Monday, June 15, 2020

Controlling Board OKs Millions For Coronavirus, Protest Responses

The funneling of federal dollars toward state coronavirus relief efforts continued Monday as the Controlling Board cleared funding for county fairs, prisons and other programs.

The board also approved $3.2 million for the Ohio Army National Guard's activation in response to protests in recent weeks.

The Adjutant General's Department requested the money for active duty costs related to civil unrest starting May 30. The money will support about 1,200 Army National Guard members dispatched to Cleveland and Columbus to assist state and local law enforcement.

That request received the board's assent, with Sen. Vernon Sykes (D-Akron) objecting after he questioned a department representative on the role of the Guard in addressing protests.

Jeffrey Newman, chief financial officer for the Adjutant General's Department, told Sen. Sykes that the Guard can be called to a variety of activities, including responding to peaceful protests, and has no choice but to respond if ordered by the governor. He also discussed the dual state-federal role of the Guard, which can be activated by the president.

"Can the president override the governor in the state of Ohio?" Sen. Sykes asked.

Federal statutes would have to be triggered in order for that to happen, but that is rare, Mr. Newman said.

Asked by Sen. Sykes who decides if the members are armed, Mr. Newman said that is done by the department and the governor's office.

"It really depends on the situations and before anyone is sent out there and issued anything, it has to be approved by the governor's office and their legal team," he said.

Other items approved by the board included new money for the state's response to COVID-19.

The Office of Budget and Management asked for and received appropriation of $47 million in federal coronavirus relief dollars across three departments.

The biggest chunk, totaling $40.3 million, is for the Department of Rehabilitation and Correction to allow for the use of federal CARES Act dollars to respond to the spread of COVID-19 in state prisons. The money will go toward hazard pay, purchases of personal protective equipment, laboratory services, cleaning and hygiene supplies, hotels for staff use and other costs.

Another $4.7 million, through the Department of Agriculture, will be used to support local fairs that operate this year. Fairs that conduct a junior fair in 2020 will receive $50,000, while those that do not will receive $15,000. The funding will be used for protective equipment, cleaning supplies, staffing and signage to promote social distancing.

Senate President Larry Obhof (R-Medina) praised the move in a statement.
"Ohio's fairs showcase our vibrant agricultural communities and mark a year of hard work and preparation by so many of our young people involved in 4-H and FFA," he said. "We worked hard to ensure that these events would go on this summer and that families could have a safe but fun experience across Ohio."

It also included $2 million, through the Ohio EPA, to fund a wastewater-based epidemiology project. That initiative, through the OEPA, Department of Health, Ohio Water Resources Center, U.S. EPA and four Ohio universities, will develop protocols to identify coronavirus trends.

An additional coronavirus-related request came from the State Highway Patrol, which sought $3 million after a line item typically funded by court fees led to a drop in revenue while expenses from special details increased.

"The fund will not have enough cash to cover the cost of payroll and maintenance expenses until revenues are restored and expenses return to anticipated levels," the patrol wrote.

Another sizable item was a request from the Department of Education for $14.6 million in appropriation authority for the creation of the Comprehensive Literacy State Development Program. That effort is funded entirely by federal dollars, and over five years the department will award 64 grants totaling $42 million across the state, said Aaron Rausch, director of the office of budget and school funding at ODE.

A request from the attorney general's office for $115,000 to contract with the Butler County Sheriff for helicopter services for the Bureau of Criminal Investigation's marijuana eradication initiative drew an objection from Rep. Jack Cera (D-Bellaire).

Rep. Cera asked if the money from the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration used to fund the effort was restricted to its current use.

"Is money from that fund limited in any way to just looking at eradicating marijuana or can it be used to deal with more dangerous drugs?" he asked.

The fund can be used for a variety of purposes, but the program has only applied for marijuana eradication, Chief Financial Officer Jay Easterling said.

The secretary of state's office also requested an increase of appropriation authority in business services operating expenses by $1 million to accommodate a return of the same amount to the General Revenue Fund.

"This shift will prevent the need for SOS to implement cost savings days during a critical time when SOS staff are preparing for the November general election. Most importantly, this shift provides more than twice the amount of savings to the state GRF than SOS cost savings days were projected to provide," the office said.

