OHIO COMMON GROUND RESEARCH CENTER

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Ohio Common Ground Legislative Tracker

Issue Index #4: Government Responsiveness & Accountability

Enacted and Pending Government-Responsiveness and Accountability Legislation in the 136th Ohio General Assembly

Status current through July 17, 2026

Prepared by the Ohio Common Ground Research Center

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Contents

Executive Summary

No bill addressing government responsiveness and accountability was enacted in the 136th Ohio General Assembly as of July 17, 2026. This report discusses 23 bills and resolutions, organized into 22 legislative proposals (Senate Bill 350 and House Bill 683 are companion measures addressing the same statutory change and are discussed together). Two of those 22 proposals — House Bill 565 (grand jury privacy) and House Bill 413 (Ohio Checkbook expansion) — had passed the House and were pending in the Senate as of the status date. The remaining 20 proposals had not passed either chamber, most without a recorded committee hearing.

This report organizes that legislative record into five categories: oversight of quasi-public and hybrid entities; public records, open meetings, and constituent access; ethics, campaign finance, and anti-corruption; government performance, efficiency, and fiscal oversight; and citizen influence tools between elections. Legislation addressing redistricting and district maps, and legislation addressing election administration and integrity (voter identification, ballot-return deadlines, primary-election structure, and similar measures), is outside this report's scope by OCG editorial decision and is not tracked here.

This report classifies each bill by its principal legal mechanism — what the bill's operative text actually requires, prohibits, or creates — separately from the bill's title or sponsor framing. In several instances, that classification identifies a difference between what a bill's name suggests and what its text does. The most significant: House Bill 779 and Senate Bill 397, both titled the “JobsOhio Transparency Act,” do not make JobsOhio subject to Ohio's Public Records Law or Open Meetings Law. A third bill, Senate Bill 420 — which does not carry “Transparency” in its title — is the one that would do that. This distinction, along with other title/mechanism gaps this report identifies, is documented in the relevant bill sections and summarized together in Interpretive Considerations.

This report does not evaluate whether any bill tracked here would, if enacted, be sufficient or appropriate to address the concerns Ohioans report about government responsiveness. It documents what each bill's text does, how far each has advanced, and where a bill's title or public framing diverges from its operative provisions.

Key Findings

- No bill in this report's scope was enacted as of July 17, 2026. HB 565 and HB 413 are the furthest advanced, both having passed the House and remaining pending in the Senate.
- Three separate bills (HB 779, SB 397, SB 420) address oversight of JobsOhio. Only SB 420 would subject JobsOhio to Ohio's Public Records Law and Open Meetings Law directly; HB 779 and SB 397, both titled the "JobsOhio Transparency Act," instead create a biennial state audit, sponsorship/media-partner disclosure requirements, and annual legislative testimony by JobsOhio's chief investment officer.
- HB 413, HB 609, and SB 420 would create or expand enforceable public-access rights, while HB 565 and HB 481 would narrow public access — HB 565 by creating a new public-records exemption for grand jurors' names, HB 481 by addressing whether a public body may discuss an employee's or official's performance in closed executive session. HB 619 is a separate case: it extends an existing virtual-meeting framework to boards of elections while preserving that framework's public-access safeguards, rather than changing the standard itself.
- HB 250, titled the "Ohio Anti-Corruption Act," is limited in mechanism to campaign-finance disclosure (expanding who qualifies as a "political contributing entity" and requiring ownership disclosure) and restricting foreign-national involvement in ballot-issue campaigns; it does not address the Ohio Ethics Commission, financial disclosure by public officials, or lobbying regulation. It has not had a committee hearing since being referred in May 2025.
- HB 938, titled the "No Free Advertising for Politicians Act," is limited in mechanism to physical signage purchased with public funds (road signs, billboards, building exteriors, vehicle exteriors); it does not reach mailers, broadcast advertising, or social media.
- SJR 2 would lower the signature threshold for statewide initiated statutes from 6% to 3% of electors and eliminate the current pre-ballot legislative review step, while also adding a new requirement: a supermajority vote of the General Assembly to amend or repeal an initiated statute for two years after voter approval.
- Two commissions with overlapping but distinct mandates were proposed: HB 454 (State Government Efficiency Commission, focused on eliminating duplication within state departments) and HB 912 (State and Municipal Government Commission, focused on state-municipal coordination and home-rule impact). Neither commission has independent authority to implement its own recommendations.
- HB 834, described in sponsor and press coverage as requiring agencies to "improve" government service delivery, creates a coordination and reporting structure (a designated "lead" official, annual reporting, encouragement of best practices) without service-level standards, targets, or penalties in the bill text.
- HB 299 would require statewide initiative-petition circulators to hold a Secretary of State license; the Ohio Legislative Service Commission's own bill analysis flags that a licensing requirement on petition circulation may draw First Amendment "exacting scrutiny" if challenged in court.
- HB 887 and HB 932 respond to two distinct 2026 controversies — public-official use of prediction-market platforms and publicized child-care-fraud allegations, respectively — but each bill's operative text is written more broadly than its news hook: HB 887 covers a wide list of state offices and agencies, and HB 932's new fraud offense applies to any state funding or grant program, not solely child care.

Why This Report Matters

Ohioans' interactions with government accountability mechanisms span multiple, often disconnected levels: what records a resident can obtain from a school board or a state-created economic-development entity; whether a public body must hear from residents before voting; what disclosure requirements apply to campaign spending and lobbying; and what tools citizens retain to act directly through the ballot when they believe elected officials are unresponsive between elections. No single bill or agency governs all of these mechanisms, and the General Assembly's authority over them varies — some (such as the Ohio Public Records Act and Open Meetings Law) are wholly within state statutory control, while others (such as JobsOhio's structure) involve a hybrid public-private entity with its own negotiated statutory carve-outs.

This report documents legislative action within the Ohio General Assembly's authority on this subject during the 136th General Assembly. It does not assess whether Ohio's existing accountability framework is adequate, nor does it attribute any specific instance of unresponsiveness to a particular official, party, or institution. Consistent with the OCG Research Center's editorial approach, it applies the same descriptive standard to bills regardless of sponsor party, and reports title/mechanism differences and public-access effects wherever this report's research identifies them, without regard to which side of the aisle introduced the bill.

