



FALL 2024

COUNTY LEADER



Revised State Revenue Projections
Foresee a Tight Budget for FY 2025

State of the County Addresses: A Vision
for Growth and Community

Northwest Ohio Counties Innovate to
Improve Child Welfare Placements

Guernsey County's Courthouse Lights
up the Night

Ohio Department of Agriculture
Supports Farmers

Extension Responds to Ohio's Historic
Drought

Shaping Ohio's Criminal Justice Future

Wayne County Schools Career Center

Addressing the Homelessness Crisis in
Butler County

Ohio Land Banks: Transforming
Communities

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Update

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Mercer County Commissioner

CEBCO News

CORSA News

CCAOSC News

CCAO R&E News

Tips For Navigating Volatile Investment
Markets



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COVER: CCAO staff and members gathered at the Sutphen Corporation Headquarters in Champaign County at the CCAO/CEAO Central District Meeting.

ABOVE:
1: CCAO President Chris Abbuhl hosted CCAO staff at Tuscarawas County's America 250-Ohio event featuring Retired Rear Admiral Dr. Peter Cressy.

2: CCAO Managing Director of Policy Kyle Petty attended the Lorain County Strategic Action Plan Final Summit at Lorain County Community College along with the Lorain County Commissioners and other partners who helped the vision come to life.

3: Director of the Ohio Dept. of Agriculture Brian Baldrige, Sen. Stephanie Kunze, Sen. Bob Hackett, Rep. Tim Barhorst, Rep. Roy Klopfenstein, and Rep. Bob Peterso with CCAO Members and staff at the 2024 Ohio State University College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences Farm Science Review.

4: Knox County Commissioner and CORSA Board Member Teresa Bemiller, Wood County Commissioner and CORSA Vice President Craig LaHote and Delaware County Commissioner and CORSA Treasurer Gary Merrell at the 2024 CORSA Annual Meeting.

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A MESSAGE FROM 2024 CCAO PRESIDENT

CHRIS ABBUHL, TUSCARAWAS COUNTY COMMISSIONER

It has been a fast paced, thought provoking, action packed year for the County Commissioners Association of Ohio. Former President Glenn Miller had informed me that the year would be busy and that time would go by very quickly. His speculation was correct, though I can only imagine that his time as president was extremely busy due to the fact that it was a budget year.

Throughout the year I had the distinct and unique pleasure to serve as your 2024 CCAO president. Not only has this afforded me the opportunity to meet local government leaders across Ohio, it has given me the ability to build bridges with local government leaders and federal partners throughout the United States. This is vitally important in creating and building those partnerships that will assist us in navigating and securing necessary means to provide essential services to our counties.

Though it has been mentioned on occasions, I would be remiss if I did not speak to the importance of being involved within our state association. It has been so refreshing to hear the discussions at our board meetings on various topics related to the numerous committees that are engaged in making positive change within our state for local government. The meaningful work that is done by each of you in strengthening our communities is to be applauded.

I have always said that our state is only as strong as we allow for the foundation of our local government. In order for all of us to thrive, we must work together to accomplish worthy goals that serve our collective constituents. That is why I chose the presidential theme of "Team Work for A Better Tomorrow" It is with great pride that I am associated with such strong individuals that have convictions in servant leadership. That's not to say that there won't be disagreements on subject matter but it does mean that we understand the importance of compromise and the fine art of healthy productive discussion that has a positive end.

As you all know we are moving toward the America 250 celebration in 2026. Yes, it is 2 years away. However, I refer back to my initial comments on how time waits for no one. We were excited to bring Retired Rear Admiral Peter Cressy to our Kent State Tuscarawas Performing Arts Center on October 10th 2024. Dr. Cressy serves as the Washington Presidential Library's Director of Executive Leadership Programs. Many of you may remember that Dr. Cressy presented at last year's CCAO/CEAO Winter Conference. Once again, he did not disappoint in presenting "A Strategic Approach To Leading Through Times Of Crisis And Change." An inspirational message of leadership that certainly re-energized the spirit of servitude.

Also, at this time I would like to thank our Executive Director Cheryl Subler and the staff at CCAO. They are dedicated professionals that spend countless hours advocating on the association's behalf. Not only do we have exceptional staff within CCAO, but our partner organizations of CORSA and CEBCO have like-minded leaders that provide necessary services to our counties and employees.

In closing, I again want to thank you for the opportunity of a lifetime, filled with memories that I will carry the rest of my life. Serving as president of CCAO was a fantastic experience that is attributed to the quality of the people that surrounded me.



Chris Abbuhl
CCAO President, Tuscarawas County Commissioner

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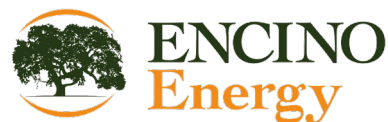
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SETTING A VISION FOR THE FUTURE: A PATH FORWARD FOR STRONGER COUNTIES AND A STRONGER OHIO

LETTER FROM CCAO EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

In any thriving organization, a clear and purposeful vision is the cornerstone of success. The County Commissioners Association of Ohio (CCAO) understands that this is just as true for our Association as it is for each of Ohio's 88 counties. Vision and strategy are not merely aspirational concepts—they are the tools we use to navigate challenges, capitalize on opportunities, and guide Ohio's counties toward a vibrant future.

At CCAO, we set annual goals designed to keep the Association focused, adaptable, and responsive to the evolving challenges and opportunities facing our members. From advocating for legislative priorities to fostering collaboration and innovation across the state, our goals keep us grounded in our mission of strengthening county government. We discuss these objectives collectively, ensuring they are more than words on paper, but rather an actionable roadmap that drives us throughout the year.

But our vision doesn't end with the work of the Association. It extends to the local level, where our members are setting their own strategies to steer their counties toward success. Across Ohio, county commissioners, executives, and council members are developing strategic plans that reflect the unique needs and potential of their communities. These plans are designed with foresight, recognizing not only where counties stand today but where they aspire to be in the coming years.

Often, the culmination of this work is shared in annual State of the County addresses, where leaders highlight their achievements and outline their future goals. These moments offer a renewed commitment to the vision they've set forth. Importantly, many of these local visions echo the broader goals of our state leaders—working together to make Ohio a great place to live, work, and raise a family.

However, Ohio faces its own demographic realities. Projections suggest that while some counties are poised for growth, others may see population declines. These shifts can feel inevitable, but they're not set in stone. The future is malleable, and deliberate, thoughtful policies can bend the population curve. By addressing housing, economic development, and infrastructure needs, and fostering vibrant, engaging communities, counties have the power to change their trajectories.

At both the state and county levels, leaders are actively working to ensure that Ohio's future remains bright.

Strategic partnerships, long-term planning, and an unwavering commitment to progress are key to making the vision of a prosperous future for all a reality.

As CCAO continues its work in support of counties, and as county leaders continue to implement their strategic visions, we remain unified in our commitment to Ohio's future. Together, we are building stronger counties and, in doing so, building a stronger Ohio. Let's continue to work toward a future where our counties thrive, and our state remains a place of opportunity for all.

Stronger Counties. Stronger Ohio.