Much of the meeting was dedicated to a series of holds from Rep. Shane Wilkin (R-Hillsboro) in which he asked agencies to justify waivers of competitive selection for various contracts. He asked about the age of contracts, when they were last bid, and if there is intent to bid them again.

Rep. Wilkin held more than two dozen items, with agency representatives explaining the reasoning behind the no-bid contracts, the use of the services — often software — and sometimes informing the board that they are in the process of putting the contracts out for bid.

"It's the waiver issue that I've taken exception to with the amount that we've had in this particular Controlling Board meeting," he said.

In total, the board approved 111 requests for funding. The cleared items include:

- $12.9 million – Secretary of State – to use federal funds to support the costs of the 2020 election cycle.
- $1.35 million – University of Cincinnati – to buy equipment for the Ohio Cyber Range project.
- $1.9 million – Lakeland Community College – to buy equipment and furniture for engineering building renovations.
- $6.3 million – Ohio University – for building renovations.
- $1.2 million – Department of Agriculture – to buy agricultural easements.
Statehouse Update

- $800,000 – Development Services Agency – for Etna Township in Licking County to improve roads in support of Amazon.
- $7.8 million – Department of Job and Family Services – to renew a contract with the Institute for Human Services to act as state training coordinator for the Ohio Child Welfare Training Program.
- $1.5 million – Department of Natural Resources – to contract for construction at Hocking Hills State Park.
- $5.4 million – Racing Commission – to pay owners of winning horses at races held at Ohio racetracks.
- $1.1 million – Department of Rehabilitation and Correction – for water and wastewater treatment plant upgrades at the Pickaway Correctional Institution.

Late-Emerging Amendment Seen As Providing Certainty For School, Public Works Projects

Lawmakers are poised to issue new bonding authority for school projects and other capital expenditures after slipping language into a fast-tracked bill last week.

The House added $555 million in one-year bonding authority to a school construction finance measure (SB 4), the original contents of which had already become law through the enactment of the biennial budget bill (HB 166).

The move is expected to meet with favorable consideration in the Senate, said Sen. Matt Dolan (R-Chagrin Falls), who chairs the Senate Finance Committee. The Senate is in session next week, when a concurrence vote could be held.

"I think it's a smart move because we don't want an interruption in service, interruption in construction projects," he said in an interview. "I'm happy that the House did this."

The House's amendment, offered by Rep. D.J. Swearingen (R-Huron) during a session that ran into the early hours of Friday morning, includes $300 million for school facilities and $255 million for new public works projects. That includes $175 million for the State Capital Improvement Program, also known as Issue 2, which provides funding for road, bridge, water supply, wastewater, stormwater and other projects for local governments and districts.

It also included $37.5 million for the Clean Ohio Program and $42.5 million for the state's public works loan program, Rep. Swearingen said.

"Reopening Ohio and rebuilding our economy must include investing in our infrastructure and in Ohio's future and that's what this amendment does," he said.

The school funding will be authorized through the Ohio Facilities Construction Commission.

"We're investing in Ohio's schools, communities and future," Speaker Larry Householder (R-Glenford) said in a statement. "These are programs with a solid track record of delivering real results."

The measure's passage by the House came just hours after the chamber concurred in Senate amendments on another bill (HB 481) that included capital reappropriations for previously approved projects.

Those reappropriations and new bonding authority such as that included in SB 4 are typically included, alongside other capital expenditures, in a capital budget or a package of bills. The coronavirus crisis has thrown the fate of other capital projects into question as it wreaks havoc on state revenues.

The fact that school facilities and Public Works Commission bonds are being authorized in sizable chunks is fairly routine, but the speedy manner in which they were authorized by the House — through a floor amendment with no prior public vetting — is pretty unique and yet another side effect of the ongoing pandemic.

Sen. Dolan said the effort isn't a replacement for a capital budget, but it would provide some certainty for projects in a few programs that they can continue to work while lawmakers sort out what will happen with broader capital expenditures.

