



JOSH MANDEL

STATE TREASURER OF OHIO

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By Maria DeVito

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After trailing other states, Ohio is now at the top of the list for transparency in government spending.

The U.S. Public Interest Research Group announced today that Ohio jumped to No. 1 after being ranked 46th last year.

Ohio received a perfect score of 100 — the highest score the group has ever awarded. Ohio's jump to the top was the largest single improvement since the group started the ranking six years ago.

The top ranking comes after Treasurer Josh Mandel's office unveiled OhioCheckbook.com, which tracks spending by all government agencies in the state, in December.

Mandel said the reason his office launched the site was so Ohio could "be leader, not a basement dweller."

"My ultimate goal here is to help set off a national race for transparency," Mandel said.

The website has about 112 million transactions going back to fiscal year 2008 through fiscal year 2014. The treasurer's office plans to eventually update the site monthly, but isn't ready to do that yet.

It cost the treasurer's office \$813,979.62 to build the site.

Mandel said 130,000 searches have been done so far.

Phineas Baxandall, senior analyst at U.S. PIRG, specializing in transportation, tax and budget policy, said the report grades websites for each state.

The report takes 13 aspects of transparency into account, as well as sub-criteria, Baxandall said, adding the criterion has become more stringent each year.

"Ohio in recent years has been an underperformer," he said. Last year Ohio received 46 points, earning it a D- rating.

Ohio earned a B+ in 2010, but fell behind because it did not improve transparency.

"We found that states have to keep improving to stay at the top of the pack in transparency," he said, but added other states can now learn from Ohio.

Mandel's next step is putting the checkbooks of local governments online as well. He said he hopes to find a way for his office to "host and post" the data for local governments at no cost to them.

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