CCAO 2024 GOALS

- Strengthen CCAO's Advocacy and successfully advocate CCAO priorities, particularly jail funding in capital bill
- Support Association Members
- Build awareness of county government through outreach, relationships and resources
- Build CCAO member learning modules and continue to update educational material
- Enhance CCAO Research & Educational Foundation and fundraise to support educational programming for CCAO members
- Implement CCAO Strategic plan which includes exploring a CLOUD computing storage purchase program and growing County Benefits+
- Enhance spotlighting of counties innovations and collaborations
- Continue to enhance annual conference — more engaging, worthwhile and valued
- Facilitate more counties joining NACo



Cheryl Subler
CCAO Executive Director



POLICY

REVISED STATE REVENUE PROJECTIONS FORESEE A TIGHT BUDGET FOR FY 2025

by Jon Honeck, CCAO Senior Policy Analyst

The Office of Budget and Management (OBM) revised its State Fiscal Year (FY) 2025 General Revenue Fund (GRF) estimates in September. FY 2025 began July 1, 2024 and ends June 30, 2025. The original estimate, prepared in June 2023 for the House Bill 33 Conference Committee, anticipated that FY 2025 state GRF tax receipts would total approximately \$28.6 billion. The September revision lowers this total by about \$1.0 billion, or 3.5%, compared to the original forecast. At this level, state tax revenue for FY 2025 will be lower than the \$27.9 billion received in FY 2024 and approximately \$1.3 billion lower than the \$28.9 billion received in FY 2023. The FY 2025 GRF tax estimates shown in Table 1 below do not include transfers to the state GRF to offset the impact of the expanded sales tax holiday that concluded August 8, 2024.

TABLE 1. STATE GENERAL REVENUE FUND TOTAL TAX RECEIPTS

FY 2023 (Actual)	FY 2024 (Actual)	FY 2025 (Revised Est.)
\$28.9 billion	\$27.9 billion	\$27.6 billion

Note: transfer of reserve funds to the GRF for the expanded sales tax holiday is not included in the FY 2025 total.

The main factor leading to the downward revision is the personal income tax estimate. FY 2025 personal income tax estimates were reduced by \$681.3 million (6.5%) from the original estimate following significant underperformance in FY 2024 beyond the expected impact of the rate reduction enacted by HB 33. Now that the employer withholding changes from the rate cut have been implemented, the tax is expected to resume growth in line with personal income (Table 2).

TABLE 2. STATE GRF PERSONAL INCOME TAX RECEIPTS

FY 2023 (Actual)	FY 2024 (Actual)	FY 2025 (Revised Est.)
\$10.80 billion	\$9.52 billion	\$9.77 billion

The FY 2025 sales and use tax estimate was lowered by \$321.4 million (2.4%) to \$13.28 billion, leaving the total about \$400 million below that of FY 2024 (Table 3). Investment earnings were revised upward by \$125 million (83%) and the foreign insurance tax estimate was increased by \$59 million (16.4%). The latter was offset by a downward revision in cigarette and tobacco taxes of \$63.2 million (8.2%). Cigarette and tobacco taxes generally decline each year. This tax totaled \$750.4 million in FY 2024, but is expected to receive just \$703.5 million in FY 2025.

TABLE 3. STATE GRF SALES AND USE TAX RECEIPTS (AUTO AND NON-AUTO)

FY 2023 (Actual)	FY 2024 (Actual)	FY 2025 (Revised Est.)
\$13.48 billion	\$13.70 billion	\$13.28 billion

Note: transfer of reserve funds to the GRF for the expanded sales tax holiday is not included in the FY 2025 total.

This estimate may turn out to be too conservative given that the expanded sales tax holiday did not reduce non-auto sales tax revenues from August sales much as expected. Vendors reported these revenues to the tax department in September (Table 4). Any gains to the GRF, however, will be temporary because OBM will reduce the expected level of reimbursement made from the \$750 million special fund set aside for this purpose. Revenues from the September accounting period will be distributed to counties in November along with reimbursement funds. Resources remaining in the reserve fund will be available for reimbursements for losses resulting from future sales tax holidays.

TABLE 4. STATE GRF NON-AUTO SALES TAX RECEIPTS IN SEPTEMBER (MILLIONS)

September 2023 (Actual)	September 2024 (Est.)	September 2024 (Actual)
\$945.4	\$249.3	\$815.0

FEATURE

STATE OF THE COUNTY ADDRESSES: A VISION FOR GROWTH AND COMMUNITY

Across Ohio, counties are stepping forward with bold visions for the future, as shared in recent State of the County addresses. County leaders outlined plans to foster economic growth, improve infrastructure, and enhance public services—all aimed at creating stronger, more resilient communities. Key themes across these individual county events include a commitment to progress, collaboration, and furthering the well-being of their residents.



Delaware County's State of the County event focused on "Smart Growth: From Policy to Action" at Delaware County's state of the county event. TOP: Delaware County Commissioner Jeff Benton, Gary Merrell, Delaware County Commissioner, Barb Lewis, Delaware County Commissioner
BOTTOM: Delaware County Deputy Administrator Dawn Huston, CCAO Assistant Director John Leutz, Delaware County Job and Family Services Director Bob Anderson, CCAO Boards' Liaison and Events Manager Robin Garrett

Find videos, presentations and more from the 2024 Delaware County State of the County Address [here](#).

FAIRFIELD COUNTY



Fairfield County Commissioners Dave Levacy, Steve Davis and Jeff Fix spoke at their State of the County Address in September. They stressed the importance of support and engagement from the community to help drive their vision forward during this time of growth.

Watch the Fairfield County 2024 State of the County Address live stream video [here](#).

FRANKLIN COUNTY



Franklin County Commissioners hosted their annual State of the County address and highlighted key projects, programs and services that contributed to the well-being and prosperity of Franklin County residents.

TOP: Franklin County Commissioners John O'Grady, Erica Crawley and Kevin Boyce

BOTTOM: CCAO Outreach & Member Engagement Manager Rachel Reedy, CCAO Executive Director Cheryl Subler with Darnita Bradley, Senior Manager, Local Government Affairs & Engagement at JobsOhio.

Read the 2024 Franklin County State of the County Report [here](#). Watch the Franklin County 2024 State of the County Luncheon Program live stream video [here](#).

MIAMI COUNTY



The Miami County Commissioners shared accomplishments and plans for continued success in their 2024 State of Miami County address. Pictured: CEBCO Managing Director Mike Kindell, Miami County Commissioners Wade Westfall, Greg Simmons, and Ted Mercer, CCAO Managing Director of Policy Kyle Petty, CCAO Policy Analyst James Kennedy.

Read the Miami County State of the County presentation [here](#).

SUMMIT COUNTY



During her State of the County address, Summit County Executive Ilene Shapiro celebrated investments in infrastructure, high-speed connectivity, and community resources. Pictured: Shapiro with Cheryl Subler, Cuyahoga County Executive Chris Ronayne and Kyle Petty.

Read the 2024 Summit County State of the County Address materials [here](#). Watch the Summit County 2024 State of the County Program live stream video [here](#).

FEATURE

NORTHWEST OHIO COUNTIES INNOVATE TO IMPROVE CHILD WELFARE PLACEMENTS

by Rachel Reedy, Outreach & Member Engagement Manager



Across the state, counties struggle to find appropriate placement options for children in our child welfare system due to a statewide placement and treatment crisis. When children have complex needs, county public children services agencies (PCSAs) are often unable to safely place them in a traditional family foster home.

The result is more and more children living in congregate care – a residential facility with staff members who care for the children, rather than a family. These congregate care placements are costly, and the state doesn't have enough skilled homes with the people with the right skillset caring for its most vulnerable. Many counties notice that the children entering congregate care are younger and younger these days. Even though slightly fewer children are in custody of PCSAs, counties face ballooning placement costs and need additional options.

In 2022, Sandusky County Job and Family Services (JFS) Director Melanie Allen decided to think outside the box and leverage local relationships to find a solution.

"What we wanted was to place more of our youth in family settings with skilled foster parents. We needed something in between family foster homes and congregate care. A home, a family setting – not staff," Allen said. "We needed treatment foster care and we didn't have enough of them in Ohio, and we surely did not have any to use in Sandusky County."

Allen approached her colleagues in surrounding Seneca and Wyandot counties to join forces and create the Northwest Treatment Foster Care Program. She knew that, even for some of these children with complex needs, a foster home with the right family that had training would be the best placement option. In 2024, Ottawa County joined the collaboration.