The measure also includes a trio of amendments of which versions were included by the House last week in a combination reappropriations and local government coronavirus relief bill (SB 310). One allows local governments to borrow from tax
increment financing funds, another allows them to sidestep competitive bidding for the purchase of personal protective equipment and the third deals with the prevailing wage law for transportation improvement districts.

Rep. Bill Seitz (R-Cincinnati) said the House and Senate worked to come to agreement on those issues, which weren't included in HB481 as amended by the Senate.

"After an exhaustive day of discussions, I am assured that the Senate does not have a problem with this amendment after all," he said of the TIF change.

Sen. Dolan said he's comfortable with all of them.

"I had a chance now to study them and understand them and I support all three of those amendments," he said.

The original SB4 bill was a Senate priority that increased the bonding authority for school construction by $100 million. It moved quickly through the upper chamber, passing last March in the early weeks of the General Assembly. It headed to the House, clearing two committees before June 2019.

After the increased bonding authority in the original language was included in the two-year spending plan, the measure was sidelined for a month or so before being re-referred to the House Rules and Reference Committee. That panel picked it up again Thursday morning, reporting it and setting the stage for the evening’s floor amendment.

Tuesday, June 16, 2020

State May Borrow Billions From Feds For Unemployment Costs; County Fair Guidelines Issued

Ohio needs assistance to cover unemployment compensation benefits for workers who have lost their jobs in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic and related restrictions on business activity.

Gov. Mike DeWine on Tuesday announced the state has requested $3.1 billion in borrowing authority from the U.S. Department of Labor to put toward payments to out-of-work Ohioans.

"It is essentially a line of credit, so we ask for greater authority than we currently think that we will need so that we have it just in case we do need it," he said. "Ohio is certainly not alone. Other states have been forced to do this."

The move is not unprecedented in state history. Gov. DeWine said Ohio borrowed about $3.3 billion about a decade ago amid the Great Recession and finished paying back the debt in 2016.

The Department of Job and Family Services announced last week it had sent more than $3.8 billion in unemployment compensation payments to more than 686,000 claimants for the 12-week period ending June 6.

The situation has led the legislature to consider action to address the state's unemployment compensation woes on a number of fronts, including a resolution (SJR 4) to seek voter approval for an amendment allowing the state to issue debt to repay advances from the federal government to the state's unemployment compensation system.

Senate President Larry Obhof (R-Medina) has said the alternative, borrowing from the federal government, can be "pretty expensive," with penalties for every year the debt is not paid back in full.

Gov. DeWine said one benefit to seeking funding from the federal government in this case is that it is not charging interest "at this moment."

He said the legislature will need to find a long-term solution to assure the unemployment system remains solvent, although it's unlikely to be implemented any time soon.

"We've known for a number of years this is a problem that has to be addressed," he said. "It's a lot easier to address it when the economy is going up."

The announcement on unemployment compensation followed Gov. DeWine's breakdown of the state's most-recent coronavirus data.
The state has seen 42,010 cumulative coronavirus cases and 2,597 deaths, including probable cases, the Department of Health reported Tuesday afternoon. Total hospitalizations sit at 7,007, with ICU admissions at 1,784.

While the governor said recent transmission trends throughout the state are not "really alarming," he threw cold water on the idea that large events would return to Ohio anytime soon.

In particular, he called the possibility of the Pro Football Hall of Fame bringing in 20,000 fans for its annual induction ceremony and Hall of Fame Game in Canton in August "highly unlikely."

"Certainly, it could not occur today. It would be very dangerous to do it today," he said.

Despite the ongoing uncertainties involving the pandemic, the governor late Tuesday issued guidelines that will allow county fairs, which usually attract thousands of visitors, to continue this summer with certain restrictions.

Among those are limiting grandstand occupation to half capacity, encouraging distance protocols during livestock shows and discouraging "large gatherings."

"Fair boards and managers should conduct the fair in a manner that discourages the large gathering of people on the midway or on other parts of the fair grounds," the order issued by interim Health Director Lance Himes states. "Where possible the fair should provide one-way traffic in buildings or other areas, where doing so will help people maintain social distancing."

The governor also announced the state would make $1 million in grant funding available to local family and children first councils.

