



THE FITZGIBBON GROUP

association management – government relations – strategic planning

Emergency Management Association of Ohio

Legislative Update

Prepared by: Michelle Fitzgibbon

Phone: (614) 378-2156

E-mail: michelle@fitzgibbongroup.com

Report created on December 12, 2025

- HB23** **CREATE ESCAPED CONVICT ALERT PROGRAM, ALLOW PARENT COMPANY APPLICATION** (ROEMER B, WILLIAMS J) To create the escaped convict alert program and to allow a prior parent company of a bank to apply to the Secretary of State for the appointment and commission of banking police officers.
Current Status: 12/1/2025 - **SIGNED BY GOVERNOR**; eff. 90 days
State Bill Page: <https://www.legislature.ohio.gov/legislation/legislation-summary?id=GA136-HB-23>
- HB26** **REQUIRE STATE, LOCAL IMMIGRATION COOPERATION** (WILLIAMS J, FISCHER T) To require state and local authorities to cooperate with the federal government in the enforcement of immigration laws, to prescribe funding reductions for noncompliance, to name this act the Protecting Ohio Communities Act, and to declare an emergency.
Current Status: 4/29/2025 - House Public Safety, (First Hearing)
State Bill Page: <https://www.legislature.ohio.gov/legislation/legislation-summary?id=GA136-HB-26>
- HB96** **OPERATING BUDGET** (STEWART B) To make operating appropriations for the biennium beginning July 1, 2025, and ending June 30, 2027, to levy taxes, and to provide authorization and conditions for the operation of state programs.
Current Status: 10/1/2025 - Consideration of Governor's Veto; Senate Overrides Veto on Item 66, Vote 21-11
State Bill Page: <https://www.legislature.ohio.gov/legislation/legislation-summary?id=GA136-HB-96>
- HB309** **LAW CHANGES-COUNTY BUDGET COMMISSIONS** (THOMAS D) To modify the law governing county budget commissions and property taxation.
Current Status: 12/9/2025 - Sent to Governor for Signature
State Bill Page: <https://www.legislature.ohio.gov/legislation/legislation-summary?id=GA136-HB-309>
- HB317** **UAS PURCHASE LIMITS-FOREIGN ENTITIES** (MATHEWS T) To prohibit the purchase of small unmanned aircraft systems manufactured or assembled by a covered foreign entity.
Current Status: 9/30/2025 - House Technology and Innovation, (First Hearing)
State Bill Page: <https://www.legislature.ohio.gov/legislation/legislation-summary?id=GA136-HB-317>
- HB335** **LIMIT INSIDE MILLAGE REVENUE INCREASES** (THOMAS D) To limit revenue



THE FITZGIBBON GROUP

association management – government relations – strategic planning

increases from inside millage levies occurring due to a reappraisal or update.

Current Status: 12/9/2025 - Sent to Governor for Signature

State Bill Page: <https://www.legislature.ohio.gov/legislation/legislation-summary?id=GA136-HB-335>

HB365 PROVIDE PROPERTY TAX REFUNDS (BRENNAN S, HALL D) To authorize a refundable income tax credit or rebate for homeowners and renters whose property taxes or a portion of their rent exceed five per cent of their income and to name this act the Property Tax Refund Act.

Current Status: 6/18/2025 - Referred to Committee House Ways and Means

State Bill Page: <https://www.legislature.ohio.gov/legislation/legislation-summary?id=GA136-HB-365>

HB413 CREATE LOCAL GOVERNMENT EXPENDITURE DATABASE (YOUNG T, PETERSON B) To create the Ohio Local Government Expenditure Database and require political subdivision participation, to require the state retirement systems to participate in the Ohio State Government Expenditure Database, and to make an appropriation.

Current Status: 10/28/2025 - House Technology and Innovation, (Second Hearing)

State Bill Page: <https://www.legislature.ohio.gov/legislation/legislation-summary?id=GA136-HB-413>

HB420 ELIMINATE PROPERTY TAXES BY 2030 (CLICK G, WILLIS B) To disallow and, by 2030, eliminate property taxes levied for a continuing period of time and to name this act The Taxpayers Freedom Trilogy – Act One: Discontinuing the Continuum.

Current Status: 9/15/2025 - Referred to Committee House Ways and Means

State Bill Page: <https://www.legislature.ohio.gov/legislation/legislation-summary?id=GA136-HB-420>

HB421 ALLOW PROPERTY TAX REDUCTION BY INITIATIVE (CLICK G, THOMAS D) To reduce unvoted property taxes by initiative and to name this act the Taxpayers Freedom Trilogy – Act Two: Arresting Inside Millage.

Current Status: 9/15/2025 - Referred to Committee House Ways and Means

State Bill Page: <https://www.legislature.ohio.gov/legislation/legislation-summary?id=GA136-HB-421>

HB422 INCREASE PROPERTY TAX PASSAGE THRESHOLDS (CLICK G, NEWMAN J) To increase the approval threshold required for passage of certain property taxes and to name this act the Taxpayers Freedom Trilogy – Act Three: The Triumph of the Taxpayer.

Current Status: 9/15/2025 - Referred to Committee House Ways and Means

State Bill Page: <https://www.legislature.ohio.gov/legislation/legislation-summary?id=GA136-HB-422>



THE FITZGIBBON GROUP

association management – government relations – strategic planning

HB425 PROHIBIT TRESPASS, UNAUTHORIZED RECORDING-DRONES (HOOPS J) To prohibit trespass and types of unauthorized recording with an unmanned aerial vehicle system.

