



PRESS STATEMENT
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Lame duck lottery: Slew of dangerous bills loom as General Assembly winds down

As Ohio's General Assembly closes out its work for the two-year session, there is plenty to keep an eye on—and be concerned about. Beyond those issues that get a lot of public attention, others that affect the quality of life for Ohioans – as well as their democratic rights and their pocketbooks – can slip through in a lame-duck session. Here is a list of just some of the bills that could be approved in this legislature's waning days – or inserted into a “Christmas tree” bill that originally had little or nothing to do with many of the provisions added on to it:

- House Bill 390 would narrow the current notice period on evictions. The bill didn't move, but the policy was dropped into an unrelated bill, Senate Bill 273, only to be stripped out after facing significant opposition. [Advocates for Ohio's Future](#) and the [Akron Beacon Journal](#), among others, call it out as bad policy. But like the others listed here, it could pop up again before it's all over.
- House Bill 625 would outlaw localities from levying plastic bag taxes, like one [proposed](#) in Cuyahoga County. As the Columbus Dispatch [pointed out](#), this is just one more attempt by lawmakers to get in the way of localities solving local problems.
- Another bill, Senate Bill 293, would require state agencies to reduce the Ohio Administrative Code – rules that implement state law – by 30 percent. This [ham-handed attempt at deregulation](#) is directed at eliminating rules that use words such as “shall,” “must” and “require,” as if these are somehow bad words. This outlandish notion has no place in state law.
- Through House Bill 182, legislators also could [dismantle important safeguards](#) covering debt settlement companies, which have a national reputation for preying on the financially vulnerable.
- Another bill, Senate Bill 250, could limit the right to protest at a long list of “critical infrastructure facilities” such as pipelines and dams. As The Plain Dealer [said](#), “SB 250 aims to make Ohioans put up, and shut up, in the face of environmental challenges. The state Senate's GOP caucus might not know it, but that's not how democracy works.”
- House Bill 119, approved by the Senate Wednesday, takes [oversight of eligibility](#) in Medicaid and food aid out of the hands of the Governor, making it harder to change rules to meet needs in changing economic times. Out-of-state interest groups promote this bill, but problems in Ohio's programs are with the private businesses in the service delivery – like pharmacy benefit managers – not with enrollees and eligibility, which this bill focuses on.
- House Bill 494, which also won Senate approval Wednesday, would [shield corporate franchise owners](#) from bearing joint responsibility with their franchisees, even when owners discourage or prevent franchisees from complying with minimum wage, overtime, health and safety and other laws designed to protect workers. Governor Kasich should be urged to veto both HB 119 and HB 494, which are likely to be enacted since both houses have passed versions of them that just have to be reconciled.

And let's not forget about tax policy. One Christmas tree bill, House Bill 51, initially carried an amendment to give a [tax break](#) to special retirement plans of top managers so they wouldn't be covered by municipal income taxes. Thankfully, the amendment got pulled at the 11th hour. This tax break was improved from [last year](#) - it wasn't retroactive, for example - but it would be another blow to local governments that have seen over \$1 billion a year taken away because of state policies. It may pop up again before this lame duck dies. Another bill, House Bill 469, would create a new uncapped tax credit for big mixed-use development projects with [unknown costs](#) and inadequate safeguards.

Amidst these various threats, there are some opportunities for legislation that will help Ohioans thrive. House Bill 750 would add \$5 million to the badly underfunded state grant for low-income college students, the [Ohio College Opportunity Grant](#). Senate Bill 225 would provide state funds for [needed expansion](#) of broadband. And in a positive step, the General Assembly just approved House Bill 158. Though it [should have been expanded](#) to cover others, it will allow spouses to receive unemployment benefits if a military transfer forces them to quit their job.

Of course, this is just a partial listing of the bills before the legislature, and if past is prologue, there will be other surprises before the session ends. Another extreme measure that would undercut Ohioan's right to bring constitutional amendments to the ballot, [House Joint Resolution 19](#), appears to be dead for this year. But many of these measures will be back again next year if they don't make it into law this time around.

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Policy Matters Ohio is a nonprofit, nonpartisan state policy research institute with offices in Cleveland and Columbus.