The goal of the partnership was to seek out local foster parents willing to be trained to care specifically for children with higher acuity needs. The county children services agencies provide the training as well as additional agency support.

The JFS agencies partnered with their local Mental Health and Recovery Services Boards to fund the program. Even though foster parents in a treatment foster home are



Executive Director of MHR SB Mircea Handru, Ottawa County Director Stephanie Kowal, Sandusky County Director Melanie Allen, Ottawa County Supervisor Janine Sanders, Seneca County Director Kathy Oliver, Wyandot County Supervisor Megan Rowe, Wyandot County Director Jason Fagan, Treatment Foster Care Supervisor Jenni Zaika, Treatment Foster Care Worker Melissa Menjarez, and Sandusky County Asst. Director Casey Morrow.

compensated at a higher per diem rate than a traditional foster home, a treatment foster placement can cost one-third to one-fifth of a congregate care placement.

The group licensed its first treatment foster home in November 2022. They find willing foster families during the inquiry process and evaluate their personal and professional experiences, as well as their background to

determine if they would be a good fit for the program. So far, there have been immense benefits to the counties in the pilot.

“Our treatment foster homes are situated closer to our counties and saves our caseworkers time from driving all over Ohio for visits. This also makes it easier for biological families to visit the youth,” Allen explained. “And it is better for youth to stay in their same or similar communities and, if possible, with the same service providers.”

This continuity is often lost when placing in congregate care, which frequently requires a child to be placed several counties away, or even out of state. Another benefit the counties are seeing: siblings

who enter custody are able to stay together when one requires higher acuity care and the other does not. In a treatment foster home, the family is able to accept placement of all siblings.

Governor Mike DeWine lifted up the great work in Northwest Ohio during his 2024 State of the State address and announced an expansion of the work to more counties involved. Initially, it was anticipated that around five more collaborations could be added to the pilot program. After seeing the immense interest statewide, 30 additional counties are implementing treatment foster homes. Wood

County became the fifth county to join the Northwest Treatment Foster Care program in September of 2024.

The Northwest Treatment Foster Care Program now has ten treatment foster homes. In the first year, it is estimated the counties saved at least half a million dollars in placement costs. That cost savings doesn't include the hours and miles of travel county caseworkers who are already stretched thin. Their efforts were awarded the Child and Family Advocate of the Year Award by the Public Children Services Association of Ohio this summer.

“Most importantly, we have moved the needle in trauma reduction by placing children in a family setting with an option for high acuity needs youth to stay with their siblings,” Allen said. “That is immeasurable and I cannot quantify it in terms of the value of giving these kids a fighting chance.”

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FEATURE

GUERNSEY COUNTY'S COURTHOUSE LIGHTS UP THE NIGHT FOR WHAT HAS BECOME A REGIONAL HOLIDAY TRADITION

by Dave Wilson, Guernsey County Commissioner



The Guernsey County Courthouse's holiday lights blink, flash, pulse and chase in perfect synchronization with a 90-minute soundtrack of seasonal favorites from November 1st through New Year's Day.

By day, Guernsey County's historic, 143-year-old courthouse is much like any other in the Buckeye State, housing our Common Pleas, Probate and Juvenile Courts; our Clerk of Courts; and our Adult and Juvenile Probation offices.

But, by night, from now through the New Year's holiday, our courthouse is bathed in bright, colorful lights that flash, chase, and even sing in perfect synchronization to a pair of tailor-made, seasonal, musical soundtracks.

Now in its 18th year, the Guernsey County Courthouse Holiday Light Show has become a treasured Guernsey County tradition. The show began thanks to the vision and generosity of Cambridge businessman Grant Hafley, who, when the show began, was the owner of AVC Communications in Cambridge which, at the time, was a

group of five radio stations.

Full disclosure: before taking office as a Guernsey County Commissioner, I served as AVC's Operations Manager for 32 years and was the owner of what is now the broadcast group's sixth radio station, WBK-FM, providing me with a front row seat to see the light show take shape.

Nineteen years ago, light displays synchronized to music were something very new and considered "cutting edge" technology. Having an electronic engineering background and a love of technology, Hafley wanted to see this new technology displayed on our Guernsey County Courthouse.

He met with the Board of Commissioners holding office at that time and, upon receiving their green light, invested \$50,000 out of his own pocket to get things started. With that, the Guernsey County Courthouse Holiday Light Show was off and running.

The courthouse was outlined with programmable white rope lighting and colorful LED floodlights bathed the structure in a seemingly infinite number of colors. The front windows were filled with animated displays of colorful miniature lamps, each window with a separate theme; and powerful speakers were put in place.

Practically from the outset, the shows have been programmed by Joel Losego, who assumed ownership of AVC in 2014. Never satisfied with the status quo, Hafley insisted that something new should be added to the light show each year and Losego has kept that tradition alive.



A life-like Father Christmas, part of Downtown Cambridge's Dickens Victorian Village, "oversees" the courthouse square activities each year, bearing a strong resemblance to The Guernsey County Courthouse Light Show's creator, Grant Hafley.

Over the years, Losego has overseen the addition of programmable, motorized spotlights; a variety of lighted, animated displays; laser projections on an adjacent bank building; an animated Christmas Tree Quartet that "lip syncs" to holiday favorites by Straight No Chaser, Pentatonix and others; an animated elf named Ellwood (Named after the former judge!) that is the show's emcee; and much more. Fun fact: Ellwood was named after our former Common Pleas Judge, the Hon. David A. Ellwood, who retired after 30 years on the bench!

Losego invests a tremendous amount of time programming hundreds of circuits, each to the tenth of a second, to assure the lights will be in perfect synchronization with the show's music. It can take around 40 hours of programming to synchronize lighting with a mere ten-minutes of music. Considering that the light show lasts 90 minutes before it repeats, that adds-up to a tremendous amount of time.

This year's new addition is a huge 26-foot pixel tree packed with 6,500 programmable pixels and perched atop the courthouse's front porch roof.

The spectacle of sight and sound was – and continues to be – the perfect complement to Cambridge's Dickens Victorian Village, a series of Victorian-era vignettes set-up along both sides of Cambridge's main drag, Wheeling Avenue. The two attractions combine to be one huge tourism draw with dozens of escorted motorcoach tours rolling into Downtown Cambridge throughout November and December.

While the Christmas version of the Guernsey County Courthouse Holiday Light Show begins November 1st, it is now preceded by a Halloween light show that has

become an incredible hit! The show is anchored by a quartet of lighted, animated Halloween characters lip syncing to classics like The Monster Mash and Thriller, among others.

Our county's exceptional Maintenance Department, consisting of Department Head Todd Carpenter, Eric Robertson and Jessie Tuck, does an amazing job alongside folks from AVC in getting the show put together each year. To them, it's more than just lights and hard work. In fact, during opening night of the Halloween show and on Halloween night itself, the trio makes a special appearance dressed like their favorite horror flick favorites, including Michael Myers from the Halloween films; Freddy Krueger from A Nightmare on Elm Street; and Pennywise from It. They look incredibly authentic but, while scary, the crowd – especially the kids – loves them as they pose for countless selfies!

The shows are mostly funded through donations and the generosity of AVC Communications. As Commissioners, we cover the cost of overtime for the Maintenance crew as well as lift rental and the power to run the show.



TOP: A quartet of comical characters lip-sync to Halloween favorites during October light shows. BOTTOM: Commissioner Dave Wilson (right) strikes a pose with the county's ghoulishly costumed maintenance crew.

