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A DANCE TO REMEMBER



Vivian Leavell looks up at her son, Pierre Leavell, of Symmes Township, as they participate in Dancing to Remember at A-Marika Dance Company in Sharonville on Tuesday. The Giving Voice Foundation and Episcopal Retirement Services sponsor the free event for those living with dementia and their caregivers. Vivian suffers from dementia. In the hourlong session, dancers learn steps for the rumba, waltz, foxtrot, swing and the tango. LIZ DUFOUR/THE ENQUIRER

Public access gets more limited

Ohio moves will block records, spending views

Dan Horn
Cincinnati Enquirer
USA TODAY NETWORK

It's about to get harder for Ohioans to see what their government is up to.

In a series of under-the-radar actions, state lawmakers are considering or have approved some of the most significant changes to Ohio's open records laws in years.

Taken together, those measures put new limits on the public's right to know about crimes, evidence gathered by police, court proceedings, investigations of public officials, the work of the coroner's office and spending by a nonprofit that controls half the state's \$2 billion opioid settlement.

Those who support the changes describe them either as minor tweaks to existing law or as necessary steps to protect crime victims and criminal investigations.

Those who oppose them say they threaten a fundamental American right: The right to know how the government wields its power.

"It doesn't make any common sense, other than a desire to hide things," said Fred Gittes, a Columbus attorney who handles open government and First Amendment cases.

The debate over government secrets, privacy and the public's right to know is as old as the republic. Disagreements over what should — and should not — be available for all to see have raged from the Founding Fathers to the Cold War and beyond.

Those arguments intensified in recent years as Americans clamored for more government transparency about the COVID-19 pandemic and a criminal justice system dealing with high-profile cases of misconduct by police and politicians.

"Transparency has gone mainstream," said Joseph Foti, chief research officer at the Open Government Partnership, an international nonprofit that advocates for more openness in government. "Now we're discussing who and what should be transparent."

See ACCESS, Page 3A

Ex-Ohio speaker faces 20 years in prison

Householder found guilty in racketeering case

Laura A. Bischoff and Jessie Balmert
State Bureau
USA TODAY NETWORK

When U.S. District Court Judge Timothy S. Black read the guilty verdict aloud in the courtroom, Larry Householder kept a poker face — no response, no emotion.

Minutes later, outside the courthouse in downtown Cincinnati, Householder slapped his camouflage ballcap on and faced the press.

The former Ohio House speaker conceded no mistakes. Asked if he could go back in time, what would he have done differently, he said "I would've done everything I could possibly do to save Ohio

jobs in those power plants." As Householder walked away from reporters, a bystander yelled across the street in a booming voice: "Run away, you crook, run away!"

It was a stunning end to a seven-week trial. Twelve jurors decided that Householder ran a racketeering conspiracy that took \$61 million in bribes from Akron-based FirstEnergy Corp., hidden in a web of dark money political groups. He used the money to seize political power, enrich himself and then pass a \$1.3 billion bailout law known as House Bill 6 for FirstEnergy and its subsidiaries.

The jury also convicted former Ohio Republican Party chairman Matt Borges of racketeering conspiracy for his role in influencing politicians and paying a bribe

See HOUSEHOLDER, Page 3A



Former Ohio House Speaker Larry Householder is surrounded by reporters outside the Potter Stewart U.S. Courthouse in downtown Cincinnati on March 9 after a jury found him and ex-Ohio Republican Party chairman Matt Borges guilty of racketeering conspiracy.

SAM GREENE/THE ENQUIRER

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