Data and Methodology

Bill descriptions and statuses are drawn from the Ohio General Assembly's official legislative tracking system (legislature.ohio.gov), Ohio Legislative Service Commission (LSC) bill analyses and fiscal notes, sponsor and cosponsor testimony, proponent, opponent, and interested-party testimony submitted to committee, and LSC keyword and committee-docket searches conducted directly against the 136th General Assembly's status report. Introduction and referral dates for several recently introduced bills were confirmed against LegiScan's bill-history record, cross-checked against the Ohio General Assembly's official journal and, where available, sponsor press releases and contemporaneous news coverage.

A bill is included in this report when its operative provisions have a direct, reasonably identifiable effect on one of this report's five tracked categories, and the bill was introduced in the 136th General Assembly (January 2025 through the status date). This report's scope excludes legislation addressing redistricting or district-map boundaries and legislation addressing election administration or integrity, both by OCG editorial scope decision rather than by absence of legislative activity in those areas; readers interested in redistricting should note OCG's companion white paper, “The Uncontested Majority” (RL-2026-001), which addresses primary competitiveness.

Each bill is classified by its principal legal mechanism, drawn from its operative text and the LSC bill analysis, independent of the bill's title or sponsor-provided framing. Where a bill's title or public description differs materially from its operative mechanism, this report states both and cites the relevant Revised Code section.

This report uses the phrase “no hearing identified”, defined in Definitions, rather than an unqualified statement that no hearing occurred. Audit-frequency, criminal-penalty, and similar technical claims are drawn from the operative bill text or the LSC bill analysis rather than from press coverage or sponsor press releases where the two sources could plausibly differ; this report resolved one such apparent conflict during preparation of this version (SB 420's audit frequency) directly against the LSC bill analysis rather than against conflicting press accounts, and cites the analysis at the relevant point in the text.

Status date: July 17, 2026.

Definitions

The following terms are used throughout this report with the specific meanings given here.

- **Principal legal mechanism.** What a bill's operative statutory text actually requires, prohibits, authorizes, or creates, as distinct from its title, name, or the framing offered in sponsor statements or press coverage.
- **Classification.** This report's short label for each bill's principal mechanism (for example, “Disclosure requirement,” “New public-records exemption,” “Advisory commission”), used to compare bills within and across categories.
- **Quasi-public entity.** An entity, such as JobsOhio, that is created by or operates under state statutory authority and performs functions historically associated with government, but that is organized as a nonprofit corporation and is not, by default, subject to the same public-records, open-meetings, or audit requirements as a state agency.
- **Public records exemption.** A statutory carve-out under R.C. 149.43 that removes a specific category of government-held record from the general presumption that public records are open to inspection and copying.
- **Executive session.** A portion of a public body's meeting closed to the public, permitted only for a list of statutorily enumerated purposes under Ohio's Open Meetings Law (R.C. 121.22).
- **Political contributing entity (PCE).** A category of campaign-finance filer under Ohio law distinct from an individual, campaign committee, political party, legislative campaign fund, or political action committee (PAC); PCE regulation is a principal mechanism of HB 250 in this report.
- **Title/framing-mechanism difference.** This report identifies a title/framing-mechanism difference when a bill's title or dominant public description would reasonably lead a reader to expect a materially broader, narrower, or different legal effect than the bill's operative text actually creates. This classification describes a textual gap; it does not imply, and this report does not assess, any intent behind that gap.
- **No hearing identified.** This report uses this phrase, rather than an unqualified statement that no hearing occurred, to mean that no committee hearing was found on a bill's official committee-activity page, the relevant committee's posted schedule, or posted committee testimony as of the status date. A hearing may have occurred without being reflected in these sources by the status date.
- **Interested-party testimony.** Testimony submitted to an Ohio legislative committee that is neither in support of (“proponent”) nor opposition to (“opponent”) a bill, typically raising specific concerns, requesting amendments, or providing technical context.

Legislative Record: Oversight of Quasi-Public and Hybrid Entities

Three bills in the 136th General Assembly address oversight of JobsOhio, the state-created nonprofit corporation that administers Ohio's primary economic-development program and is funded through a long-term lease of the state's liquor franchise. None had been enacted as of the status date.

Bill	Principal Legal Mechanism	Sponsor(s)	Classification	Status (through 7/17/26)
HB 779	Repeals JobsOhio's current audit-committee process; requires the Auditor of State to audit JobsOhio biennially, including average employee salary, total employee count, and number of employees earning 4x median Ohio income; requires annual public disclosure of corporate sponsorships and media partnerships; conditions any future liquor-franchise-lease extension on a public hearing, an independent fair-market-value appraisal, and payment of that value; requires JobsOhio's chief investment officer to testify annually before House and Senate Finance committees. If JobsOhio fails to comply with the bill's audit or disclosure requirements, as determined by a two-thirds vote of the Controlling Board, the Controlling Board may withhold release or transfer of funds to JobsOhio until a subsequent two-thirds vote finds JobsOhio back in compliance.	Reps. Rader (D), Pizzulli (R)	Audit, disclosure & funding-compliance requirements	Introduced 3/24/26; 1st hearing (House General Government) 6/2/26; no vote
SB 397	Substantively near-identical to HB 779: repeals current audit process, requires biennial Auditor of State audit with the same salary/headcount disclosures, requires sponsorship/media-partner disclosure, conditions franchise-extension on public hearing and fair-market-value payment, requires CIO annual testimony.	Sen. DeMora (D)	Audit & disclosure requirements	Introduced 3/23/26; referred Senate Gov't Oversight & Reform 3/25/26; no hearing
SB 420	Declares JobsOhio a “public office” for purposes of the Ohio Public Records Law, making its records subject to inspection and copying under R.C. 149.43. Repeals JobsOhio's exclusion from the Open Meetings Law, subjecting it to the same open-meeting requirements as other public bodies (with the same executive-session exceptions available to any public body). Requires the Auditor of State to conduct an annual (not biennial) performance audit. Does not require CIO testimony or condition any franchise extension.	Sen. O'Brien (D)	Public-records & open-meetings extension	Introduced 4/9/26; referred Senate Finance 4/15/26; no hearing

