



www.lsc.ohio.gov

# OHIO LEGISLATIVE SERVICE COMMISSION

Office of Research  
and Drafting

Legislative Budget  
Office

H.B. 643  
133<sup>rd</sup> General Assembly

## Bill Analysis

**Version:** As Introduced

**Primary Sponsor:** Rep. Howse

Amanda George Goodman, Attorney

### SUMMARY

- Creates the Outdoor Rx Program to award grants to applicants to fund outdoor therapy programs (programs that focus on outdoor recreation, environmental and ecological studies, agricultural resource-based activities, and resource conservation, stewardship, or restoration).
- Creates the Outdoor Learning Grant Program in the Department of Natural Resources to award grants to city, local, and exempted village school districts for outdoor learning programs for fifth and sixth graders.
- Appropriates \$12,000,000 for each program from the General Revenue Fund.

### DETAILED ANALYSIS

#### Outdoor Rx Program

The bill requires the Chief of the Division of Parks and Watercraft (in the Department of Natural Resources) to establish the Outdoor Rx Program. Under the program, the Division of Parks and Watercraft must provide grants to applicants (state agencies, local governments, organizations, or individuals) to fund outdoor therapy programs serving Ohio citizens.<sup>1</sup> An outdoor therapy program is a program that includes any of the following activities:

1. Outdoor recreation;
2. Outdoor environmental and ecological studies;
3. Agricultural resource-based activities; and
4. Resource conservation, stewardship, or restoration.

<sup>1</sup> R.C. 1546.40(A)(1) and (B).

An outdoor therapy program is not a program that involves activities that may be perceived to lobby or advocate for political purposes; activities that are not in compliance with local, state, or federal laws; or organized sports.<sup>2</sup>

### **Application process**

The bill requires the seven-member Outdoor Rx Program Advisory Committee comprised of various appointees (see “**Outdoor Rx Program Advisory Committee**” below), in conjunction with the Chief, to develop an application form to be used by applicants for program grants. On the form is a space in which an applicant must describe the outdoor therapy program for which a grant is sought. An applicant must submit a complete application form to the Committee in order to be eligible for grant consideration.<sup>3</sup>

The Committee must review submitted applications and evaluate each application. In evaluating applications, the committee must give preference to proposals that:

1. Utilize veterans for at least 50% of program implementation or administration;
2. Contribute to healthy lifestyles through outdoor recreation and sound nutrition;
3. Maximize the number of participants who can be served, particularly participants who are veterans or who are recovering from substance abuse or physical or mental trauma;
4. Provide for partnership with either public or private entities;
5. Provide for innovative ways to increase the availability and use of outdoor recreation facilities;
6. Include ongoing program evaluation, assessment, and reporting of program effectiveness;
7. Commit matching and in-kind resources;
8. Use state park and other natural resource venues and personnel as a resource;
9. Encourage community involvement;
10. Encourage sound environmental practices;
11. Provide an opportunity to experience the outdoors directly and an opportunity to understand nature and the natural world;
12. Make use of research-based, effective environmental, ecological, agricultural, or other natural resource-based therapy;
13. Demonstrate innovative approaches to outdoor-based therapy; and

---

<sup>2</sup> R.C. 1546.40(A)(2).

<sup>3</sup> R.C. 1546.42(A).

14. Include any other criteria established by the Chief.<sup>4</sup>

After evaluating an application, the Committee must forward the application to the Chief and make a recommendation to the Chief as to whether the application should be approved and whether grant money should be disbursed to the applicant. The bill requires the Chief to make the final decision regarding awarding a grant to an applicant.<sup>5</sup>

The bill also authorizes the Chief to do all of the following regarding the program:

1. Require applicants to make a matching contribution to a program proposal to be eligible for a grant;
2. Award partial grant money for one or more elements of a proposal;
3. Require grant recipients to submit a report, in accordance with any policies and procedures established by the Chief, regarding the success of a funded program and any accounting information; and
4. Take any other actions the Chief determines is necessary for the implementation and administration of the program.<sup>6</sup>