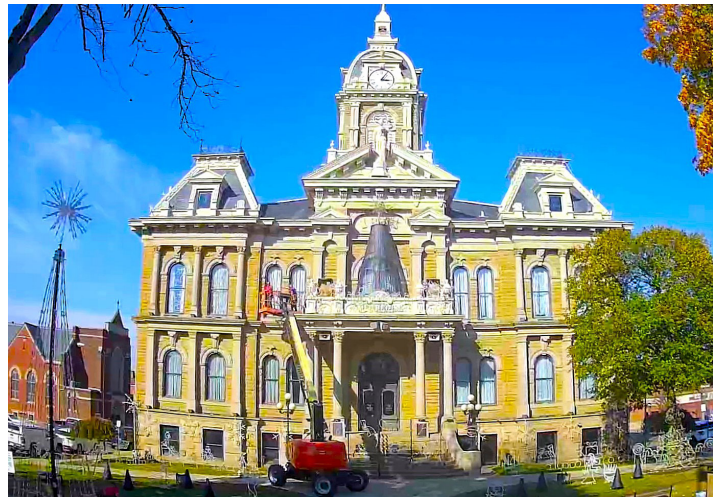


THE NEW STAR OF THE SHOW: A big, bold 26-foot pixel tree with 6,500 programmable pixels is the newest addition this year, providing a new level of digital animation. Although difficult to see in the light of day, if you look closely, you can see the image of a snowman.

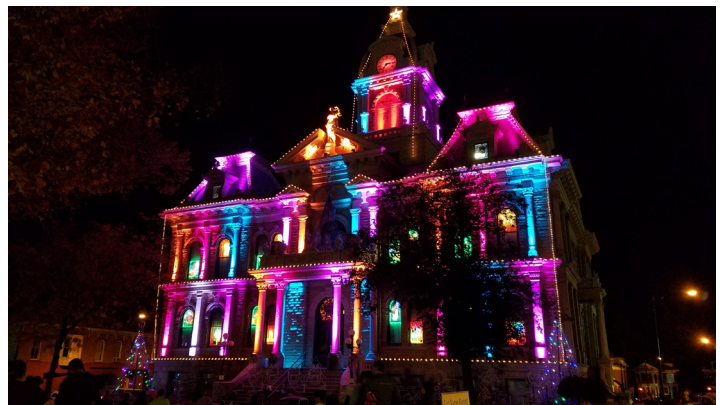
I think it's a great example of a private-public partnership, especially when you see what the spectacle means to families; when you see the motorcoaches cruising through our downtown; and when you see sidewalk traffic, street vendors and busy storefronts.

Sound like fun? It is fun! And, with Cambridge sitting at the intersection of Interstates 70 and 77, it's a quick, easy drive. So consider this to be an invitation to come start a new holiday tradition for your family and, to paraphrase Tom Bodett: "We'll leave the lights on for you!"

For more on the Guernsey County Courthouse Holiday Light Show, including video, visit <https://yourradioplace.com/lightshow/>.



A TALL ORDER
A view from a lift provides a better perspective of the effort necessary to decorate the courthouse - literally - from top to bottom



The Guernsey County Courthouse Holiday Light Show is best described as a kaleidoscope of color, with every hue imaginable woven throughout the show's 90-minute cycle. Musically, the show features a variety of holiday tunes from traditional favorites to contemporary artists like Trans-Siberian Orchestra and Mannheim Steamroller.



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GUEST COLUMN

OHIO DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE SUPPORTS FARMERS IMPACTED BY HISTORIC DROUGHT

by Jessi Starkey, Multimedia Communications Specialist, Ohio Department of Agriculture

As an earlier than usual harvest season continues in Ohio, many farmers are experiencing a period of uncertainty while dealing with extreme drought conditions. Crops yields are low, and many farming families are wondering how this historic drought will continue to affect them long-term.

"When our farmers are hurting, we all hurt with them," said Ohio Department of Agriculture Director Brian Baldrige. "Agriculture touches every part of our lives from the breakfast we eat in the morning to the fuel we put in our cars to get to work. Ohio farmers keep our nation fed and thriving every day. When they are struggling, we all feel that impact."

According to the USDA Farm Service Agency and the U.S. Drought Monitor, 42 counties have received an emergency declaration.

"Impacts across the south and southeast parts of Ohio are extensive," said Director Baldrige. "Pasture conditions are extremely dry, producers are feeding winter storage hay to livestock and searching for alternatives. Creeks are dry, ponds are low, and corn and soybeans crops are damaged."

While the Ohio Department of Agriculture (ODA) closely monitors drought conditions, Director Baldrige and ODA staff continue to talk with farmers and local Soil and Water Conservation Districts in impacted counties. ODA's primary role during drought is to assess impacts and to connect farmers to resources and assistance. In addition to county visits, virtual meetings, and the creation of a drought resource page and hay directory on ODA's website, Director Baldrige sent a letter to U.S. Secretary



Ohio Department of Agriculture Director Brian Baldrige speaks to a group in Monroe county.

of Agriculture Tom Vilsack, asking for additional flexibility for emergency haying.

"People may think a drought only impacts farms with crops, but this also affects our livestock farmers," said Director Baldrige. "If there is not enough rain, pasture and hay growth stops, causing shortages of feed to care for livestock. In some areas of the state, there are major shortages of hay available to feed livestock. Many farmers are having to buy hay for their farm from other areas."

As a seventh-generation farmer himself, Director Baldrige understands the stressors that come with a job in agriculture, especially when the weather doesn't cooperate. He has continued to ask the farming community to check on one another.



Ohio Department of Agriculture Director Brian Baldrige speaks to a group in Noble county.

Farmers are working through the stress the best they can. However, we know mental health needs to be at the center of this conversation,” said Director Baldrige. “We need to check in on our neighboring farms, share concerns and strategies and pull together as an agriculture community.”

As food and agriculture is Ohio’s number one industry, contributing \$124 billion to the state’s economy each year, it is critical we focus on farmers’ mental wellbeing. The newly established Ohio Agricultural Mental Health Alliance (OAMHA) focuses on mental health in agriculture. Recently released survey results outline mental health challenges in the agricultural community. The most common stressors that caused moderate to severe stress were the cost of farm inputs, market prices for crops and livestock, and the cost of farmland.

ODA’s Got Your Back campaign also offers information and resources for the farming community.

Any farming operation located in drought impacted counties should contact their local USDA Farm Service Agency to learn more about emergency loans and other assistance programs available for producers who are suffering losses.

Farmers are also encouraged to visit ODA’s drought resource page and hay directory at agri.ohio.gov/drought.

GUEST COLUMN

EXTENSION RESPONDS TO OHIO’S HISTORIC DROUGHT: MOBILIZING RESOURCES FOR FARMERS FACING UNPRECEDENTED CHALLENGES

by Ellen Essman, Senior Research Associate,
Government Affairs, OSU Extension

Nearly every Ohio community has felt the effects of the 2024 drought. Before conditions officially deteriorated, Ohio State University Extension was actively monitoring rainfall, temperatures, humidity, and precipitation outlooks—key factors in determining official drought declarations.

While predicting drought declarations is somewhat straightforward, responding to drought conditions presents challenges. Thanks to the expertise of an active statewide team, led by Aaron Wilson, OSU Extension was able to provide valuable resources and support to agricultural producers facing uncertainty during this weather crisis.

EXTENSION’S RESPONSE

Wilson and his team worked diligently to update online resources, sharing summaries of the drought’s impact across various aspects of life—from forests and fire to pastures and landscapes—throughout the state. They were also proactive and reactive with speaking engagements, creating social media content, and responding to media requests.

Because Extension has a presence in all of Ohio’s 88 counties, our professionals were able to address the unique drought-related needs of each community. Local teams played a crucial role in our statewide response, sharing their observations, the questions posed by farmers, and the information needs they identified. Extension professionals hosted multiple in-services to educate our faculty and staff, who then shared drought-related information in the communities they serve.

One of the most prominent ways the team responded was to create a web presence for drought information and resources. A resource page was created in early June and continues to be updated at least once a week with the most current U.S. Drought Monitor map, observed conditions around the state, and links to internal and external resources for agricultural producers. The webpage has captured more than 18,000 clicks, views, and downloads since its launch.