HB 779 and SB 397 — the "JobsOhio Transparency Act" — and what it does not do

HB 779 and SB 397 both carry the title "JobsOhio Transparency Act." Read only by title, a reader could reasonably expect these bills to make JobsOhio's records open to public inspection, in the way "transparency" legislation does for other entities in this report (compare HB 413, below). They do not. Their operative mechanism is a periodic audit (biennial, by the Auditor of State, with specific salary and headcount disclosures), a standalone sponsorship/media-partner disclosure requirement, conditions on any future liquor-franchise-lease extension, and annual legislative testimony by JobsOhio's chief investment officer. None of these provisions amend R.C. 149.43 (the Public Records Law) or JobsOhio's exclusion from Open Meetings Law. A member of the public seeking a specific JobsOhio record — an individual grant agreement, an internal communication, a contract — would gain no new legal right of access under either bill.

HB 779 does, however, carry a real enforcement mechanism for the requirements it does create: if JobsOhio fails to comply with the bill's audit or disclosure requirements, the Controlling Board may vote, by a two-thirds majority, to withhold the release or transfer of funds to JobsOhio until a subsequent two-thirds vote finds JobsOhio back in compliance. This report notes this mechanism because it distinguishes HB 779's audit and disclosure requirements from a purely aspirational reporting obligation — noncompliance carries a defined financial consequence — even though that consequence does not extend to public-records or open-meetings access.

Sponsor testimony for HB 779 (Rep. Rader, June 2, 2026) states that JobsOhio paid $1.4 billion upfront for a 25-year lease of the state's liquor franchise, for a term set to run through 2038, and that only 14 years had elapsed, per the testimony, when a 15-year extension to 2053 was sought and approved by the Ohio Controlling Board on a split vote. The testimony also cites the Legislative Service Commission's estimate that this extension was worth approximately $16 billion. Independent of the testimony, LSC's own background materials on JobsOhio date the liquor-franchise transaction to a Franchise and Transfer Agreement executed January 4, 2013 — not to JobsOhio's 2011 creation — which this report notes because the two dates are sometimes conflated. This report reports the $16 billion figure and the 14-years-elapsed calculation as the sponsor's stated rationale for the bill's mechanism; it has not independently reproduced either figure from LSC's underlying valuation work.

SB 420 — public records and open meetings, without the "transparency" title

SB 420 is the one bill among the three that would extend Ohio's Public Records Law and Open Meetings Law to JobsOhio directly. It does not carry "transparency" in its title. Under current law, JobsOhio is exempt from the Public Records Law; a separate contractual mechanism between JobsOhio and the Department of Development designates a defined set of records (tax returns, certain travel-expense reports, compensation totals, audit reports, and Board meeting minutes where a quorum is physically present) that must be made available on public-records-like terms. SB 420 would replace that narrower, contract-based mechanism with direct statutory coverage under R.C. 149.43, and would repeal JobsOhio's current statutory exclusion from the definition of "departments, offices, and institutions" subject to the Open Meetings Law. Because SB 420 was introduced later (April 2026) than HB 779 and SB 397 (March 2026) and assigned to the Senate Finance Committee rather than Government Oversight and Reform, it has not yet had a hearing as of the status date.

Legislative Record: Public Records, Open Meetings & Constituent Access

This category includes bills that would expand public access to government records, meetings, and decision-making processes, and bills that would narrow it. Both directions are represented in the current legislative record.

Bill	Principal Legal Mechanism	Sponsor(s)	Classification	Status (through 7/17/26)
HB 565	Amends R.C. 149.43 to exempt a grand juror's name and home address, and a grand jury foreperson's signature, from public-records disclosure.	Reps. Jarrells (D), Odioso (R)	New public-records exemption	Introduced 11/4/25; passed House 5/20/26; in Senate Judiciary since 6/2/26; no hearing identified
HB 413	Splits the existing voluntary “Ohio Checkbook” database into separate state and local databases; requires counties, cities, villages, townships, public libraries, park districts, school districts, regional water/sewer districts, regional transit authorities, and the five state retirement systems to participate (participation is currently voluntary; roughly 900 subdivisions currently do so); adds revenue reporting alongside existing expenditure reporting; appropriates $5 million to the Treasurer for implementation.	Reps. Young (R), Peterson (R)	Mandatory public-data disclosure	Introduced 8/13/25; passed House 91–5 on 5/20/26; in Senate, no hearing yet
HB 609	Amends the Open Meetings Law to require a public body composed of elected officials to allow at least one period of public commentary and testimony before taking formal action on an item. Permits reasonable, content-neutral restrictions on length; bars a body from requiring registration or prior approval to speak, but allows it to require a speaker's name and contact information.	Reps. Craig (R), D. Thomas (R)	Mandatory public-comment period	Introduced 11/25/25; in House General Government; multiple proponent submissions on file, no vote
HB 619	Creates a narrow exception to the rule barring compensated public bodies from meeting virtually: permits a board of elections to hold a meeting by video conference, provided the meeting otherwise satisfies all of the state's existing standard requirements for virtual public meetings under R.C. 121.221 (72-hour public notice, public ability to see and hear the proceedings, a means to receive public testimony and comment, and roll-call votes).	Rep. Lorenz (R)	Narrow eligibility expansion (no standard change)	Introduced 12/3/25; referred to committee; LSC bill analysis published 3/11/26; no hearing yet
HB 481	Amends the Open Meetings Law to state that a public body may hold a closed executive session to	Reps. Fowler Arthur (R),	Executive-session authorization/clarification	Introduced 9/29/25; sponsor

Bill	Principal Legal Mechanism	Sponsor(s)	Classification	Status (through 7/17/26)
	discuss the performance of a public employee or official. Does not disturb the existing separate rule that a public body may not use executive session to discipline an elected official for conduct related to official duties, or to remove an elected official from office — those matters remain required to be conducted in open session. Whether this provision expands the matters a public body may close to the public, or instead codifies an authority sponsors contend already exists under current law, depends on a reading of the current statutory baseline that this report has not resolved.	Piccolantonio (D)		testimony on file; no committee vote

HB 565 and the "53rd exemption" figure

Sponsor testimony for HB 565 (Rep. Odioso) describes the bill as creating what would be the 53rd item expressly enumerated in the definition of "public record" under R.C. 149.43(A)(1) — the specific statutory list of records excluded from that definition. This report repeats that figure as the sponsor's own characterization of a specific statutory list, not as a claim about the total number of ways Ohio law permits withholding a record: public-records exemptions also arise elsewhere in the Revised Code, in federal law, and in case law, and this report has not attempted to count those separately.

