, and free eye screening for children in the local community.

As Jason says: "It is my pleasure to serve as Boardman Township's Administrator in my hometown. I will do my absolute best in assuring that the Township runs both effectively and efficiently in the day-to-day operations. On a personal note, I believe Boardman Township is indeed a "Nice Place to Call Home."





KNOWING THE CORD BOARD: MEET LAURA KUNZE

*President, Mount Air Water District and Trustee,
Sharon Township*

Laura Kunze has served as a Sharon Township Trustee in Franklin County since 2018 and was re-elected to a new four-year term in 2022. She also serves as President of the Mount Air Water District and as Secretary of the Franklin County Association of Townships. Laura was the driving force behind the establishment of the Mount Air Water District in northern Franklin County. She is passionate about the use of forced annexation and the imposition of unjustified unreasonable rates by municipalities on residents in unincorporated areas to obtain essential water and sewer services.

Laura grew up in Worthington and has resided in the unincorporated area of Sharon Township, known as Mount Air since 2011. Her house in Mt. Air, like most others in the area, is on well and uses a septic tank. Laura became treasurer of a neighborhood water operations board and later became chairperson. The area included 50 homes on the community water system and 25 more homes in individual wells. Things went well until 2014 when more frequent and severe water breaks occurred, and it became clear that a long-term water strategy was needed. After extensive research, Laura concluded that the establishment of a 6119 District was the answer. At long last, and with lots of help, water service is now in place for the Mount Air community.

In addition to having a busy public life, Laura works in health care administration as the Practice Administrator for Comprehensive Eyecare of Central Ohio. She is also a real estate agent for Keller Williams Capital Partners Realty. Laura earned her MBA from the Fisher College of Business at The Ohio State University and a master's in Expressive Arts Therapies from Lesley College in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Her undergraduate degree is in Psychology from Otterbein University in Westerville. Laura is also a graduate of the Ohio Township Association Leadership Academy.



BITS AND PIECES FROM CORD



Things you may have missed and may want to know
Written by Larry Long, Director of Membership and Development

Household Incomes Grow, but less than National Average

Recent data from the Census Bureau reveals that Ohioans grew marginally wealthier over the last five years, but income growth was behind the nation as a whole. Ohio's inflation-adjusted median household income increased 4%, from \$55,772 in 2015 to \$58,116 in 2020. During this same period, U. S. median household income rose from \$60,904 in 2015 to \$64,994, an increase of 7%. No county in Ohio saw a decrease in median income. The largest increase was in Union County where median incomes swelled from \$67,000 to \$89,000, a whopping 31% jump.



Non-Metro Population Gains During Pandemic

Census Bureau population estimates reveal that non-metropolitan areas around the country showed the greatest population gain in more than a decade, outpacing major metro areas and smaller metro areas. The estimates cover a year from July 2020 to July 2021, often associated with the prime 12 months of the COVID-19 pandemic. The estimates show an absolute decline in the aggregate size of the U. S. 56 major metro areas with populations over one million. During the same period, smaller metro areas saw higher population growth than in each of the previous two years.

These population shifts occurred during a year when the nation saw its lowest population growth in at least 120 years (0.1%) due to reduced immigration and lower levels of natural population increases. Migration within the U. S. thus became the most instrumental factor in this gain. For more information or to read the entire Brookings Institution report see: [New census data shows a huge spike in movement out of big metro areas during the pandemic \(brookings.edu\)](https://www.brookings.edu/research/new-census-data-shows-a-huge-spike-in-movement-out-of-big-metro-areas-during-the-pandemic/).

Earth Day Report: Ohio is the 30th "Greenest State"

A study released by WalletHub, ahead of Earth Day on April 22nd, finds Ohio the 30th "greenest state". The study allegedly measured states by environmental quality, eco-friendly behaviors, and climate-change contributions. The study rates Ohio as 29th in environmental quality, 35th in eco-friendly behaviors, and 24th in climate change contributions. Ohio ranked behind of "that state up north" that ranked 13th and Pennsylvania that landed at 24th. But Ohio was ahead of Indiana (39th), Kentucky (45th), and West Virginia that came in dead last. Vermont was the winner followed by New York and Hawaii. Ohio ranked near the bottom (46th) in the consumption of renewable energy. Want the best air quality in the U. S.? Move to Wyoming. The best water quality? Try California, but not if you have breathing problems! To read the entire study--good entertainment--go to: [2022's Greenest States \(wallethub.com\)](https://www.wallethub.com/2022/04/22/greenest-states/).