Current Status: 9/15/2025 - Referred to Committee House Transportation

State Bill Page: <https://www.legislature.ohio.gov/legislation/legislation-summary?id=GA136-HB-425>

HB466 LEVY REQUIREMENT-PROPERTY TAX APPROVAL (LEAR B, RITTER K) To require certain subdivisions to obtain the approval of the body that created the subdivision before levying a property tax.

Current Status: 10/1/2025 - Referred to Committee House Local Government

State Bill Page: <https://www.legislature.ohio.gov/legislation/legislation-summary?id=GA136-HB-466>

HB473 PROHIBIT PUBLIC EMPLOYER CONTRIBUTION PAYMENTS (THOMAS D) To prohibit a public employer from paying employee contributions to a state retirement system.

Current Status: 10/29/2025 - House Public Insurance and Pensions, (Third Hearing)

State Bill Page: <https://www.legislature.ohio.gov/legislation/legislation-summary?id=GA136-HB-473>

HB499 LAW CHANGES-COUNTY BUDGET COMMISSIONS (BARHORST T, KING A) To modify the law governing county budget commissions and property taxation.

Current Status: 10/8/2025 - Referred to Committee House Ways and Means

State Bill Page: <https://www.legislature.ohio.gov/legislation/legislation-summary?id=GA136-HB-499>

HB520 ESTABLISH COUNTY BLUE RIBBON COMMITTEES (MATHEWS T, THOMAS D) To establish and convene a Blue Ribbon Committee in each county to review and assess each taxing unit within the county and each county program or department to identify duplication of services and generally to streamline and improve county efficiency and effectiveness.

Current Status: 11/13/2025 - **BILL AMENDED**, House Local Government, (Second Hearing)

State Bill Page: <https://www.legislature.ohio.gov/legislation/legislation-summary?id=GA136-HB-520>

HB598 ALLOW RESIDENTIAL STABILITY ZONES-TAXES (SIGRIST M, HOOPS J) To authorize local governments to create residential stability zones where homeowners may qualify for a partial property tax exemption.

Current Status: 11/19/2025 - Referred to Committee House Ways and Means

State Bill Page: <https://www.legislature.ohio.gov/legislation/legislation->



THE FITZGIBBON GROUP

association management – government relations – strategic planning

[summary?id=GA136-HB-598](#)

HB608 **LAW CHANGES-PROPERTY TAXES** (THOMAS D, GLASSBURN C) To modify the law governing property taxes and other local taxes.

Current Status: 11/19/2025 - Introduced

State Bill Page: <https://www.legislature.ohio.gov/legislation/legislation-summary?id=GA136-HB-608>

SB69 **INTENTION TO REFORM-STATE PUBLIC RETIREMENT SYSTEMS**
(ROMANCHUK M) To declare the General Assembly's intent to enact legislation to reform the law governing the state's public retirement systems.

Current Status: 2/12/2025 - Referred to Committee Senate Financial Institutions, Insurance and Technology

State Bill Page: <https://www.legislature.ohio.gov/legislation/legislation-summary?id=GA136-SB-69>

SB275 **ELIGIBLE HOMEOWNERS-DEFER PROPERTY TAX PAYMENT** (CRAIG H, REYNOLDS M) To allow eligible homeowners to defer the payment of a portion of their property taxes.

Current Status: 10/28/2025 - Senate Ways and Means, (First Hearing)

State Bill Page: <https://www.legislature.ohio.gov/legislation/legislation-summary?id=GA136-SB-275>

Friday, Dec. 12, 2025

ADDICTION/SUBSTANCE ABUSE

OneOhio Recovery Foundation announced Wednesday that "any form of state or local government" can now apply for \$45.8 million in second-round awards for drug prevention, treatment and recovery under its new request for proposals (RFP). Along with tax-exempt nonprofits, Grant Cycle 2 also allows private for-profits meeting OneOhio's charitable mission to apply for a half million dollars or more in funding. Foundation directors approved \$40 million for second-round awards in June and carried over another \$5.8 million in unused funds from Grant Cycle 1, which totaled \$45.5 million to 240 initiatives by the end of the first round. "This next round of grants builds on the momentum of our first cycle and represents another powerful opportunity for Ohioans to come together and create lasting change," OneOhio Executive Director Alisha Nelson said in a statement.

ARTS, SPORTS AND ENTERTAINMENT



THE FITZGIBBON GROUP

association management – government relations – strategic planning

The Ohio Department of Development recently announced more than \$17 million in state tax credits to support film and TV productions in Ohio. Issued through the Motion Picture Tax Credit program, three feature films and one television series are expected to create around 115 new jobs, more than \$59 million in eligible production expenditures, and \$215 million in total production costs. Projects receiving support through the Motion Picture Tax Credit Program are the following:

Feature Films

- Night Flirt, Delaware, \$101,385
- Reaper, Cuyahoga, \$10,843,505
- Somedays, Cuyahoga, \$6,144,562,50

TV Series

- The Land Season 1, Cuyahoga, \$859,267

FY26-27 BUDGET

November tax collections beat estimates by 2.1 percent or \$54.1 million, a difference largely attributable to the income tax, according to preliminary data from the Office of Budget and Management (OBM.) The income tax brought in nearly \$807 million, versus expectations of \$761 million, up \$45 million or 4.9 percent compared to the forecast. The sales tax missed estimates by just \$5.7 million or half a percent. Non-auto sales tax collections of \$1.1 billion were off about \$3 million or 0.3 percent, while the auto sales tax collections of about \$145 million were off by \$2.1 million or 1.5 percent. The Commercial Activity Tax (CAT) brought in \$485 million, \$17.3 million or 3.7 percent more than expected. For the fiscal year so far, total tax collections of \$12.4 billion are ahead of estimates by \$456 million or 3.8 percent. The three major tax sources are all at least \$100 million ahead of expectations for the year, with the income tax farthest ahead, by \$220 million or 5.1 percent.