HB 413 — the mandate, and who is raising concerns about it

HB 413 passed the House by a wide, bipartisan 91–5 margin. The bill's testimony record contains a genuine range of positions: proponents include the Buckeye Institute, Americans for Prosperity–Ohio, the Ohio News Media Association, and Treasurer Robert Sprague's office. Four associations representing the entities that would be required to participate — the County Commissioners Association of Ohio, the Ohio Municipal League, the Ohio Library Council, and the Ohio Mayors Alliance — submitted interested-party testimony describing general support for transparency alongside specific implementation concerns, rather than outright opposition. The Ohio Township Association submitted formal opponent testimony, arguing that the bill is an unfunded mandate that falls disproportionately on Ohio's 1,308 townships, many of which — per the Association's testimony — operate with only their four elected officials and a single accounting-software terminal, with no dedicated IT staff.

HB 619 as a contrast case

Unlike several other bills in this category, HB 619's operative text does not create a new, lower standard for virtual public meetings; it makes an existing public body (boards of elections) eligible for a virtual-meeting framework that already applies to other public bodies. The bill's LSC analysis confirms that all of the standard safeguards — advance notice, public accessibility, a mechanism for public comment, and roll-call voting — continue to apply. This report notes the contrast because several of the bills discussed above and below illustrate cases where a bill's mechanism is narrower, or points in a different direction, than its title or framing suggests; HB 619 is a case where the bill's scope matches its stated purpose.

Legislative Record: Ethics, Campaign Finance & Anti-Corruption

This category covers public-official ethics rules, campaign-finance disclosure, anti-fraud enforcement involving public funds, whistleblower incentive programs, and the investigative authority of state oversight institutions.

Bill	Principal Legal Mechanism	Sponsor(s)	Classification	Status (through 7/17/26)
HB 250	Expands and clarifies the definition of “political contributing entity” (PCE) to reach a broader set of entities that make political contributions or expenditures; requires PCEs organized as corporations or unincorporated businesses to disclose leadership and ownership information in periodic filings; requires a PCE to disclose the source of all donations if it uses its general fund for political expenditures; restricts foreign-national involvement in Ohio ballot-issue campaigns. Titled the “Ohio Anti-Corruption Act.”	Reps. Sweeney (D), Isaacsohn (D)	Campaign-finance disclosure	Introduced 4/29/25; referred to House General Government 5/7/25; no hearing recorded as of 7/17/26
HB 887	Amends Ohio ethics law (R.C. Chapter 102) to bar a defined list of public officials and employees — statewide executive officers, legislators and legislative staff, judicial officers, employees of casino-control/lottery/racing commissions, the Inspector General's office, the Ethics Commission, and employees of Commerce, Insurance, and Administrative Services — from holding prediction-market accounts, trading event contracts, or disclosing confidential information to assist another person's trading. Excludes licensed sports gaming. Titled the “Ohio Public Employee Event-Wagering Ethics Act.”	Rep. Brennan (D); cosponsors Synenberg, McNally, White (E.)	Conduct prohibition (ethics law)	Introduced 5/12/26; referred House General Government 5/20/26; no hearing identified
HB 932	Enacts a new second-degree-felony offense of “public assistance fraud” for knowingly making a false or misleading statement to obtain reimbursement or funding from any state funding or grant program; mandatory 5-year minimum prison term and 5-year post-release control if the amount is $50,000 or more; bars a business owned by a convicted person from future state funding.	Rep. Williams (R)	New criminal offense	Introduced 5/19/26; referred House General Government 5/20/26; no hearing yet
HB 960	Amends the Auditor of State's existing fraud-reporting hotline statute and adds a new section authorizing the Attorney	Rep. Hiner (R)	Discretionary whistleblower award program	Introduced 6/8/26; not yet referred to committee

Bill	Principal Legal Mechanism	Sponsor(s)	Classification	Status (through 7/17/26)
	General to grant a monetary award to a person who reports fraud, if the report materially contributes to a fraud action and results in an actual, collected fraud recovery, and the reporter did not participate in the fraud. The Attorney General determines eligibility and award amount at its discretion, in consultation with the Auditor and the harmed public office.			
HB 409	Bars members of the General Assembly from knowingly accepting a free or discounted ticket to an NFL, NHL, MLB, MLS, or NBA game, unless offered as part of a promotion generally available to the public on the same terms. Authorizes the Joint Legislative Ethics Committee to fine a violating member up to $1,000.	Reps. Brennan (D), Brownlee (D)	Gift-ban / conduct prohibition	Introduced 8/7/25; referred House General Government 9/15/25; no hearing identified
HB 938	Bars the use of public funds to display a sitting public official's personal name or likeness on a road sign, billboard, or other outdoor marker, or on a sign, sticker, or decal on the exterior of a building, fixture, or vehicle, unless otherwise specifically authorized by law. Does not apply where only an official's title or position, not their name or likeness, is displayed. Requires removal or modification of existing noncompliant displays. Titled the "No Free Advertising for Politicians Act."	Reps. Hiner (R), Fischer (R)	Restriction on public-funded signage (narrow)	Introduced 5/19/26; not yet referred to committee
SB 350 / HB 683	Adds the Inspector General and a deputy Inspector General to Ohio's statutory definition of "peace officer" while engaged in official duties and after completing a certified peace-officer training program. As a peace officer, the IG's office gains the authority to apply directly to a court for search warrants and subpoenas for electronic records (email, cloud storage, messaging data) without routing requests through a local law-enforcement agency.	Sen. Patton (R) [SB 350]; Reps. Odioso (R), Dovilla (R) [HB 683]	Law-enforcement authority expansion	SB 350 introduced 2/2/26, referred Senate General Government 2/11/26; HB 683 referred House Public Safety 2/18/26; neither has passed a chamber