Great Lakes Commission Establishes 2022 Federal Priorities

The Great Lakes Commission (GLC) recently released its 2022 Federal Priorities, urging President Biden and Congress to fund initiatives to protect the lakes and accelerate the national economy. Included in the Federal Priorities list are programs and projects to: (1) build a resilient Great Lakes basin; (2) fully fund the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative; (3) protect from invasive species; (4) expand efforts to address harmful algal blooms; (5) strengthen the Great Lakes Navigation System; and (6) upgrade infrastructure to ensure equitable access to clean and safe water. The Commission also stressed the need to support coordinated regional science and data collection initiatives.



The Great Lakes Commission was set up in 1955 to protect the Great Lakes as an economic and environmental asset to the U.S. and Canada. The lakes fuel a \$6 trillion regional economy and hold 90% of the U.S. supply of fresh surface water, supplying drinking water for more than 40 million people. More than 1.5 million U.S. jobs are directly connected to the Great Lakes and those jobs generate \$62 billion in wages annually. The Commission includes representatives from eight states and two Canadian provinces. Mary Mertz, Director of the Department of Natural Resources is the Ohio representative on the Commission Board. For more information on the Commission take a look at its website at - Great Lakes Commission (glc.org)

In mid-February President Biden visited Cleveland and Lorain touting the recent bipartisan infrastructure law enacted by Congress late last year. Biden and EPA Administrator Michael Regan said the \$1 billion in Great Lakes clean-up funding would be a "game-changer for communities throughout the Great Lakes region." Senator Rob Portman, who helped lead the passage of the bipartisan infrastructure law, called the funding "great news" for efforts to address harmful algae blooms, invasive species, pollution, and habitat degradation in Lake Erie and across the Great Lakes.



OWDA Low Interest Loan Awards Made in April

The Ohio Water Development Authority made 9.18 million in low interest loans for water and sewer projects at interest rates ranging from 1.81% to 2.41%. Northwestern Water and Sewer District in Wood County, a regional district, was awarded \$1.28 million at 2.11% for 20 years for the construction of a valve building at the Oregon Road water tower in Perrysburg Township. This will assist with the filling of a new water tower currently under construction.

Public Health Workforce Retention Crisis?

Recent reports show that a public health workforce problem may be emerging. One in three government public health employees say they are considering leaving their job within the next year. Faced with harassment, bullying, and even death threats from officials and citizens who oppose guidance on pandemic mitigation efforts, including masking, social distancing, and vaccination, some workers are ready to find a new way to make a living. According to a new survey of 45,000 employees in state and local government public health departments, more than half of America's public health workers report at least one symptom of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) because of the COVID-19 pandemic. The survey was conducted between September 2021 and January 2022 by the Association of State and Territorial Health Officials (ASTHO).

Federal Infrastructure Funding Details Emerging

Ohio EPA has rolled out initial information on water and sewer funding that will be available under the massive federal bipartisan infrastructure law passed late last year by Congress. Over the next five years, Ohio will receive \$1.39 billion, including \$241.5 million in new funding for 2022.

The funding will be split between two programs – the Clean Water and the Drinking Water state revolving funds and targeted at three areas: (1) increasing capitalizations for base programs, (2) addressing emerging contaminants, and (3) tackling lead service line replacements. Allocations for base programs, meanwhile, will enable the state to leverage more funding for core programs but come with a required 10% state match for the first two years and a 20% match beyond that. Specific funding amounts for 2022 and during the next five years include the following:

Program Category	Dollars in 2022 (In Millions)	Funding Over 5 Years (In Millions)
Base Clean Water	\$102	\$624
Clean Water Emerging Contaminants	\$5	\$49
Base Drinking Water	\$45	\$278
Drinking Water Emerging Contaminants	\$18	\$90
Lead Line Replacements	\$71	\$355

Sunshine Manual Updated for 2022

Late in March Ohio Attorney General Dave Yost released the 2022 edition of the Ohio Sunshine Laws, a manual for citizens and local public officials. The manual is a one-stop resource to help public officials understand their rights and responsibilities under the Ohio Public Records and Open Meetings Acts.