"These local councils serve some of Ohio's most vulnerable children, who often need services from many different agencies such as developmental disabilities, child welfare, juvenile justice (and) behavioral health," he said.

Gov. DeWine said the dollars could be used by agencies to purchase technology to help them adapt to challenges stemming from the pandemic.

The governor said he, Attorney General Dave Yost and state lawmakers would discuss policy proposals regarding policing at Wednesday's press conference in the wake of recent protests.

Within the next 10 days, the state will release guidelines for K-12 schools regarding the 2020-21 school year, he added.

In a development unrelated to the coronavirus pandemic, Lt. Gov. Jon Husted announced InnovateOhio and the Office of Budget and Management have used analytical tools to identify just over $1 million in duplicate payments across 27 state entities. The state has recovered $950,027 of that total.

"This is very common in large organizations in the private sector and in the public sector, but we're doing something about it," the lieutenant governor said.

**Wednesday, June 17, 2020**

**DeWine Calls For Quick Action On Policing Updates**

Gov. Mike DeWine on Wednesday outlined proposals to overhaul policing in Ohio, including the use of independent investigations and the licensing of police officers.

The governor's proposals – many of which will require legislative action – include tasking an independent entity with investigating and potentially prosecuting all officer-involved shootings and in-custody deaths.

"Simply put, law enforcement agencies should not be investigating themselves," the governor said during a press conference with Attorney General Dave Yost.

While serving as attorney general, Gov. DeWine expressed skepticism that such a change would improve public confidence in the process.
But he said an independent investigation and potentially a prosecution can avoid the perception of impropriety. Nonetheless, not everyone will agree with the conclusions, he said.

"That's never going to change," Gov. DeWine said. "There are going to be people that don't like the results."

Gov. DeWine has directed the State Highway Patrol to allow the Bureau of Criminal Investigation to probe all fatal shootings and in-custody deaths involving troopers.

AG Yost said the bureau is well-versed in officer-involved shooting investigations, saying they handle on average 35 such cases per year.

"It's about independence," he said of the proposal. "It's about legitimacy."

Two House Republicans last week introduced legislation (HB 703) that would task the bureau with looking into all fatal police-involved shootings.

Rep. Phil Plummer (R-Dayton) and Rep. Cindy Abrams (R-Harrison), the sponsors of the bill, issued their own response.

“We appreciate the comments of Governor DeWine and Attorney General Yost. The 15-point legislation we introduced last week is the beginning of what we expect will be a robust and thoughtful conversation,” they said. "We look forward to listening to citizens and community leaders from across Ohio as we work toward meaningful change that improves law enforcement and public safety. As we said last week, the status quo isn’t good enough.”

The governor's plan also calls on potential law enforcement officers to pass a psychological exam before they can begin training.

He also announced that the state will provide an additional six hours of de-escalation training and called on lawmakers to find a permanent funding stream for law enforcement training.

"Some officers go years without any additional training. This is simply unacceptable," he said. "I have never met a law enforcement officer who did not want more training."

The current situation creates a disparity among law enforcement agencies in Ohio, according to Gov. DeWine.

"There are hundreds and hundreds of smaller departments around the state that have not been able to afford that additional training for their officers each year," he added.

The governor also asked lawmakers to create a standard definition of use of force and require such incidents to be reported when they occur.

"If you don't know the facts, it's difficult to make judgements," he said.

Another request of lawmakers is that they ban chokeholds unless it is determined that the officer was justified in using deadly force.

The governor wants body cameras on every officer in the state and the professional licensing of law enforcement.

Gov. DeWine asked for legislative hearings to begin immediately.

"It's time for us to get these things done," he said. "There's no reason these issues should not be dealt with."

AG Yost acknowledged it will be a tough lift to get the proposals through the legislature.

"None of it is going to be easy and there is going to be substantial discussion and maybe arguments as we move through the legislative process," he said.
Although the governor said some of the proposals came from the Ohio Legislative Black Caucus, House Minority Leader Emilia Sykes (D-Akron) refuted that notion.

