



JOSH MANDEL

STATE TREASURER OF OHIO

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By Matthew Merchant
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Portage County has taken an extra step toward greater government transparency, becoming the 20th county in the state to join OhioCheckbook.com.

State Treasurer Josh Mandel unveiled the county's website for the open checkbook program during a meeting at the Record-Courier offices on Monday.

Also in attendance at the announcement was County Auditor Janet Esposito, who spearheaded the push for the county to join the program.

In 2014, Mandel announced the launch of Ohiocheckbook.com, a searchable website that allows the state government to share information on almost \$600 billion in state and local spending over the course of a seven year period.

For the past two years, the U.S. Public Interest Research Group gave Ohio an A+ rating for financial transparency, the only state to receive that score and the highest rating ever given by the group. By introducing the website, Mandel's office has improved the state's transparency from 46th to 1st in the nation.

"The goal is not transparency. The goal here is changing behavior. The goal is to make politicians and bureaucrats think twice before they waste taxpayer money or defraud the citizens," Mandel said. "The other goal is empowering taxpayers to hold politicians accountable. This initiative is all about power of the people."

He said the website covers everything from a \$2 box of pencils to multimillion dollar transactions for highway repairs.

Esposito said inclusion in the state website allows for greater detail of records searches compared with the information available on the county's website.

"In this process of posting information online, there's leaders and there's followers. Janet Esposito should be commended for being a leader," Mandel said. "(She) was one of the first local government officials in the entire state of Ohio (to ask about joining the checkbook)."

Because of the positive response from the state's checkbook being placed online, Mandel said they decided to invite local agencies to join as well. As of last year, more than 18,000 government agencies have been invited to join.

Of the 3,962 local government and school districts in the state, 769 have voluntarily joined the service "in a friendly partnership," Mandel said.

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Portage County joins Mantua, Streetsboro and the Crestwood Local School District in the program.

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