



JOSH MANDEL

STATE TREASURER OF OHIO

Momentum Builds for Government Transparency as Treasurer's Office Forms Partnerships with Local Government Leaders and Associations
Press Release - Ohio Treasurer's Office

COLUMBUS – Ohio Treasurer Josh Mandel stood today with leaders representing Ohio cities, schools, townships and other entities to invite local governments statewide to partner with his office and place their spending online at OhioCheckbook.com. Last year, Treasurer Mandel launched OhioCheckbook.com, which sets a new national standard for government transparency and for the first time in Ohio history puts all state spending information on the internet. OhioCheckbook.com recently earned Ohio the number one ranking in the country for government transparency. Treasurer Mandel sent a letter today to 18,062 local government and school officials representing 3,962 local governments throughout the state calling on them to place their checkbook level data on OhioCheckbook.com and extending an invitation to partner with his office at no cost to local governments. These local governments include cities, counties, townships, schools, library districts and other special districts.

"Ohioans have a right to see how their tax money is being spent at every level of government," said Treasurer Mandel. "I am calling on cities, counties, townships and schools to open the books and post their checkbooks on OhioCheckbook.com. My vision is to create an army of citizen watchdogs who are empowered to hold public officials accountable."

"Josh Mandel's online checkbook may be the most important transparency initiative since the original public records law," Auditor Yost said. "I gladly join his call for all local governments to take advantage of this new standard for accountability."

Treasurer Mandel was joined at today's announcement by Ohio Auditor Dave Yost and leaders from statewide and local government organizations, as well as representatives from individual local governments who have expressed interest in becoming early adopters to post their spending on OhioCheckbook.com. Individuals and organizations expressing support included:

Statewide Associations and Third Party Groups:

Ohio Municipal League – Susan Cave, Executive Director
Ohio Township Association – Matthew DeTemple, Executive Director
Ohio Association of School Business Officials – David Varda, Executive Director
Buckeye Association of School Administrators – David Axner, Deputy Executive Director
County Commissioner Association of Ohio – Suzanne Dulaney, Executive Director
County Auditor Association of Ohio – Fran Lesser, Executive Director
Ohio Newspaper Association – Dennis Hetzel, Executive Director
Ohio Society of CPAs – Scott Wiley, CEO
Buckeye Institute – Greg Lawson, Statehouse Liaison & Policy Analyst
Common Cause Ohio – Catherine Turcer, Policy Analyst

Local Government Officials:

Mayor Lydia Mihalik – City of Findlay (Hancock County)

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Dan Unger, School Board President and Amy Wells, Treasurer – Northwest Local Schools (Hamilton County)
Barry Tiffany, Township Administrator – Sugar Creek Township (Greene County)
Rhonda Sowers, Fiscal Officer – Marblehead Village (Ottawa County)
Marcus Shelton, Trustee – Harlan Township (Warren County)
Mike Graham, Fiscal Officer – Darby Township (Pickaway County)

OhioCheckbook.com was launched on December 2, 2014, marking the first time in Ohio history when citizens could actually see every expenditure in state government. Since its launch, OhioCheckbook.com has received overwhelming support from newspapers and groups across the state and, as of April 1, 2015, there have been more than 158,000 total searches on the site. OhioCheckbook.com displays more than \$408 billion in spending over the past seven years, including more than 112 million transactions. The website includes cutting-edge features such as:

- “Google-style” contextual search capabilities, to allow users to sort by keyword, department, category or vendor;
- Fully dynamic interactive charts to drill down on state spending;
- Functionality to compare state spending year-over-year or among agencies; and,
- Capability to share charts or checks with social media networks, and direct contact for agency fiscal offices.

Last month, the U.S. Public Interest Research Group (U.S. PIRG) released their annual “Following the Money 2015” report and Treasurer Mandel earned Ohio the number one transparency ranking in the country for providing online access to government spending data. Ohio was prominently featured in the report after climbing from 46th to 1st in spending transparency as a result of Treasurer Mandel’s release of OhioCheckbook.com. Due to the launch of OhioCheckbook.com, Ohio received a perfect score of 100 points this year – the highest score in the history of the U.S. PIRG transparency rankings.

The Treasurer’s office is partnering with OpenGov, a leading Silicon Valley government transparency technology company, to provide residents of Ohio the ability to view and search local government expenditures in a user-friendly, digital format. “Ohio is setting the standard for financial transparency on an unprecedented scale. We are excited to partner with the Treasurer’s office to bring world-class technology to communities large and small across the state,” said Zachary Bookman, CEO of OpenGov. Coalition Supports Transparency Efforts Through OhioCheckbook.com

A strong coalition of groups from across the spectrum have expressed support for Treasurer Mandel’s efforts on OhioCheckbook.com and the next phase of placing local government checkbooks online.

