

# Ohio General Assembly Tackles Lame Duck Session and Selects New Leaders for the Next

NOVEMBER 26, 2024

Authors: [Robert A. Zimmerman](#), [Cheryl Burchard](#), [Holly F. Gross](#), [Rachel Winder](#)

With election day behind us, Ohio legislators have gone full throttle into a lame duck session, focusing their efforts on wrapping up the 135th Ohio General Assembly before the end of 2024. With less than five voting sessions scheduled for the remainder of the year, legislators are all pushing to pass their agendas before time expires.

The items below underscore the variety of topics the General Assembly takes up during the lame duck session. Many may not be of interest beyond the sponsoring legislator and those with a particular stake in the subject matter. But it is still worthwhile to keep an eye on Statehouse activities and the priorities of Ohio leaders during the busy period between the November election and when the new General Assembly is seated in January. We at Benesch do just that, and we will report back on the key developments once the lame duck session concludes.

Several issues at the forefront of debate in the legislature include:

- The regulation of intoxicating hemp, which could include an all-out ban on the broadly defined products. Debate is expected to continue into December and may also expand to include changes to the adult use statute.
- Senate Bill 95 would allow for the operation of remote dispensing pharmacies through a telepharmacy system and allow for the mailing of drugs to a patient. Having passed the Senate earlier this year, it is currently pending in the House Health Provider Services Committee.
- Conducting the state's review of occupational licensing boards set to expire under the state's six-year cycle. Each board has the legal burden of demonstrating their continued existence using a robust list of criteria, including comparison to other states, and that it provides the least restrictive form of regulation that adequately protects a meaningful defined public interest. The Ohio Division of Real Estate is one of many boards under this year's review.
- Ohio's quadrennial evaluation of various state agencies to determine their usefulness, performance, and effectiveness by the Sunset Review Committee.
- A potential allocation of \$10 million in state assistance to farmers grappling with the aftereffects of a historic drought. House Bill 683 will have to be approved by the House before it moves on to the Senate.
- Senate Bill 226 would prohibit foreign adversaries from acquiring real property within 25 miles of a military base, camp or airport and critical infrastructure such as dams, water treatment facilities and natural gas pipelines in an effort to protect Ohio's military operations and infrastructure

facilities that are at-risk from foreign adversaries. It is currently pending in the House Economic & Workforce Development Committee.

- House Bill 93 would create a plan to make tenants, not landlords, responsible for unpaid rental utility bills. It is currently pending in the Senate Local Government Committee.
- The proposed General Assembly initiated constitutional amendment, Senate Joint Resolution 4, to renew the popular public works bond program to help local governments fund infrastructure needs. Changes could possibly extend the bonding authority by 10 years and increase the annual cap on the state debt from \$200 million to \$250 million. This measure passed in the Senate and will have to be approved by the House.
- A resolution to amend the state Constitution to grow the legislature from 99 representatives and 33 senators to 153 representatives and 51 senators beginning Jan. 1, 2033. If passed, it would put the matter before voters at the Nov. 4, 2025, election.
- A possible pay raise for county elected officials, which would replace an annual 1.75% pay bump enacted in 2018 with a 6% annual increase over the next four years.
- House Bill 257 would expand virtual meetings for certain boards, commissions and the like except for extraordinary occurrences like nonroutine expenditures or hiring decisions. It is still pending in the Senate Government Oversight Committee and changes are expected.
- Further updates to election laws, including curbs on ballot drop boxes.

Additionally, Governor DeWine and the Ohio General Assembly continue to prioritize measures aimed at protecting and supporting Ohio's children and families:

- The enactment of Braden's Law to prohibit sexual extortion and aggravated sexual extortion and to allow family of certain victims of aggravated sexual extortion to receive compensation from the crime victims' compensation fund. After passing the House in June, House Bill 531 is currently undergoing hearings in the Senate.
- House Bill 279 is the result of Governor DeWine's School Bus Safety Working Group formed to enhance the safety of school bus travel in Ohio. It would authorize the installation of school bus camera equipment, implement increased fines for illegally passing a stopped school bus, and create a new fund to support the installation of enhanced safety features in publicly owned and operated school buses.
- House Bill 5, passed by the House and awaiting a vote in the Senate, makes changes to Ohio's adoption law, including one to simplify the adoption of a foreign-born child.
- House Bill 7, known as the Strong Foundations Act, includes funding increases for maternal and infant health. It has passed the House of Representatives and is pending in Senate Finance Committee.
- House Bill 583, to implement accountability measures for group homes for foster children, including regulatory oversight and the creation of a Study Committee to Evaluate the Placement of Delinquent Children in Residential Facilities.

- Restrictions on transgender use of bathrooms in schools, from elementary through college. This measure has passed and awaiting Governor DeWine's signature.

In addition to the legislative activity happening at the Statehouse, each legislative caucus has selected its leadership team for the 136<sup>th</sup> General Assembly.

The **Ohio Senate Majority Caucus** selected Rob McColley (R-Napoleon) as its next president. Other leaders include President Pro Tempore: Bill Reineke (R-Tiffin), Majority Floor Leader: Theresa Gavarone (R-Bowling Green), and Majority Whip: George Lang (R-West Chester).

The **Ohio Senate Minority Caucus** selected once again Nickie Antonio (D-Lakewood) as its Minority Leader. Other leadership positions include Assistant Minority Leader: Hearcel Craig (D-Columbus), Minority Whip: Kent Smith (D-Euclid), and Assistant Minority Whip: Beth Liston (D-Dublin).

The **Ohio House Majority Caucus** selected Matt Huffman (R-Lima) as its next Speaker. They also picked Speaker Pro Tempore: Gayle Manning (R-North Ridgeville), Assistant Speaker Pro Tempore: Phil Plummer (R-Dayton), Majority Floor Leader: Marilyn John (R-Shelby), Assistant Majority Floor Leader: Adam Bird (R-New Richmond), Majority Whips: Riordan McClain (R-Upper Sandusky), Steve Demetriou (R-Chagrin Falls), Nick Santucci (R-Warren), and Josh Williams (R-Oregon). Adding a slate of four whips was proposed by Sen. Huffman in recognition of the House's large majority, also noting that Ohio's traditional six-member structure was small in comparison to other states.

The **Ohio House Minority Caucus** kept Allison Russo (D-Upper Arlington) as the Minority Leader, as well as Assistant Minority Leader: Dontavius Jarrells (D-Columbus) Minority Whip: Dani Isaacsohn (D-Cincinnati), and Assistant Minority Whip: Michele Grim (D-Toledo).

The official vote for all caucus leadership positions will be held early in the 136<sup>th</sup> Ohio General Assembly next January.

The Benesch Government Relations team will be working tirelessly over the next few weeks to ensure the needs of our clients are met during the lame duck session. As always, if you have any questions or concerns about these or any other issues, please do not hesitate to reach out.

**For more information, contact a member of Benesch's Government Relations Practice Group.**

**Robert A. Zimmerman at [rzimmerman@beneschlaw.com](mailto:rzimmerman@beneschlaw.com) or 216.363.4437.**

**Rachel Winder at [rwinder@beneschlaw.com](mailto:rwinder@beneschlaw.com) or 614.223.9316.**

**Holly F. Gross at [hgross@beneschlaw.com](mailto:hgross@beneschlaw.com) or 614.223.9392.**

**Cheryl Burchard at [cburchard@beneschlaw.com](mailto:cburchard@beneschlaw.com) or 614.223.9315.**

**N. Victor Goodman at [nvgoodman@beneschlaw.com](mailto:nvgoodman@beneschlaw.com) or 614.223.9343.**