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FEATURE

SHAPING OHIO'S CRIMINAL JUSTICE FUTURE: TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATIONS AND THEIR IMPACT ON COUNTIES

by Evelyn Stratton, Project Director, Stepping Up Ohio

Criminal justice and public safety spending often account for over 60% of a county's budget. Recently, several groups have released reports containing various recommendations that have the potential to impact county criminal justice and public safety operations.

In April of 2023, Ohio Supreme Court Chief Justice Sharon Kennedy convened [The Supreme Court of Ohio Reentry Task Force](#) that was charged with studying the challenges surrounding reentry after incarceration. The Task Force was comprised of representatives from the Ohio Departments of rehabilitation and correction, education and workforce, Medicaid, job and family services, development, and public safety. The Task Force also heard various input from defense attorneys, prosecutors, and officials from law enforcement, legal aid organizations, education, and other community groups.

The Task Force made numerous recommendations impacting the judicial and executive branches of government. However, there is a particular focus on "Rapid Reentry" from jails that focus on housing, treatment, work, and many others that require the commissioner's involvement and support to effect the change. Ideally, these policy changes should result less people cycling through the county jail and allow them to successfully reenter the community.

Additionally, [The Ohio Attorney General Task Force on Criminal Justice and Mental Illness](#) recently released its Fiscal Year 2023 and 2024 Annual Report. The annual report provides updates on important issues related to criminal justice, aging, law enforcement, veterans courts, juvenile, etc. Overall, the Task Force consists of 15 different committees, and commissioners and their staff are encouraged to participate in any of these committees. The task force is a very active group and often serves as the action arm for Stepping Up.

Governor DeWine recently convened the [Ohio Juvenile Justice Working Group](#) in response to some issues arising at Ohio Department of Youth Services (DYS) facilities and increased juvenile crime in the community. The majority of the Working Group's focus is on youth who commit violent acts in overcrowded and understaffed state and county facilities and the chronic problem of trying to hire and retain staff. Some of the Working Group's recommendations have

a direct impact on counties by recommending funding be provided to county prosecutor's offices for counties that contain a state DYS facility for the prosecution of incidents that occur in those facilities. Furthermore, the Working Group recommends that the minimum commitment age to DYS be increased from 10 years old to 14 years old, which could result in more juveniles being retained in the county detention center or other county facility.

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GUEST COLUMN

WAYNE COUNTY COMMISSIONERS REVISIT THEIR ROOTS AT THE WAYNE COUNTY SCHOOLS CAREER CENTER

by Dan Starcher, Public Communications Coordinator, Wayne County

Wayne County Commissioners Jonathan Hofstetter and Dave McMillen have close ties to the Wayne County Schools Career Center (WCSCC) and recently toured the facility.

Hofstetter attended the career center and graduated from the Ag Mechanics and Power Technologies program. He then attended the University of Northwestern Ohio and graduated after completing the Automotive and Diesel Tech program. On the other hand, McMillen taught Building Trades at the Ashland County-West Holmes Career Center before becoming a commissioner.

"In today's job market, being equipped with the right tools and skills is crucial for success; whether you are non-college-bound or seek higher education, students are prepared for the future," Hofstetter said. "Career centers are vital in preparing these young individuals for their professional journeys. My experience as a student here at the WCSCC was invaluable."

Career centers have emerged as critical hubs for empowering non-college-bound students in today's rapidly evolving economy. As traditional pathways to success are being redefined, these centers are essential in providing resources, guidance, and support tailored to young individuals who may not pursue a four-year degree.

Non-college-bound students include those who thrive in hands-on environments, those interested in vocational training, or those who are eager to enter the workforce after high school. These students often possess unique skills, such as creativity, technical aptitude, or entrepreneurial spirit, and they may be drawn to fields like skilled trades, technology, the arts, or service industries.

For Hofstetter, the father, the tour got personal. His

daughter, Jamie, is currently enrolled in the same Ag Mechanics and Power Technologies program he graduated from in 1998.

In every father-daughter relationship, a unique bond shapes the lives of both individuals. This connection is defined by shared experiences, lessons learned, and years of nurturing. Jamie's journey into a career in Ag mechanics is about honoring the family's lineage of hard work, resilience, and dedication.



Career Services Manager Sarah Morrow, Commissioner Jonathan Hofstetter, Director of Operations and Adult Education Lynn Moomaw, Automotive Technologies Instructor David Leatherman, and Commissioner Dave McMillen discuss some of the options and opportunities available to Wayne County Schools Career Center students.

"Seeing her explore a career field she is passionate about is extremely gratifying," the elder Hofstetter said. "As she steps into this career with a solid foundation from the Career Center, she carries with her not just skills and knowledge, but a special place in her father's heart as I watch her grow up in a trade I enjoyed."

Although Jamie decided on a career path early, a significant barrier for many young people is the lack of awareness about available careers and what they entail. Students may feel overwhelmed by the

number of career options available and unsure of the realistic and achievable paths. Career centers provide personalized counseling sessions, helping students assess their strengths and aspirations. This tailored approach allows individuals to make informed decisions about their futures.

Career center instructors provide invaluable guidance and support to young individuals who feel uncertain about their future or overwhelmed by the myriad of options available. With their wealth of knowledge, teachers foster students' sense of belonging and build confidence as they navigate their career journeys.

"Seeing students find a career path where they thrive was



Jamie Hofstetter and her father, Wayne County Commissioner Jonathan Hofstetter, pose for a photo from the Wayne County Schools Career Center staff. Jamie is following in her father's footsteps and is currently enrolled in the same program, Ag Mechanics and Power Technologies, from which he graduated in 1998.

very rewarding as an instructor," McMillen said. "Career centers equip students with the knowledge to explore a variety of jobs that align with their interests and goals."

Career centers can develop relevant programs that align with the job market's demands by collaborating with local businesses, industry leaders, and educational institutions.

The WCSCC doesn't just confer a certification; many students continue their education at a two- or four-year institution, as in Hofstetter's case. In some instances, students may gain college credit from their two-year career-technical degree and seamlessly transition into a post-secondary program.

"When instructors take on the role of mentors, they provide a perspective beyond textbook knowledge," he said. "They share their experiences, successes, and even failures, allowing students to see a realistic view of the professional world. This type of learning environment lets students get a first-hand look at what they will be doing in a particular career."

In addition to serving the needs of high school-age students, the WCSCC boasts a robust curriculum of programs for adult learners.

For a list of programs and additional information, visit <http://www.wayne-jvs.k12.oh.us>.

OSU Extension, continued from page 15

Extension collaborated with the Ohio Department of drought impacts and resources. Wilson continues to deliver drought and climate briefings at joint situational awareness meetings with the Ohio Emergency Management Agency and ODA. These meetings include most state agencies to ensure a coordinated response to drought conditions and effective communication with the Governor's Office and other officials.

MOVING FORWARD

It's important to note that the economic impact of the drought has yet to be fully assessed, leaving agricultural producers with challenging farm management decisions in the near term.

For instance, do farmers have enough hay, or can they secure sufficient supplies to sustain their animal herds through winter? Or will they need to sell off livestock?

As Ohio grapples with the enduring impacts of the 2024 drought, the collective efforts of Extension have proven invaluable in mobilizing resources and support for farmers facing unprecedented challenges. The proactive measures taken by Extension professionals, from real-time monitoring and information dissemination to community engagement and educational initiatives, have equipped agricultural producers with the tools they need to navigate this crisis.

Moving forward, it is essential that farmers continue to receive timely guidance and resources as they make critical decisions about their operations. The recent rainfall across southern Ohio associated with the remnants of Hurricane Helene, while offering temporary respite for some, has introduced new challenges that require ongoing adaptation and resilience. Drought is still ongoing for many areas of the state as well. As Ohio's agricultural community continues to share knowledge and strategies, the collaborative spirit demonstrated throughout this crisis will be vital for recovery and sustainability in the face of future uncertainties. By fostering a strong network of support, Ohio can work toward not only overcoming the current drought, but also building a more resilient agricultural system for years to come.