CITIES

Four Ohio mayors -- Andrew Ginther of Columbus, Wade Kapszukiewicz of Toledo, Christina Muryn of Findlay and Sharetta Smith of Lima -- joined the Columbus Metropolitan Club for a panel Wednesday on "urban power" and the role of cities in growing Ohio. Moderator Stacia Naquin, news anchor at WBNS 10TV, asked how Ohio cities can work together rather than competing with each other when it comes to talent, investment and national visibility. Muryn said Ohio cities are working together on better



THE FITZGIBBON GROUP

association management – government relations – strategic planning

telling the state's story, dispelling the image of it as a flyover state. She noted it has a range of communities such as large metropolitans in Columbus, Cleveland and Cincinnati to more rural areas like Lima and Findlay while Toledo is a "great juxtaposition" of both. Muryn added they work together on policy advocacy through the Ohio Mayor's Alliance as well. Kapszukiewicz followed by saying it is a fundamental matter of "playing to your strengths" while working on weaknesses, which for Toledo means not having "a lot of space" for large projects. Their suburban partners have more available area but lack Toledo's water resources so they have created tax sharing zones and agreements with those partner communities, he continued.

EDUCATION

The Fordham Institute gathered a panel of education experts this week for a virtual discussion and debate on how states and schools should proceed with science of reading policies. The webinar highlighted some of the submissions from the most recent Fordham "wonk-a-thon," in which it annually solicits arguments on a selected topic. This year's prompt was about what should happen next at the state, district and school level for science of reading policies to fulfill their promise and ensure far more children learn to read well. Ohio is among many states recently adopting laws requiring instruction aligned to the science of reading. Gov. Mike DeWine proposed and lawmakers enacted policies to require schools to adopt curriculum aligned to those methods, to require and pay educators to receive additional training on them, to fund literacy coaching, and to audit teacher preparation program alignment, among other initiatives.

While the State Board of Education (SBOE) did not clear its entire backlog of unresolved disciplinary referrals in 2025, Supt. Paul Craft told the board on Monday that he is excited about the progress staff made in bringing the number of open investigations down during the year. The SBOE Office for Professional Conduct (OPC) reports 1,599 current cases in 'unresolved' status, down from 2,191 at the end of 2024. The number of those unresolved cases that have been open for two years or longer fell to 323 at the end of 2025, down from 386 at the end of 2024; only 93 of those cases involve active educators. Craft said he had originally hoped to lower the number of unresolved cases to zero during 2025, but as new referrals continually come to OPC, he doesn't know if the number will ever disappear completely.

ELECTIONS

An attorney for former House Speaker Larry Householder Tuesday appealed a decision by the Ohio Elections Commission to refer a complaint against Householder to the Ohio Elections Integrity Commission, the successor to the Elections Commission starting next year. The Elections Commission last month voted to push any action on complaints filed against Householder to the new commission despite criticism from Secretary of State



THE FITZGIBBON GROUP

association management – government relations – strategic planning

Frank LaRose and Attorney General Dave Yost over inaction on the case. Scott Pullins, an attorney for Householder, filed the appeal of the Elections Commission's actions to the Franklin County Court of Common Pleas, saying the commission "simply lacked authority to continue a case when an evidentiary hearing has been held and the commission faces a difficult public relations scenario." He argued that because the commission has no legal statutory authority to continue the matters against Householder, the Election Integrity Commission also has no legal authority to rehear the matters.

Secretary of State Frank LaRose Wednesday announced his office has launched a new statewide training platform that he said will offer improved, interactive instructional content designed to better educate Ohio's election officials. The Ohio Election Readiness Training Institute features a modernized menu of course material focused on the legal requirements and standard operating procedures for administering elections. Each training module provides participants with interactive presentations that have been proven to increase knowledge and retention, according to the secretary of state.

ELECTIONS 2026

U.S. Sen. Jon Husted's (R-OH) campaign announced on Wednesday that it has selected county campaign chairs in each of Ohio's 88 counties, which the campaign says will expand its grassroots network and volunteer infrastructure network. In total, the campaign announced 112 total county campaign chairs representing all 88 Ohio counties. The county campaign chairs include 23 county commissioners, 20 county GOP chairs, nine mayors, eight State Central Committee members, seven sheriffs, four business leaders, three township trustees, several current and former state legislators and four activists. Legislators include Sen. Jerry Cirino (R-Kirtland) chairing Lake County, Rep. Phil Plummer (R-Dayton) co-chairing Montgomery County, Rep. Mark Johnson (R-Chillicothe) chairing Ross County, Rep. Gary Click (R-Vickery) chairing Sandusky County, Rep. Jim Hoops (R-Napoleon) chairing Henry County and Rep. Justin Pizzulli (R-Franklin Furnace) chairing Scioto County.

This followed Husted's Monday release of a new ad campaign -- "What Drives Me." -- illustrating his journey from foster care to public service, highlighting the core values that shape his life and drive him to fight for Ohioans.