"Black lawmakers weren't consulted or given the opportunity to offer input on the governor's recommendations. In fact, the first contact the governor had with OLBC regarding these recommendations was on a conference call just hours before today's announcement," she said in a statement.

"These are not the recommendations of black lawmakers – far from it. What we want is to uplift the voices of black Ohioans who we have heard from at protests, community meetings, and in everyday interactions. Statehouse Republicans, from the governor to the speaker, don't seem interested in truly listening to black Ohioans. They think they have the answers to hundreds of years of racism, brutality and oppression. They do not."

Senate Minority Leader Kenny Yuko (D-Richmond Heights) said Ohio needs to have a larger conversation about racism, with all parties involved in the discussions. "We need to address inequality in our criminal justice system, but also in health care, education and housing, just to name several very important issues," he said. "This conversation starts by declaring racism a public health crisis – we can't fix a problem we refuse to see."

Earlier in the day, members of the Ohio Mayors Alliance called the governor's proposals a good step but expressed skepticism that lawmakers will act on them.

U.S. Sen. Sherrod Brown (D-Cleveland) expressed a similar sentiment during his weekly conference call with reporters.

"I think the legislature, as conservative as it is, might have difficulty doing some of these things because they haven't shown any real interest in advocating people's civil rights," he said.

**Thursday, June 18, 2020**

**Governor Eyeing Southwest Ohio Virus Hotspots**

Gov. Mike DeWine on Thursday turned his attention to what appear to be a series of coronavirus hotspots emerging in southwestern Ohio.

The Department of Health reported Thursday that the state is up to 43,122 total cases and 2,633 total deaths since the start of the pandemic. A total of 7,104 Ohioans have been hospitalized, with 1,807 admitted to intensive care units.

The numbers reflect an increase of 700 cases and 22 deaths over the previous 24 hours.

What drew the governor's particular attention, however, were recent spikes in five counties: Montgomery, Greene, Clark, Warren and Hamilton.

"The trend lines that we're seeing in these five counties are worrisome," he said during an update on the coronavirus.

All five counties have seen increases in the number of cases in recent days and weeks, he said. In Montgomery County, he pointed to a significant increase in the amount of mobility and travel, noting it has exceeded pre-pandemic levels.

"People are moving around more," he said. "This is not unique to Montgomery County. You should see this to some degree with any county in the state of Ohio."

He also noted workplace outbreaks in Montgomery and Clark counties.

"None of this should come as a real shock," Gov. DeWine said. "We're going to see hotspots. We're going to see increases in cases at different times and different parts of the state."

In response, the governor said the state is stepping up testing efforts in those areas, sending in the National Guard to provide those services at pop-up sites.
"You're going to start seeing in the next several days, more information about where you can get tests," he said. "We are in a phase where to be aggressive we have to test more."

The governor also discussed trends involving the coronavirus and children with Dr. Amy Edwards, associate medical director for pediatric infection control at University Hospitals Rainbow Babies and Children's Hospital in Cleveland.

Dr. Edwards said the hospital has seen a rising level of children testing positive for the coronavirus, including an increase in the percentage of tests coming back positive in symptomatic children.

"It's to be expected as the state opens that we're going to see more positive kids," she said. "Together with that we have seen a slight uptick in hospital admissions for COVID-19 in children."

Symptoms in children generally remain relatively minor compared to those for more vulnerable populations, but the hospital is also keeping an eye on the number of children experiencing more severe inflammatory illnesses associated with the virus, Dr. Edwards said.

**PPE Stockpile:** The governor also announced the creation of a readiness stockpile of personal protective equipment to meet the needs of patients and health care workers in congregate care facilities and hospitals.

The state's hospitals will build the stockpile and distribute the equipment to long-term care facilities and other entities that see spikes in cases, the governor said.

"Having a stockpile like this is really important," he said. "This type of coordination simply did not exist three months ago."

The effort builds on an approach that teamed hospitals with long-term care facilities to help address rising case levels.

"In the early days of the COVID-19 crisis, Ohio hospitals responded by designating a clinical leader to collaborate with nursing facilities within their communities on PPE, staffing, infection control protocols and other needs created by the pandemic," Ohio Hospital Association President Mike Abrams said in a statement. "We thank our members for stepping up to the challenge outside their hospitals to serve their local communities. This collaboration enables nursing facility residents to receive the most appropriate level of care, following CDC guidance, in the familiar environment that is their home."