Visit the State Climate Office of Ohio for the most recent U.S. Drought Monitor map at go.osu.edu/drought. Additional drought resources and information can also be found at go.osu.edu/ohiodrought.



FEATURE

ADDRESSING THE HOMELESSNESS CRISIS IN BUTLER COUNTY: A CALL FOR COLLABORATION, AND SUSTAINABLE SOLUTIONS

by Cindy Carpenter, Butler County Commissioner

While homelessness has historically been an issue, the rise in individuals experiencing homelessness post-pandemic has created a crisis for Butler County communities that is no longer sustainable. The funding sources for mental health, law enforcement, social services, public health, and municipal systems that were never intended to serve the homeless population have been overburdened in their attempts to address the crisis.

The Butler County Homeless Workgroup came together as a grassroots organization to determine best practices for addressing this issue. Every service sector engaged with this vulnerable population is represented in the Butler County Homeless Workgroup. The current membership includes local elected officials, court and criminal justice officials, street outreach workers, homeless service providers, mental health and human services agency directors, emergency management experts, medical providers, department of development representatives, and individuals with experience living in homelessness.

This multi-agency, multi-jurisdictional workgroup studied model systems across the nation, met with Ohio Department of Development and Housing and Urban Development (HUD) representatives at state and federal levels, and thoroughly examined the components of Butler County's fractured homeless response system. This group found that in 1995, Butler County failed to organize and establish a local Continuum of Care as directed by HUD, resulting in its inclusion under the Balance of State Continuum of Care (BoSCoC), covering 80 rural counties. The BoSCoC, based in Columbus, Ohio, oversees Butler County's homeless priorities, strategic planning, and HUD funding allocations despite the county's urban characteristics. Further, the BoSCoC divides Ohio's rural counties into regions: Butler, Warren, and Clermont Counties form Region 14, managed administratively by the Warren County Metropolitan Housing Authority.

Comparative analysis of HUD funding among Ohio's urban entitlement counties versus Butler County reveals stark disparities. Butler County receives significantly less HUD funding, \$3.68 per capita, compared to other urban entitlement counties like Cuyahoga and Hamilton Counties, \$29.38 and \$30.46 per capita, respectively (HUD Exchange). This funding gap severely limits the scope and effectiveness of homeless services provided in Butler County. There are persistent delays in response from the BoSCoC to the needs of Butler County, including setting up meetings and data queries needed to assess and manage individuals experiencing homelessness in Butler County. This lack of support and information is a

significant barrier to developing a cohesive, strategic plan to move the county forward in managing this crisis.

The vision of Commissioner Cindy Carpenter, the leadership team, and members of the Butler County Homeless Workgroup is to develop a homeless response system in compliance with HUD guidelines that has county-wide reach, meets the needs of the local communities, and is appropriately and sustainably funded. Toward that goal, future strategies should focus on:

- **Local Empowerment:** Advocating for local control and representation within the CoC system to better align funding and services with Butler County's unique needs.
- **Enhanced Collaboration:** Strengthening partnerships between local agencies, government officials, and community stakeholders to enhance strategic planning and resource allocation.
- **Advocacy and Reform:** Engaging state and federal stakeholders to advocate for fairer funding allocations and policy reforms prioritizing Butler County's homeless population.

The Butler County Homeless Workgroup issued its findings in a Report and Recommendations presented to the Butler County Commissioners and other elected officials. The following steps were recommended objectives toward becoming an independent Continuum of Care and fulfilling the vision defined by the Butler County Homeless Workgroup.

Establish a Housing Solutions Board to provide strategic planning, financial development, monitoring, and oversight for a collaborative homeless response system. The second step is to move to an Independent Region in the BoSCoC. This would require an application from the Housing Solutions Board to be approved by HUD. The final recommendation is funding Housing Assistance Hubs. These one-stop-shop resource centers would be strategically located across the county to serve most individuals experiencing homelessness and provide housing retention services to moderate and low-income households.

As the number of individuals experiencing homelessness increases and the cost of housing continues to overburden families, it is imperative that we work together toward ensuring that all our residents are provided the most basic of rights: the right to safe, affordable housing.



GUEST COLUMN

OHIO LAND BANKS: TRANSFORMING COMMUNITIES

by Shawn Carvin, Executive Director, Ohio Land Bank Association

Ohio's land banks have evolved from their initial role as demolition-centric entities to become pivotal in community revitalization and housing development. This transformation reflects the changing needs of Ohio's communities and the adaptability of land banks in addressing these challenges.

Land banks emerged in Ohio as a response to decades of disinvestment followed by the foreclosure crisis, leading to widespread vacancy and blight in communities across Ohio. To help curb the plight that this was having in communities, Cuyahoga County Treasurer Jim Rokakis and Gus Frangos of Cleveland worked with the legislature to pass an expedited tax foreclosure process for vacant, abandoned properties in 2006. In 2009 with a large inventory of foreclosed properties that need to be addressed, Rokakis and Frangos worked to pass the legislation that enabled the creation of the Cuyahoga County Land Bank as a pilot program. Subsequent legislative amendments in 2010 and 2014 expanded eligibility, ultimately allowing all Ohio counties to create land banks. Today, Ohio has 70 county land banks, each tailored to address their local needs.

Initially, land banks primarily focused on demolition to stabilize neighborhoods. Several programs supported these efforts, such as the Moving Ohio Forward Program (2012), Neighborhood Initiative Program (2014) and the Building Demolition and Site Revitalization Program (2022 & 2024), all funding land banks and communities to address blighted, abandoned properties. These programs culminated in the demolition of over 35,000 properties across Ohio.

While actively stabilizing neighborhoods through demolition, land banks simultaneously continue to seek solutions to rebuild communities by addressing the physical conditions of neighborhoods. This includes renovating and developing new housing and commercial opportunities, assisting owner-occupied homes with repairs, and utilizing vacant land to increase the quality of life in neighborhoods.

Land banks are uniquely positioned to drive these housing initiatives due to their multifaceted approach and strategic advantages. Land banks take a comprehensive, county-wide view of housing needs, ensuring a balanced

approach across diverse communities. Their board composition, which includes local government officials and community representatives, provides crucial oversight and ensures that the organization's agenda aligns with local priorities. Land banks' ability to acquire properties through innovative, non-traditional methods expands their reach and impact. At the same time, their on-the-ground experience in neighborhood revitalization lends valuable expertise to housing initiatives. Furthermore, their collaborative approach, often partnering with CDCs, Habitat for Humanity, and other housing developers, allows them to tailor solutions to each community's needs. This combination of broad perspective, local accountability, acquisition flexibility, practical experience, and collaborative spirit makes land banks particularly effective in addressing Ohio's housing challenges.

In 2024, the Ohio legislature passed HB 33, which included funding for the Welcome Home Ohio Program. Land banks are designated as lead applicants for this funding, aimed at creating new affordable homeownership opportunities. This historic investment will bolster Ohio's housing stock and ensure housing availability for Ohioans and companies seeking to relocate to the state.

Land banks exemplify successful public-private partnerships. This is evident in the Welcome Home Ohio Program, among others, where land banks are leading the construction of over 300 homes, actively collaborating with public and private developers to ensure timely construction and availability of new housing.

As Ohio continues to face housing challenges, land banks have proven to be adaptable, innovative, and crucial partners in these efforts. Their evolution from demolition-focused entities to comprehensive neighborhood revitalization providers showcases their ability to meet the changing needs of Ohio's communities. With their county-wide approach, local oversight, and collaborative spirit, land banks are well-positioned to continue driving positive change in Ohio's housing landscape.