HB 250 — a broad name, a narrow mechanism

HB 250's title, the "Ohio Anti-Corruption Act," suggests a comprehensive ethics package. Its operative text is narrower: it is, in substance, a campaign-finance-disclosure bill focused on political contributing entities and a restriction on foreign-national involvement in ballot-issue campaigns. It does not amend the Ohio Ethics Commission's authority, the state's financial-disclosure-statement requirements for public officials, or lobbyist registration and disclosure law — the mechanisms most directly associated with anti-corruption enforcement in Ohio's existing statutory framework. HB 250 has been in committee without a recorded hearing since May 2025, more than a year as of this report's status date.

HB 887 and HB 932 — broader than their news hooks

Both bills were introduced in response to specific, publicized 2026 controversies — HB 887 following national reporting on politicians' use of prediction-market platforms such as Kalshi and Polymarket, and HB 932 amid publicized allegations of child-care-provider fraud in Ohio and neighboring states. Each bill's operative text, however, is written more broadly than the controversy that prompted it. HB 887's list of covered officials and employees extends well beyond the General Assembly to the judiciary, gaming and racing regulators, and several executive agencies. HB 932's new felony offense applies to false statements made to obtain funding from any state funding or grant program, not solely child-care programs. This report notes the gap between hook and text descriptively; it does not suggest either bill's broader scope is inappropriate.

SB 350 / HB 683 — context for the sponsors' stated rationale

Sponsors of both bills cite the Inspector General's investigations into Ohio's Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA) program as the case for expanding the office's authority: the state paid out approximately $7.6 billion in PUA benefits between 2020 and 2021, more than $1 billion of which was later determined to be fraudulent, and the Inspector General's office opened 28 related investigations between 2021 and 2025. Sen. Patton's press remarks indicate the same authority expansion had been under consideration for inclusion in the FY2026–27 state operating budget (HB 96) but was not included in the final enacted version. This report presents this context as sponsors' stated rationale; it has not independently verified the $7.6 billion or $1 billion PUA-specific figures against a primary Department of Job and Family Services or federal source.

A related but distinct figure comes from the Ohio Auditor of State's own October 28, 2021 press release on a broader public-interest audit of the state's pandemic-era unemployment system as a whole (not limited to PUA): that audit identified $475 million paid to fraudulent claims and a further $3.3 billion in overpayments, for a combined $3.8 billion, across the regular unemployment insurance program together with PUA, Federal Pandemic Unemployment Compensation, and the Lost Wage Supplemental Payment program during the fiscal year ended June 2021. This report cites the Auditor's figure separately from the sponsors' PUA-specific figures because the two describe different programs, different time periods, and different fraud/overpayment definitions; readers should not treat them as duplicative or additive.

Legislative Record: Government Performance, Efficiency & Fiscal Oversight

This category covers bills creating new oversight bodies, coordination roles, or procedural requirements intended to identify inefficiency, duplication, or service-delivery shortfalls in state and local government, along with one bill making several discrete changes to the Auditor of State's statutory duties.

Bill	Principal Legal Mechanism	Sponsor(s)	Classification	Status (through 7/17/26)
HB 454	Creates a 7-member State Government Efficiency Commission (3 House-appointed, 3 Senate-appointed, plus the OBM Director or designee) charged with identifying duplicative or	Reps. Hiner (R), T. Mathews (R)	Advisory commission (no implementation authority)	Introduced 9/15/25; sponsor testimony delivered to House General

Bill	Principal Legal Mechanism	Sponsor(s)	Classification	Status (through 7/17/26)
	overlapping functions across state departments, recommending consolidation, estimating potential cost savings, and reporting annually to the General Assembly by March 1. The Commission has no independent authority to implement its own recommendations; state departments are required only to "cooperate" and provide assistance.			Government 11/4/25; no vote
HB 912	Creates a 13-member State and Municipal Government Commission (Department of Development Director as chair; 4 gubernatorial mayoral appointees; 2 members each appointed by the Senate President, Senate Minority Leader, Speaker, and House Minority Leader, each pairing splits between a legislator and a mayor/municipal or county executive) to analyze proposed state and municipal policy for its effect on municipal home-rule authority, promote state-municipal coordination, and submit a biennial report. A reintroduction of similar legislation from the 135th General Assembly. No independent implementation or enforcement authority.	Rep. M. Miller (R)	Advisory commission (no implementation authority)	Introduced 5/13/26; not yet referred to committee
HB 202	Creates a Joint Legislative Information Technology Oversight Committee (3 House + 3 Senate members, bipartisan) whose primary task is to review a new required annual OBM report on each state agency's IT spending; the Committee may require the OBM Director and State Chief Information Officer to appear and testify, but has no authority to approve, reject, or condition agency IT spending. Separately authorizes state procurement of services and supplies through online marketplaces and restricts certain software-contract provisions.	Rep. T. Hall (R)	Oversight committee (review/testimony power only)	Referred House Technology & Innovation Committee 4/2/25; no hearing recorded
HB 248	Makes several discrete changes to Auditor of State law: eases the small-village-dissolution pathway (removes the 2-square-mile acreage cap, raises the population cap from 150 to 500); removes a "satisfactory assurance" procedural step for public offices	Rep. D. Thomas (R)	Multiple procedural changes (mixed direction)	Introduced by 5/12/25; proponent and interested-party (Ohio Municipal League) testimony on file; no vote

