|  |
| --- |
|  |
| **GOVERNMENTAL POLICY GROUP, INC.**17 SOUTH HIGH STREET – SUITE 245COLUMBUS, OHIO 43215-3413PHONE: 614-461-9335FAX: 614-461-9336**Ohio Speech & Hearing Governmental Affairs Coalition**Legislative Activities Report**September 2015** |

As with all new legislative sessions, the 131st General Assembly began in earnest with the introduction of the governor’s two-year operating budget. This past February Governor Kasich unveiled his multi-billion dollar spending plan (HB 64), which included numerous overhauls to Ohio’s tax structure, health care system, and education funding. After the bill’s introduction the House and Senate made numerous changes before putting their finishing touches on the legislation. The governor then issued 44 line-item vetoes, nearly twice as many than in the previous budget. During the signing ceremony, Governor Kasich said the $71 billion spending plan strikes a balance between financial prudence, tax relief and providing for those in need, particularly those facing addiction and mental illness. Shortly after passing the budget legislators broke for summer recess and are not expected to return until mid-September.

Over the summer, the Ohio Ballot Board approved the three ballot issues that will come before voters during the 2015 November election. Issue 1, is a proposed amendment aimed at ending the partisan process for drawing Ohio House and Senate Districts, and replace it with a more bipartisan process. The amendment would create a seven-member Redistricting Commission to draw state legislature districts for ten years. In order for the new district lines to take effect, the commission would have to pass their proposal with bipartisan support from the seven members. Without a bipartisan vote the new district lines could still pass, but they would only go into effect for four years before having to be redrawn. Issue 1 stems from the passage of HJR 12, which was designed by Reps. Matt Huffman, a Lima Republican, and Vernon Sykes, an Akron Democrat. Issue 1 has the support of both political parties.

Also appearing on the ballot in November are two issues addressing the legalization of marijuana. Issue 2, would prohibit placing language in the Ohio Constitution to create economic monopolies or create a special commercial interest. This measure was developed by the Ohio legislature to block ResponsibleOhio’s efforts to legalize marijuana in Ohio. On the other side, if approved by voters, Issue 3 would make Ohio the fifth state to legalize marijuana for recreational use. ResponsibleOhio, the group backing the measure had to submit 305,591 valid signatures of Ohio voters to meet the threshold to place it on the ballot. The amendment would allow those over the age of 21 to buy, possess, and grow marijuana in limited amounts. Commercial marijuana, could only be grown on 10 farms owned by investors. According to Secretary of State Jon Husted, if both measures are passed, Issue 2 would trump the marijuana amendment because it would take effect immediately.

Another story attracting attention around the Statehouse has been the conviction of State Representative Steve Kraus (R-Sandusky) in a case involving the theft of antiques from an elderly woman’s home. An Ottawa County jury found Mr. Kraus guilty of theft, a fifth degree felony. Mr. Kraus, who joined the House in January, was charged with the crime shortly after his unexpected win last fall over former Representative Chris Redfern, who subsequently resigned as chairman of the Ohio Democratic Party. Kraus, an auctioneer, was accused of entering an unoccupied house that was for sale in 2014 and removing several antiques. Mr. Kraus argues that he was given permission by the realtor to remove the items. State law requires immediate removal of a public official convicted of a felony. Therefore, the 89th House District seat is now vacant and will remain vacant until an individual is appointed to fill the position.

In similar news, longtime legislator Rep. Ron Gerberry (D-Austintown) resigned from the House this month after allegations became public that the 27-year legislator had overpaid vendors from his campaign fund and subsequently received refunds from the venders. Mr. Gerberry pleaded guilty to a misdemeanor count of unlawful compensation. Gerberry also agreed not to seek office for seven years and to cooperate with investigators in other corruption cases. The House Democratic Caucus has announced the creation of a five-member panel to select an appointee to fulfill the unexpired term. John Boccieri, a former state representative and congressman, was already expected to seek the seat in next year’s election and is a likely favorite for the appointment.

As mentioned above, the Ohio General Assembly is currently in its summer recess. Legislators are not scheduled to return to Columbus until mid-September. The Senate recently released its schedule for the remainder of the year. The chamber has a total of 17 session dates in September, October, November and December, with two if-needed dates set for mid-December. The House calls for just 10 session days during the remainder of the year.

While the legislators are on recess, GAC has been working on preparing for their return and engaging on two pieces of concerning legislation. The first, HB 184, seeks to license music therapists. The concerns that we have with this legislation involve activities that music therapists seek to do that fall within the SLP and AuD scopes of practice. GAC has joined together with several other interested parties (see separate letter) to outline our collective concerns to the bill’s sponsors. We have requested a meeting with the sponsors and the proponents to see if there is any common ground to move forward.

Similarly, GAC is working with many other interested parties on SB 194 over the summer. This bill seeks to allow for “alternative health services” which again, often fall within our existing scopes of practice. Along with the other groups that we are working with, we will be sending a letter to the members of the Senate outlining our concerns on the bill. (See separate letter.)

Outside of the legislative arena, GAC has been busy this summer engaging with state agencies on items of importance to our members. For example, GAC has met with various groups to discuss next steps on our SLP shortfall solutions. In addition, we been working with the Ohio Board of Speech-Language Pathology and Audiology to determine next steps in light of ODE’s delay on workload guidance.

