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Legislature Sends Major COVID Relief Package To Governor

A \$6 billion spending bill is headed for [Gov. Mike DeWine's](#) desk after early morning action that capped the 134th General Assembly.

The wide-reaching proposal ([HB 45](#)), which legislative leaders have already negotiated with the governor's team, largely draws on federal relief dollars but includes \$1.1 billion in General Revenue funds to draw down additional Medicaid funds.

It was one of several major policy issues the two chambers juggled in their effort to close out the lame duck period and was largely left for last on the agenda, clearing the Senate 29-0 shortly before 6 a.m. and receiving a 71-10 House concurrence vote at about 6:10 a.m.

That delay was attributed by Senate [President Matt Huffman](#) (R-Lima) to the omnibus language's "unusual" size, which complicated the drafting process, as well as last-minute negotiations on a pair of floor amendments aimed at securing House support for a separate election bill ([HB 458](#)). (See *separate story*)

Those changes enable drop boxes to be open outside business hours and extends the timeframe for vetting provisional ballots from the fifth to eighth day after the election.

Among other changes was language diverting nursing home funding through the Office of Budget and management rather than the Department of Medicaid while revising the distribution formula to ensure those funds go out in the next six months.

In the underlying bill, funding allocations include: \$1.750 billion for schools, \$740 million for the state's Budget Stabilization Fund, \$499 million in federal child care spending and hundreds of millions more

toward nursing homes, water quality and other needs.

As they hashed out the spending package over recent months, President Huffman, [Speaker Bob Cupp](#) (R-Lima) and Gov. DeWine had made clear their intent was to continue targeting funding toward one-time expenses – a guideline the plan follows, Sen. Huffman said.

"Most of the spending, as we say, is one-time money," the Senate president said. "We're not creating programs that will then need to be funded in next year's budget and in future budgets."

[Sen. Matt Dolan](#) (R-Chagrin Falls) said the plan accounts for \$1.4 billion of the \$1.9 billion in American Rescue Plan Act funding the state had remaining to allocate by 2024.

The spending plan emerged late Tuesday in a Senate committee, in a 492-page [omnibus amendment](#) that drew broad support from both chambers. Separate amendments added \$100 million for rural hospitals and \$25 million for food banks. (See [Gongwer Ohio Report, December 13, 2022](#))

Among other provisions, the spending plan provides:

- \$350 million for nursing homes to provide lump sum payments to nursing facilities for workforce relief payments.
- \$250 million for grants through the Department of Development's water and sewer quality program.
- \$161 million in emergency rental assistance under the Department of Development.
- \$150 million for lead abatement, including no less than \$20 million for Development's lead poisoning prevention projects and the remaining amount to support workforce development for lead contractors.
- \$90 million for crisis care infrastructure expansion, with funding to be allocated regionally based on regional psychiatric hospital catchment areas.
- \$85 million to grow behavioral health disciplines at state colleges and universities and other initiatives to recruit and retrain those workers.
- \$75 million for Honda project infrastructure including local water and sewer upgrades.
- \$40 million for provider relief through direct care staff compensation at residential care facilities.

The measure prompted concern from the Coalition on Homelessness and Housing in Ohio, however, which cautioned that one included change to revise the method to assess the value of affordable housing developments would increase property tax liability for senior and workforce housing developments.

The language, the group said, resembles a provision previously included but nixed in the last budget ([HB 110](#)) following stakeholder concerns.

"The demand on Ohio's rental market has increased at unprecedented levels over the past two years, exacerbating what was already a severe shortage of senior and workforce housing in Ohio," Ohio Housing Council President Matt Rule said. "This unvetted amendment will raise costs on workforce and senior housing developments and result in even fewer struggling families and seniors having a safe, decent home that they can afford."

Also on its way to the desk of the governor is a measure ([HB 66](#)) to require reporting on property tax exemptions.

That bill too picked up a federal spending provision Tuesday night in the [Senate Ways & Means](#) Committee – language that doles out \$30 million to the state's minor league sports teams. (See [Gongwer Ohio Report, December 13, 2022](#))

The bill landed two floor amendments from [Sen. Louis Blessing](#) (R-Colerain Twp.), one of which removes duplicative language passed in a previous bill. The other corrects an error in Tuesday's round of amendments which mistakenly added the as-introduced version of a bill ([HB 197](#)) authorizing an income tax credit for an employer's expenses to train a commercial vehicle operator instead of the most recent version.

The legislation also changes added there also gut the Tax Expenditure Review Committee and provide the Cleveland Guardians and Dayton Dragons \$35 million for capital expenditures.

The plan cleared the Senate unanimously, although [Sen. Matt Dolan](#) (R-Chagrin Falls), whose family owns the Guardians, recused himself. The House later concurred.

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