“We applaud Treasurer Mandel’s efforts to bring more transparency to government spending across Ohio through the innovative OhioCheckbook.com website. It’s a great sign that a number of local government officials already are working with the treasurer’s office to display their spending information. We believe the long-term benefits will far outweigh the short-term challenges of figuring out best practices so all of Ohio’s local governmental bodies and other entities such as public universities will participate. These efforts will lead to better-informed citizens and new tools to help officials make smarter decisions on how they spend public dollars.”

-Dennis Hetzel, Executive Director, Ohio Newspaper Association

“Public records are owned by the people, but so often we don’t have easy access to them. Expanding spending information available on OhioCheckbook.com to include local government checkbooks opens the doors to the public and invites citizens in to explore the inner workings of their local government.”

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-Catherine Turcer, Policy Analyst, Common Cause Ohio

"We at the Ohio Municipal League will continue to work with the State Treasurer's office to make this effort a useful tool for our members the cities and villages of Ohio."

-Susan Cave, Executive Director, Ohio Municipal League

"OhioCheckbook.com is an impressive tool for the public to learn more about state spending. The Ohio Township Association supports transparency in government and we appreciate the fact that Treasurer Mandel has made the online checkbook concept available as an option to local governments."

-Matthew DeTemple, Executive Director, Ohio Township Association

"The Ohio Association of School Business Officials (OASBO) supports transparency for taxpayers and we believe our members assure that happens in public school districts. We appreciate State Treasurer Josh Mandel's efforts to create an online checkbook option that is user friendly for both the taxpayers that are viewing the transactions, and for government officials that provide the information."

-David Varda, Executive Director, Ohio Association of School Business Officials

"The CAAO commends and thanks Treasurer of State Josh Mandel on his initiative to enhance government transparency by implementing OhioCheckbook.com, as well as the national recognition for his efforts. Several County Auditors recently had the opportunity to learn about the details of the program and take a first-hand look at the various graphs and reports. They came away most impressed. Many County Auditors currently publish and electronically post their Comprehensive Annual Financial Reports and Popular Annual Financial Reports. County Auditors are committed to promoting transparency in government and look forward to working with the State Treasurer's Office and other entities to provide financial information to the public in an open data format."

-Fran Lesser, Executive Director, County Auditor Association of Ohio

"The City of Findlay is pleased to partner with Treasurer Mandel and begin posting our finances on OhioCheckbook.com at no cost to our citizens. OhioCheckbook.com is a great opportunity for Ohio's elected officials to showcase transparency and engage their constituents. Thank you Treasurer Mandel for providing a cutting-edge transparency tool!"

-Mayor Lydia Mihalik, City of Findlay (Hancock County)

"We are pleased that the Northwest Local School District in Hamilton County will be one of the first public school districts in the state with our detailed expenditures available on OhioCheckbook.com. I believe that this new transparency effort will breed innovation and build trust with the community. By making our expenditures easily accessible to the public, a thousand sets of eyes can help to encourage good spending decisions."

-Dan Unger, School Board President, Northwest Local Schools (Hamilton County)

"Sugar Creek Township appreciates the Transparency Project initiative led by Treasurer Mandel's office and we are happy to be one of the first local governments to provide data for inclusion in the database. The online checkbook allows our constituents greater access to information on how their money is being spent and it allows the Township to further our goal of transparency without the cost and duplicity of multiple systems statewide. It's a win for us and it's a win for the taxpayers in Sugar Creek Township and the State of Ohio."

-Barry Tiffany, Township Administrator, Sugar Creek Township (Greene County)

"OhioCheckbook.com is a great resource for the Village of Marblehead and we are proud to partner with the Ohio Treasurer's office. Transparency has become increasingly important to citizens and we are happy to be on the forefront by providing access through OhioCheckbook.com."



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-Rhonda Sowers, Fiscal Officer, Marblehead Village (Ottawa County)

"Lack of transparency in government breeds corruption and dishonesty. Transparency in our government treasuries provides an avenue of security for the public revenues and holds our elected and appointed officials accountable for unnecessary spending. OhioCheckbook.com will be a model for other states throughout our great nation to emulate."

-Marcus Shelton, Trustee, Harlan Township (Warren County)

"Transparency is the foundation for accountability at all levels of government. We think Treasurer Mandel's desire to partner with local governments while empowering local taxpayers to an unprecedented degree is extraordinarily wise. With these tools, local governments can prove to their constituents how effective they are with taxpayer dollars or be held to account for poor choices."

-Greg Lawson, Buckeye Institute

For more information visit OhioCheckbook.com.

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