COUNSELOR'S CORNER

EMPLOYMENT LAW UPDATE

by Benjamin D. Humphrey, Associate, Fishel Downey Albrecht & Riepenhoff

The field of employment law is everchanging, with new regulations and rulings being made on a regular basis. For that reason, it is especially important to review new changes that impact both employers and their employees.

NEW PROTECTIONS FOR PREGNANT WORKERS UNDER THE PREGNANT WORKERS FAIRNESS ACT

The Pregnant Workers Fairness Act (PWFA) seeks to combat pregnant workers' overwhelming and isolating feelings through expanding the protections and accommodations available to pregnant workers. The PWFA does not replace any of the federal, state, or local laws that are more protective of workers affected by pregnancy, childbirth, or other related medical conditions, but rather seeks to expand existing protections by requiring employers to reasonably accommodate certain limitations, even if they do not rise to the level of a disability under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Below are things to consider in the workplace when addressing this new law.

WHO DOES THE PWFA PROTECT?

The PWFA protects employees with identified limitations related to pregnancy, childbirth, or related medical conditions. Employers who are covered by Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 are also covered employers for purposes of the PWFA. Non-pregnant/non-birthing partners and family members are not entitled to accommodations under the PWFA, but the non-retaliation provisions of the PWFA may apply to those who oppose unlawful practices.

WHAT ARE "REASONABLE ACCOMMODATIONS" UNDER THE PWFA?

"Reasonable Accommodations" are changes to the work environment or how job duties are performed that do not cause an employer undue hardship. Undue hardship means significant difficulty or expense for the operations of the employer. Some examples of reasonable accommodations under the PWFA include: the ability to sit and drink water, receiving closer parking spaces, having flexible hours, receiving appropriately sized uniforms and safety apparel, receiving additional break time to use the bathroom, eat and rest, take leave or time off to recover

from childbirth and be excused from strenuous activities and/or activities that involve exposure to compounds not safe for pregnancy.

Similar to the ADA, the PWFA requires an employer to engage in the interactive process with the employee to identify reasonable accommodations. Under the PWFA, employers must provide accommodations related to an employee's identified limitations unless it would cause an undue hardship on the employer's operations.

Employers cannot require an employee to take leave if they can provide another reasonable accommodation(s) that would allow the employee to keep working. Employers should ensure they do not retaliate against any employee who reports unlawful discrimination under the PWFA or participates in a PWFA proceeding. Lastly, employers cannot interfere with an employee's rights under the PWFA. Unnecessary delays in making reasonable accommodations may result in a violation of the PWFA.

OTHER LAWS THAT APPLY TO PREGNANT WORKERS

Other laws like Title VII, the ADA, the Pregnancy Discrimination Act, the Family Medical Leave Act, and The PUMP Act provide additional protections to pregnant workers. The PUMP Act was also enacted in 2023, and it broadens workplace protections to pump breast milk at work, such as requiring reasonable breaktime and space for breast-feeding employees. These protections extend for up to one year following the birth of a child.

Employers should review their policies and procedures to ensure that there are reporting mechanisms in place that allow employees to request accommodations under the PWFA.

RECENT CHANGES TO FLSA OVERTIME REQUIREMENTS

On April 23, 2024, the U.S. Department of Labor announced a final rule ("the Final Rule") which became effective on July 1, 2024. The Final Rule updates and revises the regulations issued under Section 13(a)(1) of the Fair Labor Standards Act by modifying the minimum salary level for executive, administrative, and professional employees and the total annual compensation threshold for highly compensated

employees to be exempt from overtime. The goal of this change is to address concerns regarding the current salary and compensation thresholds that were set in the 2019 rule, and to provide a timely update to the current levels.

Most significantly, the Final Rule increased the minimum salary level for overtime exempt employees on July 1, 2024. The minimum salary level is now \$844 per week (equivalent to \$43,888 per year), and the minimum earnings threshold for the highly compensated employees exemption is now set at \$132,964 per year. The Final Rule also provides for future updates to these levels, with the first increase occurring on January 1, 2025, and the subsequent increase happening on July 1, 2027, with updates every three years, based on available data and methodology.

Now is a good time for employers to review positions that are close to the new salary thresholds and either reclassify those employees or increase their compensation to meet the minimum salary level required to continue to qualify for the applicable overtime exemption.



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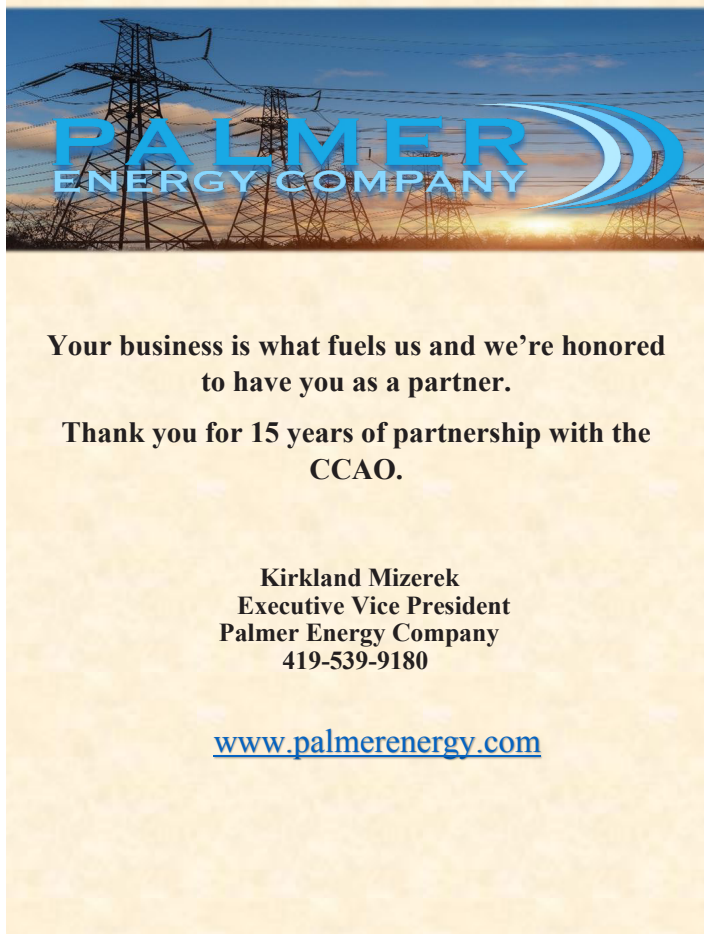
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For additional questions, contact Tony Sharrock at:
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VOICE OF COUNTY LEADERSHIP

JERRY LAFFIN, MERCER COUNTY COMMISSIONER

How long have you been a county commissioner?

I have been a commissioner for 44 years.

Can you tell me about yourself? What is your professional background?

I'm 85 years old, married & have 1 son, 2 daughters, 11 grandchildren, & 4 great grandchildren. I graduated from Celina High School in 1956. While in high school I was in FFA (Future Farmers of America). I participated in Parliamentary Procedure and Public Speaking. I received the State Farmer Degree. I was Ohio FFA Vice President in 1956. I learned many of my leadership skills while being active in the FFA. After High School I became involved in the Mercer County

Farm Bureau and Grange. I held the position of President. I was in the US Army from November 20, 1961 to November 21, 1963. I also worked at Karch Stone Quarry for 10 years. I have always been active in farming.

What other elected positions have you held? Why did you first run?

I have always liked working with people and serving my community, hoping to make the county a better place.

I first ran for Mercer County Clerk of Courts in 1976. My uncle, Dwight Laffin was going to retire after 32 years of service. He talked to me about running for his position. He said that farming has its ups & downs and he thought I could help myself if I got elected along with farming. I lost that election by 800 votes. In 1977 a Trustee in my Township was retiring and he ask me to run for his position. I got elected and took office January 1, 1978.