The gubernatorial campaign of Democrat Amy Acton Monday announced four additions to the senior staff: Maggie Boyle has been named digital director; Jordan Hawkins has been named political director; Adelaide Bullock will serve as communications director; and Jessie Burton joins the team as the Ohio finance director.

Democrat Zack Rossfeld announced his run for the Ohio House Thursday, seeking to succeed the term-limited Rep. Allison Russo (D-Upper Arlington), who is running for



THE FITZGIBBON GROUP

association management – government relations – strategic planning

secretary of state. A lifelong Ohioan, Zach Rossfeld and his wife Kara, a cancer surgeon, are raising their two children in Clintonville. He currently sees patients as an associate professor of medicine at Ohio State and has served at Ohio's departments of health and Medicaid. He likely will face Michaela Burris, a former legislative aide to Rep. Lauren McNally (D-Youngstown) and former Rep. Michele Lepore-Hagan (D-Youngstown), in the Democratic primary.

Democratic secretary of state candidate Bryan Hambley Thursday announced he has officially filed his petitions to appear on the ballot for the May 2026 Democratic primary, where he will likely face current state Rep. Allison Russo (D-Upper Arlington). Hambley's campaign said it turned in over 2,500 signatures and that he is the first statewide candidate from either party to file their petitions.

The following endorsements were made over the week:

- Ohio Value Voters endorsed Craig Reidel and Beth Lear for Ohio Senate.
- The Ohio House campaign of Democrat Michaela Burris announced the endorsement of the Ohio State Legislative Board of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen.
- The Ohio secretary of state campaign of Democrat Allison Russo announced the endorsement of SMART TD, the Sheet Metal, Air, Rail and Transportation Union.

EMPLOYMENT/UNEMPLOYMENT

After a delay due to the federal government shutdown, the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS) announced Thursday that Ohio's unemployment rate fell to 4.8 percent in September, compared to 5 percent in August. The state saw a decrease of 6,200 jobs over the month as well, from a revised 5,730,000 in August to 5,723,800 in September. ODJFS said the number of workers unemployed in Ohio in September was 287,000, down from 295,000 in August 2025. The number of unemployed has increased by 26,000 during the past 12 months from 261,000. The September unemployment rate for Ohio increased 0.4 percentage points from 4.4 percent in September 2024. The U.S. unemployment rate for September 2025 was 4.4 percent, up from 4.3 percent in August 2025 and up from 4.1 percent in September 2024.

ENERGY/UTILITIES

Capitol Square politicians and pundits addressed proposed changes Monday to two key electric generation queues impacting Ohio at the state, regional and national levels: the Ohio Power Siting Board (OPSB) permitting process and new rules allowing PJM



THE FITZGIBBON GROUP

association management – government relations – strategic planning

Interconnection to "fast-track" thermal power sources over intermittent renewables to ensure grid reliability. Federal legislation presented by U.S. Rep. Troy Balderson (R-Zanesville) at the Ohio Chamber of Commerce and the latter's report, "Energy Permitting in Ohio," in some sense work at cross purposes. The congressman's GRID (Guaranteeing Reliability through the Interconnection of Dispatchable) Power Act, which passed the U.S. House with bipartisan support and is seeking the same in the Senate, seeks to expedite "dispatchable" or fossil fuel power generation in regional waiting lists -- including PJM's -- to get power plants operating 24/7/365 online while the 46-page "Energy Permitting in Ohio" calls on the Ohio Legislature to rewrite the section of the Ohio Revised Code amended by 134-SB52 (Reineke-McColley) to prevent local officials from declaring a county off limits to solar or wind development.

Renewable energy advocates pushed back Tuesday on efforts by the Republican president and Congress to reset the energy conversation around fossil fuels, saying wind and solar generation are cheaper and quicker to build than natural gas plants and equally reliable when combined with battery storage. The Reliable Grid Project engaged a panel of speakers including Director Jon Gordon of Advanced Energy United, which seeks a "100 percent clean energy in America"; Program Director Nikhil Kumar of GridLab, which calls renewables a "reliable and cost-effective replacement for fossil generation"; and Campaign Manager Clara Summers of Consumers for a Better Grid, a "watchdog holding grid operators accountable to ... a clean, affordable energy future."

FEDERAL

Ohio is more purple than red, according to U.S. Rep. Greg Landsman (D-Cincinnati), and the state still represents a bellwether for where the country is politically. But Ohio is ground zero for voter suppression, Landsman told the Cleveland City Club on Friday. Landsman said politicians in Ohio have decided the state's elections for the past decade or more through, for instance, stricter voter ID laws and the purging of voter rolls. "The reason why things got really out of control here ... is because of partisan gerrymandering," said Landsman. "[Republicans] drew the map to increase their numbers." Ending partisan gerrymandering is part of the "Democracy for the People Act," one of 10 pieces of federal legislation included in Landsman's Great American Comeback Plan package to "revitalize the American Dream and unite the country around shared values of fairness, opportunity, democracy and hard work," which was the main focus of his speech to the City Club.

Former Ohio Gov. John Kasich called on President Donald Trump Thursday to use his national influence to prioritize a constitutional amendment that would require a federally balanced budget. Proposing it be called "the Trump amendment," Kasich wrote in a Substack column that an amendment would "force Congress to spend within their means" and over time, achieve a balanced budget that he said would benefit future generations of



THE FITZGIBBON GROUP

association management – government relations – strategic planning

America. The column, which detailed Kasich's fiscal rationale, was accompanied by a letter addressed to the president, encouraging him to champion the effort.

