

Overview of the State's Budget Process and AOHC's Involvement

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The State of Ohio funds its agencies, statewide offices, as well as a host of other public and private entities through its biennial budget. The Ohio Constitution provides that the budget must be introduced in February or March of odd numbered years, and passed by July 1st of the same year. The purpose of this article is to provide a high-level overview of this process and outline how AOHC is able to participate in it.

Budgeting 101: The Process

Each odd numbered year, the biennial budget is introduced in the Ohio House of Representatives as a legislative document, drafted by the Ohio Legislative Service Commission, and introduced by the majority party (regardless of the party of the Governor who is presenting the budget). Depending on whether the Governor was just elected to their first term or returning for their second, the budget is introduced in February or March.

While the budget is not publicly unveiled until this time, much work has gone into the budget prior to its introduction. In fact, state agencies requesting appropriations generally begin formulating their budget as early as the summer of the year before. It is at that time that the Office of Budget and Management (OBM) puts out general guidelines to the agencies for formulating their budget proposals. Upon completion of this draft process, OBM reviews agency budgets and makes final edits and changes in the fall/early winter prior to the budget's public introduction. This early stage is as crucial to the process as the legislative one (see below for AOHC's involvement in this stage).

Once the budget has been introduced in the House, legislative deliberations begin. The bill is generally referred to House Subcommittees where agencies present budget testimony and the public is given a chance to weigh in as well. Once this process is completed, the subcommittees make recommendations to the full House Finance Committee where a substitute bill is introduced. Additional testimony takes place before a final version is drafted and a committee vote takes place. From there the bill moves to the House Floor for consideration.

Upon House passage, the process begins anew in the Senate. Historically, the Senate Finance Committee has done all the work in the Senate, although in the last General Assembly, they created subcommittees for the first time in recent memory. Once the Senate Finance Committee hears witness testimony, a sub bill is drafted and further testimony is taken. A committee vote is followed by a Senate floor vote.

By this time there are hundreds of differences between the House version and the Senate version of the bill. These differences are reconciled in a joint House-Senate conference committee comprised of six members (three from each chamber with the majority party in each chamber having two members). Generally, this committee will work for two to three weeks before agreeing on final changes. Little public testimony is taken with the exception of OBM who provides updated economic information. A final

conference report is then agreed to by the conference committee and both chambers, before being sent to the Governor for signature. Unlike most bills, the Governor has, and often exercises, line item veto authority. Appropriation items take effect immediately upon the Governor's signature, while other statutory changes are typically effective 90 days after the bill is signed.

Budgeting 201: Advocacy

AOHC has always been actively involved in lobbying for and against budget provisions that affect public health. To give you an idea of how impactful the budget is to us, AOHC tracked and lobbied over 30 provisions in the last biennial budget.

It is not uncommon for agencies to solicit ideas from their partners for inclusion in the Governor's version of the budget. AOHC views this as a critical and important opportunity. It is ALWAYS easier to defend a provision that has been included in the Governor's version of the budget than to add one through the legislative process at a later date. Because the Governor can exercise line item veto authority, it is imperative that state agencies be made aware of AOHC's budget priorities well in advance of legislative deliberations. This affords AOHC the ability to have positive changes included in the budget early on, while also working with state agencies on controversial items in order to avoid a line item veto at the end of the process.

Upon introduction of the budget, AOHC's public affairs committee reviews the budget in great detail. Negative provisions are identified for opposition, positive provisions are identified for support, and opportunities are sought for other provisions AOHC would like to see included. These recommendations are approved by AOHC's board. With this information in hand, AOHC's legislative lobbying begins.

AOHC has a robust advocacy campaign that incorporates lobbying of individual members of key subcommittee, the House and Senate Finance committees and legislative leadership. Our grassroots network is activated through alerts by AOHC leadership, and our members engage in personal contacts with legislators, emails and letters. Public testimony is provided at the appropriate times in the process. Finally, AOHC works closely with other associations and groups through coalition efforts to influence items of mutual interest.

Conclusion

While this article is by no means exhaustive of the entire process, I hope it sheds light into the basics and how AOHC chooses to engage in the budget deliberations. I would encourage any member with an interest to become more involved through our Public Affairs Committee, which meets on a monthly basis.