Bill	Principal Legal Mechanism	Sponsor(s)	Classification	Status (through 7/17/26)
	contracting for electronic data processing (records remain subject to audit either way); repeals the requirement that the Auditor audit every STEM school annually (STEM schools remain subject to audit as public offices generally); repeals a treasurer's-office investment-notation requirement; adds a budgetary-comparison-information requirement to annual financial reports; repeals the Auditor's mandatory annual fiduciary-training program; transfers custody of historical public land records from the Auditor to the Ohio History Connection.			
HB 834	Creates a "Government Service Delivery Lead" position within the Department of Administrative Services and requires each state agency (JobsOhio, the General Assembly, legislative agencies, and the Governor's office excluded) to designate an employee responsible for improving service delivery, collecting data, and reporting to the Lead. Duties described in the bill are coordination, data collection, feedback solicitation, and reporting; the bill text does not set service-level standards, targets, or penalties for noncompliance. Cosponsored across party lines.	Reps. D. Thomas (R), Fischer (R), Glassburn (D)	Coordination & reporting structure (no enforceable standard)	Introduced 4/27/26; awaited committee assignment as of late April 2026

Two commissions, distinct scopes

HB 454 and HB 912 both create multi-member commissions intended to address government inefficiency, and both lack independent authority to implement their own findings — each is limited to identifying problems and issuing periodic recommendations to the General Assembly or to state and municipal leaders. Their scopes differ: HB 454 looks inward, at duplication among state departments and agencies; HB 912 looks outward, at the interaction between state policy and municipal home-rule authority, with a membership structure that deliberately pairs legislators with sitting mayors and county executives across party lines.

HB 834 — a "requirement" without a standard

Press coverage and sponsor statements describe HB 834 as requiring state agencies to "improve" service delivery and "mandate" that service-delivery factors receive primary attention. The bill's operative text creates a coordination role and reporting obligation — a designated point person, data collection, an annual report to legislative leadership — but does not itself define a service-level standard, set a numeric target, or attach a penalty for an agency that fails to improve. Whether the bill functions as a meaningful accountability mechanism or a reporting exercise depends substantially on how the designated "Government Service Delivery Lead" role is implemented and resourced after enactment, which cannot be assessed from the bill's text alone.

Legislative Record: Citizen Influence Tools Between Elections

This category covers bills affecting Ohioans' ability to act directly through the ballot-initiative process, independent of legislative action.

Bill	Principal Legal Mechanism	Sponsor(s)	Classification	Status (through 7/17/26)
HB 299	Requires a circulator of a statewide initiative petition to hold a license issued by the Secretary of State (applicant must be an Ohio resident, at least 18, and renew every two years); an unlicensed circulator's collected signatures are not considered properly verified and are discarded. Applies only to initiative petitions, not referendum petitions. Completed license applications are not public records; a registry of current and former license holders is maintained for boards of elections to verify petitions.	Reps. Lorenz (R), Deeter (R); 5 Republican cosponsors	Licensing requirement on petition circulation	Introduced 5/20/25; referred House General Government; no hearing recorded
SJR 2	Proposed Ohio constitutional amendment. Under current law, a statewide initiated-statute petition requires signatures equal to 3% of electors to submit the proposal to the General Assembly for a four-month review-and-enactment opportunity; if the General Assembly does not enact the proposal, a second, supplementary petition requiring an additional 3% of electors (6% combined) is required to place the measure on the ballot. SJR 2 would replace that two-stage process with a single petition requiring signatures equal to 3% of electors, placing the measure directly on the ballot without the legislative-review step. The existing requirement that signatures come from at least 1.5% of electors in at least 44 of Ohio's 88 counties is not changed by the resolution. Separately, SJR 2 would add a new requirement: a supermajority vote of the General Assembly to amend or repeal a voter-approved initiated statute during the two years following its approval. The resolution specifies the November 3, 2026 general election as the intended submission date if adopted.	Sen. Blessing (R)	Constitutional amendment (mixed direction)	Pending in Senate committee as of 7/17/26; had not been adopted by either chamber or filed with the Secretary of State, and had not qualified for the ballot

HB 299 and the First Amendment question raised in its own bill analysis

HB 299's sponsors describe the bill as addressing paid, out-of-state circulators collecting signatures for Ohio ballot measures. Independent of that framing, the Ohio Legislative Service Commission's own bill analysis notes that the U.S. Supreme Court has recognized petition circulation as a form of core political speech protected by the First Amendment, subject to “exacting scrutiny” for any law that burdens it, and states that a court reviewing a licensing requirement of this kind might examine whether it constitutes an impermissible restraint on that protected speech. This report notes the LSC's own analysis on this point because it is a legal consideration identified by a nonpartisan legislative body, not an outside advocacy claim; this report does not predict how a court would rule.

SJR 2 — two changes, not one

SJR 2 is consistently described, including in its own sponsor testimony, as making Ohio's citizen-initiative process easier to use: a lower total signature burden and one petition instead of two. That description is accurate as far as it goes, but it describes only one of the resolution's two structural changes. The second — a two-year supermajority requirement to amend or repeal any statute voters approve by initiative — does not make the process easier; it makes the result of a successful initiative harder for the General Assembly to subsequently modify. A reader encountering only the “easier to use” framing would not learn of the second change from that description alone. Both are stated in this report's bill table and should be read together.

As of the status date, SJR 2 remained pending in Senate committee. It had not been adopted by the three-fifths vote of each chamber required to place a constitutional amendment before voters, and had not been filed with the Secretary of State. It had not, therefore, qualified for the November 3, 2026 ballot as of July 17, 2026, notwithstanding the November 3, 2026 date specified in the resolution's own text as the intended submission date if adopted.

Interpretive Considerations

The record above supports more than one reasonable reading, and Ohio Common Ground does not adopt one. The dimensions below are offered so a reader may form an independent judgment.