GAMING/GAMBLING

The Ohio Lottery Commission (OLC) met Wednesday and approved seven scratch-off games ranging in price from \$2 to \$20 and have an approximate on-sale date of either March 31, 2026, or May 12, 2026. Fiscal year to date, profits are \$22.9 million above the OLC's budgeted commitment and \$24.8 million ahead of last year, OLC director Michelle Gillcrist said in her update as director. For the month of November, Gillcrist said transfers from lottery profits to the education fund totaled approximately \$127.5 million, which is \$9.2 million more than the OLC's budgeted commitment for the month and half a million dollars more than November 2024.

GENERAL ASSEMBLY/STATEHOUSE

The Senate Tuesday in a short session voted along party lines 22-7 to agree to the conference committee report on marijuana and hemp bill SB56 (Huffman), sending it to Gov. Mike DeWine after the House similarly approved the measure before Thanksgiving. Sen. Steve Huffman (R-Tipp City), sponsor of the bill, outlined a number of the conference committee provisions including releasing the tax funds to local jurisdictions that have marijuana businesses, saying that should occur in short order and calling it a "pretty good Christmas" present for those jurisdictions.

The Legislature Tuesday forwarded 17 bills to Gov. Mike DeWine for his consideration. Among them are the five property tax bills: HB124 (D. Thomas-T. Hall), HB129 (D. Thomas), HB186 (Hoops-D. Thomas), HB309 (D. Thomas) and HB335 (D. Thomas). Other notable bills now on his desk include the elections bill, SB293 (Gavarone-Brenner); the bill addressing access to feminine hygiene products in correctional facilities, HB29 (Humphrey-John); legislation regulating imitation meat and egg products, HB10 (Klopfenstein-Daniels); budget correction bill HB184 (Stewart-T. Mathews); and legislation addressing vicious dogs, HB247 (K. Miller-Lawson-Rowe).

Visitors will be welcomed to holiday events at the Ohio Statehouse, the Capital Square Review and Advisory Board (CSRAB) announced, saying that on weekdays now through Dec. 19, choirs from across Ohio will perform at noon. Visitors attending the performances are allowed to bring their own lunch or purchase one from the Capitol Cafe, CSRAB added. The concerts will be streamed each day at noon on the Ohio Channel, which can be found [HERE](#). Performances will be archived [HERE](#).

GOVERNOR



THE FITZGIBBON GROUP

association management – government relations – strategic planning

Gov. Mike DeWine signed an executive order Wednesday designating organizations to receive money provided in the budget to the Governor's Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives (GOFBCI.) Under HB96 (Stewart), lawmakers authorized GOFBCI to spend about \$13 million per fiscal year from federal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) funding.

Gov. DeWine Thursday told reporters that he plans to make an announcement on his personal stance towards the death penalty next month. An execution has not been carried out under DeWine's watch, with the administration blaming the delays on difficulty securing execution drugs. With lawmakers exploring possible new ways to carry out executions, DeWine has been tight-lipped when asked about his personal stance. Asked again on Thursday, the governor told reporters "We'll be talking to you in January" about the issue. "I'm going to spend a little time at Christmas writing my statement," he said.

DeWine also said he plans to sign SB56 (Huffman), marijuana and hemp legislation that was sent to him Wednesday after the Senate agreed to a conference committee report on Tuesday.

DeWine Thursday requested the Ohio Board of Pharmacy (OBP) to issue an emergency rule to immediately designate all synthetic kratom compounds and other dangerous compounds derived from the active ingredient in kratom as illegal drugs. DeWine further asked OBP to pursue rules through the regular rulemaking process for scheduling natural kratom, or mitragynine. DeWine's request follows a recent review of federal action concerning kratom and a recent recommendation by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) that the kratom compound 7-hydroxymitragynine (7-OH) be classified as an illegal drug under the Controlled Substance Act.

GREAT LAKES

The annual assessment of harmful algal blooms (HAB) in the western Lake Erie basin from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) concluded the 2025 HAB was "mild" and less severe than in 2024. The score of this year's HAB on the severity index was 2.4, versus 4.2 in 2024. An index score below 3 is considered mild; from 3-5, moderate; 5-7, severe; and more than 7, very severe. The index measures the amount of biomass over the peak 30 days of a bloom, calculated using satellite imagery. The bloom was within NOAA's forecast for the season; the agency predicted a bloom with an index score between 2 and 4.

HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

A newly formed committee in the General Assembly, the Ibogaine Treatment Study Committee, Wednesday began its evaluation of the use of psychoactive plant derivative



THE FITZGIBBON GROUP

association management – government relations – strategic planning

ibogaine for treating individuals with substance use disorders and veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression and mild traumatic brain injuries (TBI). Created in operating budget HB96 (Stewart), it is made up of two legislators from each chamber and one representative each from the Ohio Department of Behavioral Health (DBH) and the Ohio Department of Veterans Services (ODVS). Republican legislators on the committee include Sens. Steve Huffman (Tipp City) and Susan Manchester (Lakeview) and Reps. Justin Pizzulli (Franklin Furnace) and Jodi Salvo (Bolivar). Pizzulli, who was selected chair, said the committee seeks to answer three questions:

- Should Ohio pursue further ibogaine-related legislation?
- If so, what should that legislation look like?
- If not, what are the committee's main concerns, and are there alternative paths to helping addiction treatment?