The manual, commonly known as the “Yellow Book”, is updated annually to reflect the previous year’s law changes and legal decisions affecting Ohio’s open government laws. The 2022 edition is available at the following link: [2019 Ohio Sunshine Laws Manual \(ohioattorneygeneral.gov\)](https://ohioattorneygeneral.gov/2022-Sunshine-Laws-Manual). In addition, paper copies can be obtained via the Ohio Attorney General’s website.

Districts are reminded that Ohio law (ORC 149.43(E)(2)) requires the adoption of a public records policy to use when responding to public records requests. The policy must be distributed to the records manager, records custodian, or the employee who otherwise has custody of the records of the office, and that employee must acknowledge receipt. The law also requires a poster describing the policy that must be posted in the public office. If the District has a policies and procedures manual, the public records policy must be included in the manual and may be posted on the District’s website. Compliance with these requirements will be audited by the Auditor of State.

The Attorney General’s Public Records Unit has created a Model Public Records Policy which can be accessed at: [Model Public Records Request Policy \(ohioattorneygeneral.gov\)](https://ohioattorneygeneral.gov/Model-Public-Records-Policy). More detailed information on the “do’s” and “don’ts” of the content of a policy are available in the Sunshine Law Manual.



Forever Chemicals—Liver Damage?

Scientists have found a link between exposure to “forever chemicals” and liver damage, as well as a potential connection to non-alcoholic fatty liver disease, in a study published earlier this year.

Scientists concluded in an Environmental Health Perspectives article, that exposure to such compounds—commonly known as PFAS, was associated with elevated levels of a liver enzyme called ALT, which serves as a biomarker for liver damage.

The authors synthesized the results of more than 100 peer-reviewed studies in both humans and rodents, ultimately finding that three of the most common types of PFAS detected in humans – PFOA, PFOS and PFNA – are all connected to elevated levels of ALT in human blood.

“There is growing interest in the long-term health effects of PFAS exposure, and this study supports that there is evidence that PFAS is associated with liver injury,” according to Leda Chatzi, a professor of population and public health sciences at the University of Southern California’s Keck School of Medicine. The full article with a link to the study can be accessed at: [Scientists link ‘forever chemicals’ exposure to liver damage | The Hill.](#)

In Ohio, H.B. 158 has been enacted by the Ohio General Assembly and will become effective on June 13th . The legislation, sponsored by Rep. Brian Baldridge (R-Winchester-Adams County) generally prohibits the use of class B firefighting foam containing intentionally added PFAS chemicals for testing and training purposes, with some exceptions. Class B firefighting foam is a type of special foam designed to extinguish fires caused by flammable liquids, such as gasoline, oil, and jet fuel. Class B foams can be divided into two categories, fluorinated foams, and fluorine-free foams. The fluorinated foams contain PFAS chemicals.



Plugging of Orphan Oil and Gas Wells—New Funding

The Division of Oil and Gas Resources Management at Ohio DNR will work to remediate 40 to 200 orphan oil and gas wells with the injection of over \$28.5 million in new funding. Over the past three years, under legislation passed by the 132nd General Assembly in 2018 (H. B 225), 350 wells have been plugged or otherwise made safe. The legislation bumped state funding by increasing the amount earmarked for plugging from 14% to 30% of the state’s oil and gas severance taxes.

Ohio is the home to approximately 20,000 orphan wells, so the added funding for this purpose under the bipartisan federal infrastructure bill is a welcome opportunity for Ohio. The new federal law set aside \$4.7 billion nationwide and Ohio’s share is estimated to be \$326 million through 2035. However, the federal money isn’t just for plugging orphan wells. The money can also be used to find and classify existing orphan wells, measure and track emissions of gases and water contamination, remediate soil near orphan wells, and address any disproportionate burden of adverse effects on low-income and communities of color.