**Other Items:** Lt. Gov. Jon Husted said contact practice and scrimmages for sports can resume June 22. That includes for sports like basketball, football and lacrosse, he said.

The lieutenant governor also said the state's website for coronavirus-focused job openings will be transitioning back to the regular OhioMeansJobs site. That site currently has more than 120,000 job openings, he said, with half paying $50,000 or more.

"As the economy has reopened, we're beginning that long journey of recovery," he said. "Employers' needs, job seekers' needs are changing. We're transitioning."

**Industry Study Quantifies Tax Revenue Lost From Hotels**

A new industry report shows Ohio could lose more than $242 million in direct tax revenue this year due to the novel coronavirus' ongoing toll on the hotel industry.

The study comes from Oxford Economics at the behest of the American Hotel & Lodging Association at a time when that industry and others continue grappling with the economic impact of the pandemic that prompted officials to ban mass gatherings and shutter most businesses.

The findings project hotel-related tax revenues will drop by $16.8 billion nationally for 2020 and the report will likely take center stage as the industry continues lobbying state and federal policymakers for financial relief.

"I think, if anything, those numbers, they are certainly conservative," Joe Savarise, executive director of the Ohio Hotel and Lodging Association, said in an interview. "They are not overstating the case."
For Ohio, the report projects Ohio will lose: $213.87 million in occupancy taxes, $14.63 million in sales taxes, $10.91 million in personal income taxes, and $1.36 million each in corporate and unemployment insurance and other social taxes.

Although the state has continued its phased reopening, Mr. Savarise said current projections are that the industry will not fully recover until 2021 or 2022 given the public's reluctance to travel. It took three years for hotels to return to their pre-Sept. 11 performance, he said, and six years to return to pre-2008 recession levels.

"We think it's somewhere between those two numbers," he said. "For hotels and for a lot of the travel economy businesses we think it isn't going to be as V shaped as it is for some industries. The impacts on travel are going to last a little longer."

Ohio hotels reported occupancy rates at below 40% for the week of June 13, Mr. Savarise said – down from a 60-70% pre-pandemic average. Since hotels were kept open during the pandemic to serve health care workers and other essential workers occupancy rates never quite reached zero, he said. Meanwhile, although furloughed or laid off workers are inching back, Mr. Savarise said 70% of the workforce remains displaced.

As a result, the industry has pressed Ohio lawmakers to make several changes to support the industry, including: authorizing industry-specific emergency grant and working capital loan programs; offsetting the expense of accommodating medical staff and other frontline workers during the pandemic; and deferring sales and other tax remittance and state payroll taxes during the emergency.

Mr. Savarise said his group is also pushing for a change in law to install borrower protections including: a 60-120 day forbearance on all leases without lender support and permission to use all reserves to pay operating expenses before debt service while waiving reserve payments for a 90-day period.

At the federal level, the industry continues to advocate for extending the Paycheck Protection Program, tax credits for cleaning and personal protective equipment, and commercial mortgage relief.

"Hotels positively impact every community across the country, creating jobs, investing in communities, and supporting billions of dollars in tax revenue that local governments use to fund education, infrastructure and so much more," said Chip Rogers, CEO of the AHLA. "However, with the impact to the travel sector nine times worse than 9/11, hotels need support to keep our doors open and retain employees as we work toward recovery. We expect it will be years before demand returns to peak 2019 levels."

**Economists Caution On Cracker Plant**

A group of economists are warning Gov. Mike DeWine and his counterparts in two other states that the projected economic boom of a planned cracker plant may not fully materialize.

The missive to Gov. DeWine and the governors of Pennsylvania and West Virginia was signed by eight individuals, including faculty members at universities including Ohio State, Youngstown State and the University of Akron along with former Pennsylvania Secretary of Environmental Protection John Hanger.