- **Title/mechanism gaps, summarized.** This report identifies five bills whose title or dominant public framing differs materially from their operative legal mechanism: HB 779 and SB 397 (“JobsOhio Transparency Act” titles; mechanism is audit and disclosure, not public-records or open-meetings coverage — that mechanism belongs to SB 420, which does not carry “transparency” in its title); HB 250 (“Anti-Corruption Act” title; mechanism is limited to campaign-finance disclosure and a foreign-national restriction); HB 938 (“No Free Advertising for Politicians Act” title; mechanism reaches only physical signage purchased with public funds); HB 834 (described as a service-delivery “requirement”; mechanism is a coordination and reporting structure without an enforceable standard); and SJR 2 (framed as “easier” citizen initiative access; mechanism also includes a new two-year supermajority requirement to modify a voter-approved initiated statute).
- **Direction of change is not uniform.** Within the public records and open meetings category alone, this report identifies bills that would expand access (HB 413, HB 609, HB 619, SB 420) and bills that would narrow it (HB 565, HB 481). A reader assessing this category's overall direction should weigh each bill individually rather than assume the category moves in a single direction.
- **Advisory bodies without implementation authority.** HB 454, HB 912, and HB 202 each create a commission or committee with review, recommendation, or testimony-request authority, but none has independent authority to implement its own findings, approve or reject agency spending, or compel a specific outcome. Their practical effect, if enacted, would depend substantially on how the General Assembly and executive-branch agencies respond to their reports and recommendations after the fact — a dependency this report cannot assess from bill text alone.
- **Sponsor rationale presented, not adopted.** Several bill sections above report a sponsor's stated rationale for a bill — for example, Rep. Rader's cited $16 billion LSC valuation of the JobsOhio liquor-franchise extension, or the PUA fraud figures cited by SB 350/HB 683's sponsors. These

figures are attributed to their sources and have not been independently reproduced or verified against primary state or federal data by this report.

- **Legislative stage varies widely.** Two bills (HB 565, HB 413) have passed a chamber; most others remain in initial committee referral, several without a recorded hearing more than a year after introduction (HB 250, HB 202, HB 409). A bill's inclusion in this report reflects that it meets the report's substantive inclusion criteria, not that it is likely to be enacted.
- **Scope boundary: election administration and redistricting.** This report's exclusion of election-integrity and redistricting legislation is an OCG editorial scope decision, not an indication that no relevant legislative activity exists in those areas. Readers interested in primary competitiveness should consult OCG's companion white paper, "The Uncontested Majority" (RL-2026-001).

Limitations and What This Report Does Not Claim

- **Selection, not exhaustive census.** This report covers bills meeting its stated inclusion criteria across five government-accountability categories. It is not a complete census of every bill touching government administration introduced in the 136th General Assembly.
- **Descriptive, not evaluative.** This report does not rate, grade, or conclude whether any bill, if enacted, would be sufficient to address the concerns Ohioans report about government responsiveness. Its title/mechanism comparisons state what a bill's text does relative to its title or framing; they are not judgments about whether that gap is appropriate, intentional, or improper.
- **Sponsor and press context not independently verified.** Figures and characterizations attributed to sponsor testimony, press releases, or news coverage (for example, the JobsOhio franchise-extension valuation, PUA fraud figures, or Ohio Checkbook current-participation counts) are reported with attribution; this report has not independently reproduced them from primary government data.
- **Testimony record is uneven and incomplete for recently introduced bills.** Several bills in this report (including HB 912, HB 960, HB 938, and HB 834) had not yet had a committee hearing as of the status date, and accordingly have no testimony record to draw on beyond sponsor statements and press coverage. This reflects each bill's stage in the process, not a gap in this report's research.
- **Committee-docket and keyword searches may not be exhaustive.** This report's bill list was assembled through committee-docket review and keyword searches ("public records," "open meetings," "ethics commission," "lobbying," "inspector general," "whistleblower," "campaign finance," "political action committee," "procurement," "state audit," "performance audit," and related terms) against the 136th General Assembly's status report. A relevant bill using different terminology may exist and not have been identified; readers aware of one are invited to bring it to OCG's attention for a future revision.
- **Legal analysis is not legal advice.** This report's note on HB 299's First Amendment considerations restates the Ohio Legislative Service Commission's own nonpartisan bill analysis; it is not a legal opinion or prediction of any court's ruling.

Future Research

- Track HB 565 and HB 413 through Senate committee action, given both have already passed the House.
- Monitor whether HB 779, SB 397, and SB 420 converge into a single JobsOhio-oversight vehicle, or advance separately, given their overlapping subject matter and different committee assignments.

- Revisit HB 250's status if it receives its first committee hearing, given its extended period without action since May 2025.
- Track implementation of HB 454's and HB 912's commissions if enacted, including whether the General Assembly acts on any resulting recommendations — a distinct question from whether the commissions themselves are created.
- Monitor whether SJR 2 is adopted by the General Assembly and filed with the Secretary of State in time to qualify for the November 3, 2026 ballot; as of the status date it had not been adopted by either chamber.
- Consider expanding this report's scope in a future edition to election-administration and redistricting legislation, currently excluded by editorial scope decision, as a separately framed report.
- Cross-reference future revisions of this report against WP-002 (JobsOhio) as that white paper's Version 2 build incorporates public-records-request responses.

Sources

- Ohio General Assembly, official bill-tracking system (legislature.ohio.gov), consulted for status and full text of each bill discussed.
- Ohio Legislative Service Commission (LSC), bill analyses and fiscal notes for HB 565, HB 413, HB 299, HB 779, SB 397, SB 420, HB 250, HB 454, HB 912, HB 202, HB 248, HB 609, HB 619, HB 481, SB 350, and SJR 2.
- Sponsor and cosponsor testimony submitted to House and Senate committees for the bills discussed in this report, obtained directly from committee records.
- Proponent, opponent, and interested-party testimony submitted on HB 413 (Buckeye Institute; Americans for Prosperity–Ohio; Ohio News Media Association; Office of the Treasurer of State; Rep. Susan Schindel; County Commissioners Association of Ohio; Ohio Municipal League; Ohio Library Council; Ohio Mayors Alliance; Ohio Township Association) and HB 565 (Ohio Prosecuting Attorneys Association; Butler County Prosecutor Michael Gmoser; Hamilton County Prosecuting Attorney Connie Pillich).
- LegiScan, Ohio bill-history records, used to confirm introduction and committee-referral dates and cross-checked against the Ohio General Assembly's official journal.
- WOSU / The Statehouse News Bureau, “Lead investigator of state employees in Ohio would get new power under Republican bill” (March 25, 2026), reporting on SB 350 and HB 683.
- Ohio Capital Journal, “Ohio bill would ban politicians, staff from Kalshi, Polymarket prediction markets” (May 20, 2026), reporting on HB 887.
- NBC4 (WCMH-TV), reporting on HB 887's introduction (May 2026).
- Ohio House of Representatives member press releases and news pages for HB 834 (Rep. David Thomas), HB 912 (Rep. Melanie Miller), and HB 887 (Rep. Sean Brennan).
- The Vindicator and Tribune Chronicle (Ohio Public Media affiliate opinion pages), coverage of HB 834 (May 2026).
- Spectrum News 1 (Ohio), “Ohio bill looks to improve delivery of government services” (April 28, 2026), reporting on HB 834's introduction.
- Ohio House press release, “Ohio House Passes Reps. Young, Peterson Bill to Expand Government Transparency Through Ohio Checkbook” (May 2026), confirming HB 413's House passage vote.