### **Program funding**

The bill creates the Outdoor Rx Program Fund consisting of money appropriated to it and gifts, grants, donations, or money from any source. The Division of Parks and Watercraft must use fund money for awarding grants to applicants to implement their outdoor therapy programs. The Division also may use fund money for administration of the program.<sup>7</sup>

The bill appropriates \$12,000,000 from the General Revenue Fund to the Outdoor Rx Program Fund.<sup>8</sup>

### **Outdoor Rx Program Advisory Committee**

As indicated above, the bill creates the Outdoor Rx Program Advisory Committee to assist and advise the Chief in the development and administration of the program. The Committee consists of the following seven members who must be Ohio residents:

1. One member appointed by the Chief from the business community;
2. Two members appointed by the Chief from outdoor organizations;
3. One member appointed by the Chief who the Chief deems sufficient to ensure the diversity of the committee membership;

---

<sup>4</sup> R.C. 1546.42(C).

<sup>5</sup> R.C. 1546.42(B).

<sup>6</sup> R.C. 1546.42(D).

<sup>7</sup> R.C. 1546.43.

<sup>8</sup> Section 2.

4. One member appointed by the Director of Veterans Services;
5. One member appointed by the Director of Environmental Protection; and
6. One member appointed by the Director of Health.

The bill requires members to serve staggered three-year terms after the initial appointments. It also provides for the filling of vacancies on the Committee, and it allows members to be reappointed.

Committee members are reimbursed for actual and necessary expenses incurred in attending committee meetings and in the performance of their official duties. The Department of Natural Resources must furnish clerical, technical, legal, and other services required by the Committee in the performance of its duties.<sup>9</sup>

### **Financial report**

Under the bill, the Chief of the Division of Parks and Watercraft must submit an annual detailed financial report to the Speaker of the House of Representatives and to the President of the Senate. The Chief must submit the financial report by November 1, 2021, and annually thereafter. The Chief must include all of the following information pertaining to the 12 months immediately preceding the report's submission:

1. The total amount of money that was deposited into the Outdoor Rx Program Fund;
2. The total amount of money that was disbursed from the fund;
3. A description of the processes used to determine which applicants were awarded grants under the program;
4. A description of the process used to disburse the grants;
5. The grant recipients' names and the amount that each recipient was awarded;
6. A description of the outdoor therapy programs that were funded under the Outdoor Rx Program; and
7. Any other information that the Chief determines is necessary to include in the report.<sup>10</sup>

### **Outdoor Learning Grant Program**

The bill requires the Director of Natural Resources, or the Director's designee, to establish an Outdoor Learning Grant Program to provide grants to city, local, and exempted village school districts for outdoor learning programs for fifth and sixth graders.<sup>11</sup> The Director must adopt rules for purposes of the program regarding all of the following:

---

<sup>9</sup> R.C. 1546.41.

<sup>10</sup> R.C. 1546.44.

<sup>11</sup> R.C. 1501.50(A).

1. The process by which a school district may apply for a grant;
2. The form and content of a grant application;
3. The manner in which grants are awarded and distributed;
4. The number of grants to be awarded, and the duration and amount of each grant;
5. The requirements that a grant recipient must satisfy in order to renew the grant; and
6. Any other requirements necessary to implement the grant program.<sup>12</sup>

A school district that receives a grant may either use the curriculum and materials developed by the Director or the Director's designee (who must develop a model curriculum under the bill) or implement their own curriculum and materials for an outdoor learning program for fifth and sixth graders.<sup>13</sup>

The bill appropriates \$12,000,000 from the General Revenue Fund to be used for purposes of the program.<sup>14</sup>

---

## HISTORY

Action	Date
Introduced	05-19-20

---

H0643-I-133/ec

---

<sup>12</sup> R.C. 1501.50(B).

<sup>13</sup> R.C. 1501.50(C).

<sup>14</sup> Section 2.