Gov. DeWine and his predecessor personally lobbied for the Belmont County project and JobsOhio has put tens of millions toward grants for site preparation to entice developers to commit. Developers PTT Global and Daelim earlier this month announced they were pushing back the timeline and hope to have a final investment decision within the next nine months.

The authors argue the investment "has become too risky an investment to go forward" given market factors and that officials "risk squandering hundreds of millions of dollars in public funds in pursuit of a vision that will not materialize."

"We ask you to help stop the squandering of public funds and resources in pursuit of an imagined petrochemical boom," the letter reads. "Instead our region's efforts should be focused on alternative economic development strategies, which can attract new businesses and expand opportunities for existing ones while creating new jobs up and down the skills ladder in communities throughout our region."

PTT and Daelim, along with industry groups, have pushed back on that claim in statements, with developers saying the project represents a "multibillion-dollar investment that would yield a positive economic impact for generations to come."
Officials initially pegged the investment at about $5 billion when PTT was going it alone. When Daelim came aboard in 2018, developers said the total investment could increase as much as twofold.

Friday, June 19, 2020

**Capital Spending Bill Among Four Signed By Governor**

The productive past few weeks for the General Assembly led to a busy week for Gov. Mike DeWine and his bill-signing pens.

The governor on Friday signed four recently passed bills, including one that includes federal dollars for local governments' coronavirus expenses and capital reappropriations. He inked five measures Tuesday.

One of the key bills receiving Gov. DeWine's assent Friday was a measure (HB 164) providing additional funding to certain school districts and easing some K-12 education mandates in response to the pandemic.

The biggest ticket item is the broad-based spending bill (HB 481), which began as a simple land conveyance measure until it became the final vehicle for capital reappropriations totaling $1.28 billion, CARES Act funding for local governments totaling $350 million and a handful of other provisions dealing with local governments, nursing facility rates and other issues.

Senate President Larry Obhof (R-Medina) said in a statement that the measure will help support communities in the fight against COVID-19.

"These resources provide critical relief," he said. "Our communities have been on the front lines of protecting Ohioans during the COVID-19 pandemic. Among other things, these resources will fund additional testing, which is crucial to getting people back to work as we reboot and rebuild Ohio's economy."

The County Commissioners Association of Ohio, the Ohio Mayors Alliance, the Ohio Municipal League and the Ohio Township Association praised the signing in a joint statement.

"We are grateful for Gov. DeWine's steadfast support of local government," they said. "House Bill 481 will provide much-needed federal aid to Ohio's local governments as they respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. These critical funds will provide immediate fiscal relief for local health and safety expenses, assist individuals facing economic hardship and help provide support to local small businesses."

The capital reappropriations provision, meanwhile, allows ongoing capital projects to continue.

"These projects, and the jobs they support, remain vitally important to the growth and recovery of our state and our communities during the COVID-19 pandemic," Sen. Obhof said.

Gov. DeWine also on Friday signed legislation taking several steps to address infant mortality (HB 11). That measure would expand tobacco cessation programs and increase support for lead paint education and group prenatal programs.

"This is an investment in Ohio's families and once this law begins to be implemented it is our hope these issues will be better addressed," Rep. Gayle Manning (R-N. Ridgeville), who sponsored the measure alongside Rep. Stephanie Howse (D-Cleveland), said in a statement. "This legislation helps reduce infant mortality and increase access to health care for those who so desperately need it."

A late amendment to the measure also adjusted Medicaid funding in light of an increased federal share of certain costs, freeing up about $500 million in state General Revenue Fund spending.

The governor also signed legislation (HB 65) that requires child care providers to notify parents in cases that constitute a serious risk noncompliance. The measure stems from an incident in which a day care provider lost a child for part of a day, and the law only required them to notify the family of that child.

It picked up an amendment in the Senate that ensured children have access to swim lessons and instructors at residential swimming pools even if public pools are closed during the COVID-19 pandemic.
"I am grateful to my colleagues and President Obhof for swiftly passing this legislation and to Gov. DeWine for signing it today," said Sen. Theresa Gavarone (R-Bowling Green), who authored the swim lesson language in a standalone bill. "I am glad we were able to update the law quickly to ensure that swim instructors can teach our children life-saving swim lessons through House Bill 65."

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