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Executive Budget Earns Plaudits; Some Think It Falls Short

Gov. Mike DeWine's second proposed executive budget received mostly praise after it was unveiled Monday.

However, one portion of the more than \$170 billion all-funds proposal earned the ire of the House's top Democrat.

Minority Leader Emilia Sykes (D-Akron) blasted the governor's proposal to spend \$50 million marketing Ohio to attract new residents to the state.

"Instead of spending \$50m for a PR campaign Republicans could stop passing extremist legislation that keeps women, people of color, the LGBTQ community, and working families from realizing their American dream in Ohio," she wrote in a tweet. "It would be a lot cheaper. And much more kind."

Asked about those policies, the governor called Ohio a "progressive" state and touted low tax rates. (See separate story)

In an official statement, Rep. Sykes she her caucus looks "forward to digging into the details of the governor's proposal to see how it makes sense long-term without one time money and that it delivers on the promise of opportunity for all Ohioans."

Senate Minority Leader Kenny Yuko (D-Richmond Hts.) said the governor shares some of his caucus' budget priorities, including improving Ohioans' access to broadband and increasing funding for local health departments, small businesses, education and childcare.

"We must make sure these funding increases are meaningful and that we are doing everything we can to support the families and workers in Ohio who have been hurt the most by the pandemic," he said.

Others were more effusive in their praise in statements issued after the spending outline was unveiled, including the Ohio Municipal League, which lauded the governor's Investing in Ohio's Future Initiative that includes a one-time, \$450 million infusion for local communities. (See separate story)

"We thank Gov. DeWine for making an investment in Ohio's local governments a priority in the administration's budget proposal," said Kettering City Manager Mark Schwieterman, who serves as the president of the OML Board. "By funding local infrastructure projects and broadband expansion, the state will be making critical investments in Ohio's economic recovery. The League looks forward to working with Gov. DeWine and the General Assembly as the budget works through the legislative process."

Keary McCarthy, executive director of the Ohio Mayors Alliance, said the budget is a reflection of the governor's commitment to partner with Ohio's local governments.

"By investing in local infrastructure, economic development, and law enforcement support, the administration is making local economic recovery key to the economic recovery of the state," he added. "We look forward to working with the DeWine administration and the General Assembly as the budget moves through the legislative process."

CCAO President Tim Bubb said he was "thrilled" with the rollout of the biennial spending outline, highlighting a proposed increase in indigent defense reimbursement, which has been a top priority for counties over the years.

The Ohio Chamber of Commerce said the budget positions the state's economy for a strong rebound.

"It invests in the types of things – local economic development site readiness and high-speed broadband access, for example – that create jobs," President and CEO Andrew Doehrel said. "It ensures that more Ohioans have the opportunity to earn industry-recognized credentials. Also, by not proposing major tax changes or increases, it maintains consistency and predictability in the tax code."

Ryan Augsburger, president of The Ohio Manufacturers' Association, called the plan "reasonable, focused and balanced."

"We are encouraged to see strong investment in upskilling Ohio's workforce, which is the foundation of our economic future," he added.

Groundwork Ohio was complimentary of increasing eligibility for the publicly funded childcare system from 130% of the federal poverty line to 138%, with Executive Director Shannon Jones calling it "an important first step to ensuring all families can get back to work and our youngest children are prepared for school and beyond."

Bryan Hannon, director of government relations in Ohio for the American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network, applauded a 21% increase in funding for the state's tobacco prevention program.

"Increasing funding for tobacco prevention and cessation is a vital first step to protect Ohio youth from a lifetime of tobacco addiction and help more tobacco users quit," he said. "The program implements evidence-based strategies to reduce tobacco use, the number one cause of preventable death nationwide. This is especially important in 2021, given the skyrocketing youth tobacco use rates."

Alison Goebel, executive director at the Greater Ohio Policy Center, and Jason Warner, director of strategic engagement for the group, called the budget "a commendable step forward" that is in line with the group's policy platform.

"We look forward to seeing all of the details of the governor's proposal but believe this is the type of investment necessary to build on what exists, see what could be, and create solutions to enable sustainable growth, encourage pride in place and foster collaboration to build a Greater Ohio," they said. "We look forward to working with Gov. DeWine and the General Assembly to refine these proposals and bring these priorities to fruition in ways that most benefit Ohio's cities and towns."

Policy Matters Ohio, though, said the plan falls short by failing to tap into the rainy day Budget Stabilization Fund.

"He's not doing enough to help the many who are living under threat of eviction, foreclosure or hunger," Executive Director Hannah Halbert said. "Black, brown and Indigenous Ohioans, and those with low incomes, have been hit hardest by the pandemic. DeWine should be leveraging everything at his disposal to get them the aid they urgently need."

The Ohio Education Association also expressed disappointment at the governor's decision not to tap into reserve funds.

"The governor's budget looks like it will fall far short of what this moment in history requires, especially for students in high-poverty or high-minority school districts," President Scott DiMauro said.

The Buckeye Institute also said the state would be better off utilizing those funds instead of increasing fees, including a \$10 hike for annual motor vehicle registrations.

"While many of the governor's policies—particularly the workforce and broadband proposals can help move Ohio forward—this budget proposal missed an opportunity to undertake bold reforms on taxes, spending, education, and regulations," President and CEO Robert Alt said.