HIGHER EDUCATION

The Inter-University Council (IUC) of Ohio announced Monday that Joe Baker, currently director of the Common Sense Initiative (CSI) in the DeWine administration, will join the organization as vice president for policy and operations starting Monday, Jan. 12, 2026. Baker previously served under Sen. Kristina Roegner (R-Hudson) and former Sen. Kevin Bacon. He has a Master of Public Affairs from the University of Missouri and a B.A. in political science from Cleveland State University.

Ohio State University (OSU) is preparing to open its new University Hospital in early 2026 after construction began over five years ago. Featuring 820 private rooms and covering 1.9 million square feet, OSU called the new hospital the "largest single-facilities project in Ohio State's history" and noted how it has finished both on time and on budget. OSU said the construction process included more than 7 million hours worked by tradespeople, which peaked at 1,200 workers on site. The project was discussed during the university's Master Planning and Facilities Committee meeting early this month.

Wright State University (WSU) recently received \$579,000 from the Ohio Department of Higher Education (ODHE) through its Regionally Aligned Priorities in Delivering Skills (RAPIDS) program, \$399,000 from the Super RAPIDS Automotive and Advanced Mobility program and an additional state grant totaling 180,000. WSU said the funds received through the RAPIDS program will be used to improve education opportunities and workforce development efforts across the state. Funds received through the Super RAPIDS Automotive and Advanced Mobility program will be used to provide equipment for training in battery manufacturing and testing, vehicle electronics, secured connectivity and automotive manufacturing while the final grant will be used to provide modern



THE FITZGIBBON GROUP

association management – government relations – strategic planning

manufacturing tools including 3D printers, advanced software and cameras for industrial automation.

Eligible students in Franklin and Delaware counties will be offered free tuition beginning with first year students enrolling in fall 2026 under the Columbus College of Art and Design's (CCAD) Creative Pathway Initiative, a program to make the college more affordable, CCAD recently announced. Calling the program one of the college's most significant access initiatives in decades, CCAD said the program demonstrates its commitment to creating a "clear, affordable" pathway for young artists, designers and innovators.

HOUSING/HOMELESSNESS

Gov. Mike DeWine and the Ohio Department of Development (DOD) announced Tuesday that applications are now being accepted for the latest round of the Welcome Home Ohio program, providing \$65.6 million in total to help improve housing access around the state. That includes \$22.8 million in grants for the purchase of qualifying residential properties at foreclosure sales; \$22.8 million in grants for rehabilitation or construction of homes; and \$20 million in nonrefundable tax credits for qualifying rehabilitation and new construction once a property is sold. Grant applications are being accepted through 5 p.m. on Friday, Jan. 16, 2026 and tax credit applications are being accepted on a rolling basis until those funds are expended. New guidelines for this round were previously released by DOD.

IMMIGRATION

President Donald Trump's recent comments disparaging Somalian immigrants drew condemnation this week from Democratic legislative leadership and two Somali-Americans serving in the General Assembly. Among other comments reported in media accounts, Trump called Somalia "a hellhole" and said, "The Somalians should be out of here. They've destroyed our country. And all they do is complain, complain, complain." His comments followed reports of fraud schemes in Minnesota involving Somali residents. Rep. Ismail Mohamed (D-Columbus) said in a statement: "As a state and as a nation, we must do better. Although America wasn't always welcoming to new arrivals over the generations, we aspired to create laws and mend hearts and minds into accepting our unique founding principle and shared values. We are called upon again to call out hate and division."

JUDICIAL

In a dispute dating back two decades, Lake Erie property owners accuse the Cleveland firm assigned to represent them of colluding with the Kasich administration to withhold



THE FITZGIBBON GROUP

association management – government relations – strategic planning

hundreds of millions of settlement dollars through "secret" negotiations with its common client, the state of Ohio. Calfee, Halter & Griswold counters that over 10,000 class members allegedly harmed by its "malpractice," as plaintiffs describe it, are party to the order for newspaper and direct notice of the 2016 settlement along with the \$6.1 million payout. The Ohio Supreme Court has agreed to hear the case after the Erie County Common Pleas Court recertified the class action in 2024 and the 6th Appellate District upheld the ruling against Calfee and partners Fritz Berckmueller and James Lang last May, finding they had violated claimants' constitutional rights.

The Ohio Supreme Court wants to help local jurisdictions to create or expand school attendance mediation programs designed to reduce truancy and prevent K-12 youth from entering the child welfare system. Programs will address chronic absenteeism through collaborative, non-adversarial supports for regular attendance that engage students, families, schools and community partners led by local juvenile courts. "Funding may support the payment of mediators to mediate school attendance cases, provide administrative support for scheduling mediations, and assist with the development of referral systems and protocols between schools and juvenile courts," the Court says.

LABOR

Newsroom employees of the *Columbus Dispatch* and *Newark Advocate* announced Wednesday their intention to form a union, the Dispatch News Guild, citing issues including stagnant and inadequate pay, layoffs, lack of urgency to fill open positions and a staff "shrinking rapidly" despite a growing city. The union is part of Ohio Newspaper Guild Local 1 of the NewsGuild-CWA, a division of the Communications Workers of America (CWA). "Most journalists consider this a calling, not just a job. We try to be watchdogs against injustice and abuse of power," said Dean Narciso, a *Dispatch* business reporter. "Yet our shrinking ranks are controlled by outside corporations not always looking out for our welfare." Other unionized newsrooms in Ohio are supporting the union drive.

LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR

Speaking to reporters after a wreath-laying event Monday, Lt. Gov. Jim Tressel said he expects Gov. Mike DeWine and his staff to "sprint through the finish line" in 2026 as it marks the final year of the administration. That will include studying past actions to improve and making sure initiatives are finished, Tressel added in response to a *Hannah News* question. He detailed his role in education and workforce, saying Ohio is "blessed right now with a lot of new opportunities, a lot of changing opportunities." He also discussed his role in promoting fitness at schools, saying that reflects a goal to make Ohio the healthiest state. State agencies are also reviewing their accomplishments and areas for improvement, Tressel continued, and that includes on licensure and regulation.



THE FITZGIBBON GROUP

association management – government relations – strategic planning

Tressel, Ohio Adjutant General Matthew Woodruff and Ohio Department of Veterans Services (ODVS) Director John Harris Jr. joined local leaders in a wreath-laying ceremony Monday morning at the National Veterans Memorial and Museum (NVMM) in Columbus, one of many events being held ahead of "National Wreaths Across America Day" on Saturday, Dec. 13. During the week, over 2.5 million wreaths will have been laid at more than 5,200 cemeteries nationwide to honor fallen service members. In his remarks, Tressel described how Gov. Mike DeWine mentioned the ceremony as a "must-do" event after he took his role as lieutenant governor as it lets families know "how much we care."

MARIJUANA/HEMP

In testimony before the Joint Committee on Agency Rule Review (JCARR), Kevin Futryk, executive director of the Outdoor Advertising Association of Ohio (OAAO) opposed the Ohio Department of Commerce's Division of Cannabis Control's rule 1301:18-4-22, which would prohibit billboard advertising of marijuana businesses among other advertising bans. Futryk said his association believes the rule exceeds the statutory intent as approved by voters in Ohio. He also raised a concern that the rule constitutionally conflicts by limiting commercial speech through a ban on advertising in specific media. "The OAAO feels that limiting someone's First Amendment Rights to free commercial speech does have an adverse impact on that business, and their ability to promote their business or product," he said.

MEDICAID/MEDICAID REFORM

Under a provision of redesigned Medicaid managed care contracts, several Ohio health plans awarded grants worth \$6.9 million to more than two dozen nonprofits in Northeast and Southeast Ohio for programs meant to address health disparities and improve health outcomes. The Ohio Association of Health Plans (OAHP), a trade group for health insurers in the state, made the grant awards through the Community Reinvestment Collaborative Plan, part of the Next Generation managed care initiative undertaken by the DeWine administration. The plan focuses on building local partnerships to make investments reflecting community priorities. OAHP said this is a second year that Ohio Medicaid managed care plans worked together to identify needs and evaluate proposals, through a statewide steering community and regional advisory committees in Athens and Cuyahoga counties, where these grants were awarded. Grant awards ranged from \$20,000 to \$1.1 million.

NATIONAL CONFERENCE OF STATE LEGISLATURES (NCSL)

Artificial intelligence (AI) regulation and fiscal challenges related to federal HR1 will be major topics as state lawmakers across the U.S. convene for their 2026 sessions,



THE FITZGIBBON GROUP

association management – government relations – strategic planning

according to National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) CEO Tim Storey. Storey led a web presentation Tuesday on the general outlook, while NCSL has recently published topic-specific forecasts, which are available [HERE](#). "I'm very optimistic that they will meet, they will pass a bunch of laws, and they will adjourn," he joked at the outset. Storey said HR1, aka the One Big Beautiful Bill, is driving a general trend of caution as it relates to state budgets because of expenses related to Medicaid and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) that it will push onto the states.

NATURAL RESOURCES

Competition from the natural gas sector leading to the closure of several coal operations in the state decreased the value of Ohio's coal production by 33 percent in 2024 compared to 2023. The Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR) issued only one surface-mine expansion permit in 2024 and no underground-mine permits in the same year, according to ODNR's recently released 2024 Report on Ohio Mineral Industries. Ohio's mineral resources produced approximately \$1.7 billion in 2024, roughly the same amount as 2023.

PENSIONS

Members of the Ohio Retirement Study Council (ORSC) were told Thursday that the Ohio Police & Fire (OP&F) Pension Fund remains under the 30-year Ohio funding period due to "stellar market returns" and "positive payroll growth," according to OP&F Executive Director Mary Beth Foley. She said as part of her actuarial valuation report that the Health Care Stabilization Fund is solvent to 2042, beyond a target date of 15 years. There were little other changes, as the retirement age for police remains around 54.2 years old and it is around 55 years old for firefighters. The DROP fund remains neutral as well, Foley added.

The State Teachers Retirement System (STRS) Board of Trustees met Thursday and agreed that a sustainable benefit plan (SBP) would be a helpful framework moving forward but presented varying perspectives on how to balance STRS goals in light of the proposed SBP plan. The board was presented with a SBP framework matrix which detailed the specifics in regard to advancing STRS priority goals to establish eligibility permanency, consistent cost-of-living-adjustment (COLA) pay and a strengthened, protected pension fund. Members pinned the SBP strategy as a "roadmap" for the future and long-term sustainability of the fund. The board used the analogy of a road trip in their discussion, to illustrate the process of balancing simultaneous efforts to make eligibility permanent, COLAs consistent and reach 100 percent of funding.