Also outside of the legislature, GAC has been meeting with the Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities Agency (OOD) to discuss the agency’s surprise changes to its reimbursement standards for hearing aids provided by the Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation. As revised and announced on August 10th, OOD switched from a fee for service model of reimbursement to a model that follows Ohio Medicaid pricing. We have outlined the many concerns that we have with this policy change and are continuing to work with OOD and possibly the legislature on a solution.

We have been tracking the following legislation that has been introduced in the 131st General Assembly:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **HB64** | **OPERATING BUDGET** (SMITH R) To make operating appropriations for the biennium beginning July 1, 2015, and ending June 30, 2017, and to provide authorization and conditions for the operation of state programs. |
|   | ***Current Status:*** | 6/30/2015 - **SIGNED BY GOVERNOR**; Eff. 7/1/15 |
|   |
| **HB89** | **MEDICAID SCHOOL PROGRAM** (DEVITIS A) Regarding the Medicaid School Program. |
|   | ***Current Status:*** | 5/13/2015 - **SUBSTITUTE BILL ACCEPTED**, House Health and Aging, (Fourth Hearing) |
|   |
| **HB98** | **CHILDHOOD APRAXIA OF SPEECH AWARENESS DAY** (BROWN T) To designate the fourteenth day of May as "Childhood Apraxia of Speech Awareness Day." |
|   | ***Current Status:*** | 4/22/2015 - Referred to Committee Senate Health and Human Services |
|   |
| **HB109** | **STATE HEALTH BENEFIT EXCHANGE** (STINZIANO M, ANTONIO N) To create the Ohio Health Benefit Exchange. |
|   | ***Current Status:*** | 4/28/2015 - House Insurance, (First Hearing) |
|   |
| **HB157** | **HEALTH INSURANCE-MEDICAID** (BUTLER, JR. J, JOHNSON T) To revise the laws governing health insurance coverage, medical malpractice claims, the Medicaid program, health care provider discipline, and required and permitted health care provider disclosures; and to create the Nonstandard Multiple Employer Welfare Arrangement Program and to terminate that program after five years. |
|   | ***Current Status:*** | 5/5/2015 - House Insurance, (Second Hearing) |
|   |
| **HB184** | **MUSIC THERAPY LICENSING** (DOVILLA M, ANTONIO N) To require the licensure of music therapists and to require the State Medical Board to regulate the licensure and practice of music therapists. |
|   | ***Current Status:*** | 6/16/2015 - House Commerce and Labor, (Second Hearing) |
|   |
| **HB213** | **OCCUPATIONAL LICENSE RENEWAL** (BRINKMAN T) To make occupational licenses subject to annual renewal become biennial licenses and to permit a licensee to take continuing education courses online. |
|   | ***Current Status:*** | 6/23/2015 - House Commerce and Labor, (First Hearing) |
|   |
| **SB3** | **HIGH PERFORMING SCHOOL DISTRICT EXEMPTION** (HITE C, FABER K) To exempt high-performing school districts from certain laws. |
|   | ***Current Status:*** | 5/19/2015 - House Education, (Second Hearing) |
|   |
| **SB17** | **MEDICAID ELIGIBILITY** (CAFARO C) To require the Medicaid program to cover the eligibility expansion group authorized by the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act and to make an appropriation. |
|   | ***Current Status:*** | 2/11/2015 - Senate Medicaid, (First Hearing) |
|   |
| **SB32** | **MEDICAID COVERAGE-TELEMEDICINE** (TAVARES C) Regarding insurance and Medicaid coverage of telemedicine services. |
|   | ***Current Status:*** | 3/25/2015 - Senate Medicaid, (First Hearing) |
|   |
| **SB72** | **MEDICAID-PROMPT PAYMENT** (TAVARES C) To specify that the Ohio prompt payment law applies to payment of claims by Medicaid managed care organizations. |
|   | ***Current Status:*** | 3/25/2015 - Senate Medicaid, (First Hearing) |
|   |
| **SB86** | **NOT-FOR-PROFIT QUARTER AUCTIONS** (GARDNER R) To permit charitable organizations to conduct not-for-profit quarter auctions. |
|   | ***Current Status:*** | 4/14/2015 - Senate Finance, (First Hearing) |
|   |
| **SB90** | **HEALTH CARE WORKER-IDENTIFICATION** (TAVARES C) To require that a health care professional wear identification when providing care or treatment in the presence of a patient. |
|   | ***Current Status:*** | 3/4/2015 - Referred to Committee Senate Health and Human Services |
|   |
| **SB94** | **MEDICAID SCHOOL PROGRAM** (BACON K, LEHNER P) Regarding the Medicaid School Program. |
|   | ***Current Status:*** | 3/25/2015 - Senate Medicaid, (First Hearing) |
|   |
| **SB98** | **HEARING AID-COVERAGE** (BROWN E) To require health insurers to offer coverage for hearing aids. |
|   | ***Current Status:*** | 3/24/2015 - Senate Insurance, (First Hearing) |
|   |
| **SB194** | **COMPLEMENTARY-ALTERNATIVE HEALTH SERVICES** (JORDAN K) Regarding the provision of complementary or alternative health services. |
|   | ***Current Status:*** | 7/8/2015 - Introduced |
|   |