- Ohio Legislative Service Commission, "JobsOhio: Frequently Asked Questions" (background memorandum), confirming the January 4, 2013 Franchise and Transfer Agreement date for the JobsOhio liquor-franchise lease, cited to correct this report's earlier reference to that transaction.
- Ohio Auditor of State, press release, "Internal Control Weaknesses Combined with an Antiquated System Allow for Massive $3.8 Billion in Unemployment Fraud and Overpayments" (October 28, 2021), ohioauditor.gov, cited in the SB 350/HB 683 discussion for its own independently reported fraud and overpayment figures.
- Ohio Redistricting Commission transcript (October 31, 2025) — reviewed for background context only; not cited as a basis for any bill discussed in this report, consistent with this report's exclusion of redistricting from scope.

Conclusion

This report is intended as a factual description of selected government-responsiveness and accountability legislation introduced during the 136th Ohio General Assembly. It does not evaluate whether these measures were sufficient, only what they did, how far they advanced, and where a bill's title or public framing diverges from its operative text. This report discusses 23 bills and resolutions across 22 legislative proposals (SB 350 and HB 683, companion measures, are discussed together). No proposal in this report's scope was enacted as of July 17, 2026. Two — HB 565 and HB 413 — passed the House and remained pending in the Senate; the remaining 20 had not passed either chamber. This report identifies five bills whose title or dominant framing differs materially from their operative legal mechanism, most significantly the distinction between HB 779/SB 397 (titled "JobsOhio Transparency Act" but mechanically an audit-and-disclosure bill) and SB 420 (mechanically the bill that would extend public-records and open-meetings coverage to JobsOhio, without "transparency" in its title). Future editions of this report may expand its scope or update bill statuses as the 136th General Assembly continues to act.

Revision History

This is a living tracker rather than a fixed monograph. It is reviewed and reissued periodically as the 136th General Assembly acts on government-responsiveness-related legislation, on a cadence set jointly by OCG's Research Center and organizing leadership rather than a fixed calendar interval. Each revision is logged below, and superseded versions are preserved in the OCG Research Library.

Version 1.0 — July 20, 2026 — Initial publication. Incorporates corrections identified in pre-publication peer review, including: a corrected bill count in the Executive Summary and Conclusion; correction of an erroneous date associated with JobsOhio's liquor-franchise lease; verification of SB 420's and HB 779/SB 397's audit-frequency provisions directly against LSC bill analyses; narrower, more precisely attributed framing of the HB 565 "53rd exemption" figure, the HB 481 classification, and the HB 619 public-access grouping; a corrected SJR 2 ballot-qualification status and mechanism description; confirmed introduction and referral dates for HB 887 and HB 409; an added primary-source citation to the Ohio Auditor of State's October 2021 press release; and bill-specific citations in Appendix A.

Appendix A. Bills Discussed in This Report

Ohio General Assembly, official bill-tracking system, accessed through July 17, 2026. Each bill's official page follows the pattern legislature.ohio.gov/legislation/136/[bill], e.g. legislature.ohio.gov/legislation/136/hb565.

Furthest advanced (passed the House, pending Senate)

- HB 565 — legislature.ohio.gov/legislation/136/hb565
- HB 413 — legislature.ohio.gov/legislation/136/hb413

Oversight of quasi-public and hybrid entities (pending)

- HB 779 — legislature.ohio.gov/legislation/136/hb779
- SB 397 — legislature.ohio.gov/legislation/136/sb397
- SB 420 — legislature.ohio.gov/legislation/136/sb420

Public records, open meetings & constituent access (pending, beyond HB 565/HB 413 above)

- HB 609 — legislature.ohio.gov/legislation/136/hb609
- HB 619 — legislature.ohio.gov/legislation/136/hb619
- HB 481 — legislature.ohio.gov/legislation/136/hb481

Ethics, campaign finance & anti-corruption (pending)

- HB 250 — legislature.ohio.gov/legislation/136/hb250
- HB 887 — legislature.ohio.gov/legislation/136/hb887
- HB 932 — legislature.ohio.gov/legislation/136/hb932
- HB 960 — legislature.ohio.gov/legislation/136/hb960
- HB 409 — legislature.ohio.gov/legislation/136/hb409
- HB 938 — legislature.ohio.gov/legislation/136/hb938
- SB 350 — legislature.ohio.gov/legislation/136/sb350 (companion: HB 683 — legislature.ohio.gov/legislation/136/hb683)

Government performance, efficiency & fiscal oversight (pending)

- HB 454 — legislature.ohio.gov/legislation/136/hb454
- HB 912 — legislature.ohio.gov/legislation/136/hb912
- HB 202 — legislature.ohio.gov/legislation/136/hb202
- HB 248 — legislature.ohio.gov/legislation/136/hb248
- HB 834 — legislature.ohio.gov/legislation/136/hb834

Citizen influence tools between elections (pending / proposed ballot measure)

- HB 299 — legislature.ohio.gov/legislation/136/hb299
- SJR 2 — legislature.ohio.gov/legislation/136/sjr2