



# JOSH MANDEL

## STATE TREASURER OF OHIO

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By Denise G. Callahan  
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BUTLER COUNTY &mdash; Fairfield and Ross townships are the latest government entities in Butler County to join the state's online checkbook, opening their finances for taxpayers to see.

The townships' checkbooks will go live today, joining 3,962 local governments and school districts in Ohio who have joined since State Treasurer Josh Mandel put the state's books online in December 2014 and invited local jurisdictions to participate at no cost in April 2015.

"We thought the idea of being transparent was important and decided that since they made the job so easy we would go ahead and do it," Ross Twp. Administrator Bob Bass said. "We're glad to be there."

When the county's checkbook went live Feb. 1, Bass estimated it would take a bit of time to get on the checkbook, given the townships was in the midst of an office move. But the process was so easy, officials decided not to wait, he said.

Ross Twp. books from at least 2014 and 2015 will be on the checkbook immediately, and officials plan to update it annually, according to Bass.

Fairfield Twp.'s checkbook has data from 2013 to present and will be updated semi-annually to start, according to Township Administrator Julie Vonderhaar, who added that she plans to eventually get updates made quarterly.

The program has helped the township further its transparency goals, said Trustee President Shannon Hartkemeyer.

"This gives our citizens the opportunity to see how the township is allocating resources," she said. "It is another step in our efforts to promote open government."

A few more offices have also been added to the county's page, including the Veterans Service Commission, the coroner and the Mental Health and Addiction Recovery Services Board.

The veterans board agreed to post its financials after members were assured by Executive Director Caroline Bier that veterans' personal information would not be online. Only vendor names, such as landlords, appear on the checks issued by the commission, she said.

There are 13 counties, 82 cities and villages, 58 townships, 65 school districts, six special districts and six libraries have opened their books to the public, and there have been more than 478,000 searches on the site. Since the Republican treasurer issued invitations last spring for jurisdictions to join the checkbook, he has received commitments from 575 other jurisdictions &mdash;

30 EAST BROAD STREET · 9TH FLOOR · COLUMBUS, OHIO 43215  
PHONE: (614) 466-2160 · WWW.OHIOTREASURER.GOV · FAX: (614) 644-7313



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including West Chester and Madison townships and the village of New Miami &mdash; to join.

"My goal with OhioCheckbook.com is to create an army of citizen watchdogs who have the power to hold politicians accountable," Mandel previously told the Journal-News. "My mission here is to empower taxpayers to hold politicians' feet to the fire."

Cost to build the online tool was almost \$814,000, according to Mandel. There is no cost for the local jurisdictions to use the tool, but the state paid a one-time \$975,000 licensing fee for the system and pays an annual maintenance fee of \$400,000 to \$975,000, depending on the number of jurisdictions that participate.

In Butler County, Hamilton, Liberty, Oxford and now Fairfield and Ross townships and the Talawanda schools are on the state checkbook.

The city of Middletown is not on Mandel's checkbook. Officials there have chosen to use the Open.Gov tool, which is similar to open checkbook. Records from 2014 and 2015 are on their website and the city is loading 2016 figures monthly, City Manager Doug Adkins said.

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