PEOPLE



THE FITZGIBBON GROUP

association management – government relations – strategic planning

Sen. Jerry Cirino (R-Kirtland) announced he received the "Legislator of the Year Award" from the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC) as its summit in Texas. Cirino's office said the award recognized his achievements in winning passage of higher education reforms in SB1, which he sponsored, and in working as Senate Finance Committee chair to get Ohio to a flat income tax structure in HB96 (Stewart), the state budget bill.

The County Auditors' Association of Ohio (CCAO) announced that Wyandot County Auditor George W. "Bill" Kitzler received this year's Richard J. Makowski Award for the Outstanding County Auditor of the Year.

Rep. Desiree Tims (D-Dayton) on Tuesday announced she would be stepping down as president and CEO of Innovation Ohio and the Innovation Ohio Education Fund at the end of this year. "Leading this organization has been the privilege of a lifetime," wrote Tims in her announcement letter.

Columbus-based public affairs firm Strategic Public Partners announced the promotion of Jessica Ryan to vice president of communications, a role in which she will lead communication strategies, overseeing media relations, digital engagement and message development for clients. Ryan joined the firm in 2016. She has a master's degree in public administration from Ohio State University's Glenn College and a bachelor's degree in political science from Slippery Rock University in Pennsylvania.

The National Federation of Independent Business (NFIB) announced Thursday the hiring of Jacob Flowers as assistant state director for NFIB's Ohio office. Flowers joins NFIB after two and a half years in the Ohio House, most recently working for Rep. Meredith Craig (R-Smithville). During his tenure, Flowers worked on issues ranging from tort reform to health care. He served as clerk for the House State and Local Government Committee and also has experience working in Congress. He holds degrees in political science and economics from Ohio State University.

PUBLIC SAFETY

The Division of State Fire Marshal (SFM) announced Thursday it is now accepting applications for the 2026 "Small County Volunteer Fire Department" (SCVFD) grant, recently established in the budget to offer \$8 million in total one-time funding. Recipients can apply for up to \$50,000 each. The grants can be used for -- but are not limited to -- firefighter equipment and gear; rescue equipment and gear; and costs related to fire protection services. Applications are being accepted through Saturday, Jan. 10, 2026. Eligibility is limited to counties with a population of 70,000 or less in the 2020 census. That includes Adams, Ashland, Athens, Auglaize, Belmont, Brown, Carroll, Champaign, Clinton, Coshocton, Crawford, Darke, Defiance, Fayette, Fulton, Gallia, Guernsey,



THE FITZGIBBON GROUP

association management – government relations – strategic planning

Hardin, Harrison, Henry, Highland, Hocking, Holmes, Huron, Jackson, Jefferson, Knox, Lawrence, Logan, Madison, Marion, Meigs, Mercer, Monroe, Morgan, Morrow, Noble, Ottawa, Paulding, Perry, Pickaway, Pike, Preble, Putnam, Sandusky, Seneca, Shelby, Union, Van Wert, Vinton, Washington, Williams and Wyandot counties.

STATE GOVERNMENT

The Ohio River Commission Thursday voted unanimously to offer the commission's vacant executive director position to Monroe County Treasurer Taylor Abbott. As part of the offer, Abbott's salary will be \$110,000 a year, according to commissioners. Abbott on his LinkedIn profile says he has more than 15 years of experience in the public sector, including in government affairs, nonprofit organizations, operations management, government finance, and public affairs. He has been Monroe County treasurer since 2017.

TAXATION

The past year of study, committee deliberations, votes, vetoes and overrides are poised to bring Ohio's property tax system to a substantially different place, with new limits on how quickly bills can rise, credits to offset recent years' spikes in some places and a re-ordering of how the state will offset property owners' liability, among other changes. The price tag on these changes is substantial, and their effects in some cases will be felt gradually or unevenly. Gov. Mike DeWine has yet to sign several bills into law. Opinions vary on how much more needs to be done. "None of us in the General Assembly today created how we tax property for our political subdivisions, most of it going to the schools. So what we did, we had to work within that parameter as best we could. I'm really pleased with the last four or five bills that we did, because we do address some of the major concerns," said Sen. Sandra O'Brien (R-Rome), chair of the Senate Local Government Committee, which considered the five bills passing before Thanksgiving.

TRANSPORTATION/INFRASTRUCTURE

The Public Utilities Commission of Ohio (PUCO) approved over \$2 million in rail crossing upgrades Wednesday for three Ohio counties. All safety improvements must be completed by Thursday, Sept. 3, 2026.

The Ohio Turnpike and Infrastructure Commission announced that toll rates for the turnpike will be increasing by 2.7 percent on Jan. 1. The toll rate for E-ZPass customers with passenger vehicles (Class 1) will increase to \$0.073 (or 7.3 cents) per mile in 2026 from \$0.071 (or 7.1 cents) per mile in 2025; the cash/credit card toll rate will increase to \$0.106 (or 10.6 cents) per mile in 2026 from \$0.104 (or 10.4 cents) per mile in 2025. The toll rate for E-ZPass customers with commercial vehicles (Class 5) will increase to



THE FITZGIBBON GROUP

association management – government relations – strategic planning

\$0.226 (or 22.6 cents) per mile in 2026, up from \$0.220 (or 22 cents) per mile in 2025; and the cash/credit card toll rate will increase to 0.284 (or 28.4 cents) per mile in 2026, up from \$0.276 (or 27.6 cents) per mile in 2025.

actionTRACK - Hannah News Service, Inc.

The Fitzgibbon Group
88 E. Broad Street, Suite 1450
Columbus, Ohio 43215
www.fitzgibbongroup.com