In 1980 I was President of the Mercer County Township & Clerks Association. During that time many of the Township Trustees talked to me about running for Commissioner. Also, many people from the county were encouraging me to run for commissioner. I got elected and took office January 2, 1981.

Why did you want to be a commissioner? What are you most proud of for having achieved in your time as commissioner?

I wanted to work with the County Engineer to update our roads & bridges in the County. With Grand Lake being in the County there was a need for a Sanitary Sewer System around the Lake to improve the quality of the lake water. I wanted to improve the Economic Growth in Mercer County. The amount of Sanitary Plants and Sewer Lines put in to improve water quality has shown that my time and effort towards Economic Growth has helped create employment in the county. Mercer County has been either the lowest or number two in unemployment for the last 8 or 9 years in the State of Ohio.

Laffin wins commission seat

Republican Jerry Laffin will take over a seat with the Mercer County Commissioners as the result of Tuesday's election, breaking the Democratic hold on the county office.

Laffin took 57.8 percent of the vote in downing three-term Democratic incumbent Ralph Klosterman. Laffin totaled 8,449 votes in Mercer County to 6,165 for Klosterman.

Laffin said he was "surprised at the margin. I got a big response in the southern part of the county where I needed it."

Laffin said his first task upon taking office would be to "get acquainted with the office to see what can be done where I can add input and leadership where needed."

Incumbent Democratic Sheriff E. Joseph Gilmore was the biggest winner in Tuesday's county election as he polled 85 percent of the vote in defeating Republican challenger Harold L. Green. Gilmore totaled 12,770 votes to 2,225 for Green.

In the only other race for county office, Democratic Mercer County Engineer James R. Longenecker was elected to the post he held after being appointed to fill the unexpired term of Ben Gephart.

Longenecker received 60 percent of the vote or 8,397 to 5,587 for Republican Dan A. Bennett.

All other candidates for county office ran unopposed. Democrat Walter Schmiesing was re-elected to a county commissioners post. Democrat Daniel Myers was elected prosecuting attorney, and Democrat James J. Highley was re-elected as clerk of common pleas court.

Other county Democrats who won re-election were Recorder Clarence H. Post and Treasurer Waite K. Fortener. Republican County Coroner Dr. Donald R. Fox was also unopposed for re-election.

Dean James was unopposed for election as judge of municipal court. Don L. Myers was also unopposed for election as Municipal Court judge.

JERRY D. LAFFIN **JAMES R. LONGENECKER** **E. JOSEPH GILMORE**

Mercer Co Chronicle - Nov. 6, 1980

Mercer County Chronicle newspaper clipping from 1980 when Laffin won his commission seat.



Laffin alongside CCAO Past President and Henry County Commissioner Glenn Miller receiving his Decades of Dedication Award for 40+ years of service at the 2023 CCAO/CEAO Winter Conference

What has been the biggest challenge you've dealt with as a county commissioner?

In 1972 the Ohio EPA put a building ban on one mile of the Lake. Working with the Ohio EPA and the residents in that area to build a Treatment Plant and Sewer Line was a challenge. A plan had to be developed that met federal guidelines. It was necessary to have public hearings with the residents in the effected area who were going to be paying for the development. All of this was required in order to upgrade their homes or build new ones. There was kick back against the plan, however, we did get it approved and the treatment plant was put into operation in December of 1986.

What do you find are the most successful methods for reaching out to the residents of your county to communicate what your office is doing and why it's doing it?

The best ways to be successful in keeping in touch with the citizens of the county are: listening to the people, using the newspaper and radio. Also, attend meetings where you can represent the county.

What was the biggest surprise or adjustment after taking office?

The departments that the commissioners are in charge of are the Dog Warden, Mercer County Home, Job & Family Services, Child Enforcement Agency, Sanitary Sewer Plants, EMA-EMS, and Economic Development. I must remember that I was working with two other commissioners and we had to agree so action could happen.

One of the primary responsibilities of a commissioner is to develop a balanced budget and provide adequate resources to deliver county services. What has been one of the biggest challenges in that area?

As commissioners we have to develop a balanced budget, but we also have to provide adequate resources for the county. It was our responsibility to provide the funding needed for the other Elected Officials. The biggest challenge when working with the budget, was during the years the economy was in recession. We always liked to not spend any more each year than we took in as income.

What advice do you have for our new members?

Once you have been elected commissioner and take office, you are elected to serve all citizens of the county, not just those who voted for you. If you have an axe to grind leave it at the door. Try to be prepared to take on the responsibility in a common sense way. You are going to find this job is larger than you thought. You must remember that you are working with two other commissioners to operate the county and it takes two votes to pass or fail a decision.

There will be times that you will need to think thoroughly to come to an agreement. It will take the first term to understand how the county operates. You will also be learning after many years of service. Be honest and trust worthy to the people of the county.

Could you discuss your involvement with CCAO as well as the benefits of being an active member?

We have always been members of CCAO. We have served on different CCAO Committees. We encourage other Elected Officials to be involved in their Association.

CCAO congratulates Commissioner Laffin on his upcoming retirement after 44 years of dedicated service to Mercer County!



CEBCO NEWS

CLERMONT COUNTY JOINS CEBCO: EXPANSION AND KEY UPDATES

by Mike Kindell, CEBCO Managing Director



CEBCO ADDS CLERMONT COUNTY

Clermont County has agreed to join CEBCO, effective January 1, 2025. With this addition, CEBCO will grow to 49 counties serving approximately 16,700 employees and nearly 37,000 members. CEBCO remains Anthem Blue Cross and Blue Shield's largest employer group in Ohio. In addition, Butler County added our dental benefit and Darke County added our vision benefit for 2025.

2025 RENEWAL UPDATE

CEBCO renewed all of our current 48 counties for 2025, which included 15 counties renewing their 3-year participation agreements. For 2025, Aon, our actuary, forecast 2025 Trend as 9%, 7.9% for Medical and 13.1% for Rx. The CEBCO Board of Directors set the renewal minimum increase at 0% and the renewal maximum increase at 18%. The overall 2025 average renewal increase for 2025 was 7.6%, again bettering expected trend.

The CEBCO Board also decided that effective January 1, 2025, CEBCO will no longer cover Weight Loss GLP-1 medications (Wegovy, Saxenda, and Zepbound). In the past year, our spend for these three medications has grown by more than 183% and accounts for nearly \$6 million in spend. A *Program Alert* was sent to all CEBCO counties notifying them of the change and individual letters for impacted members will be mailed approximately November 1.

NEW CEBCO BOARD DIRECTOR

At our July Board Meeting, Commissioner Steve Robinson, Union County, was appointed to fill the unexpired seat previously held by Tony Bornhorst (Shelby County), who retired from his commissioner seat at the end of June. While we will miss Tony's experience and expertise, Steve brings a wealth of knowledge to our board, as he has held numerous positions in local, state, and national capacities, including as past National President of Soil and Water Conservation Districts.

In preparation for future board vacancies, the Board extended invitations to Commissioners Matt Aultman (Darke County) and Bart Westfall (Williams County) to attend board meetings so that they could observe and

hear discussion around multiple topics affecting the CEBCO members.

CEBCO STOP LOSS

Currently, each county within CEBCO has a stop loss point based on the number of employees covered on the medical plan. Above the county stop loss point, the CEBCO pool covers claims up to \$1 million, after which CEBCO purchases Stop Loss. For 2025, the Board of Directors agreed to renew with Anthem Blue Cross and Blue Shield at our current rate. This is an important protection for large claims which may occur.

CEBCO WELLNESS PROGRAM

The 2023 – 2024 Wellness Program Year ended on August 14. Though we encountered challenges at the beginning of the year, our eligible members did a fantastic job in using the program, CEBCO Rewards 200. From CEBCO's 2023 medical claims data, 74% of the CEBCO population visited a Primary Care Physician (PCP) at an average claims cost of \$290 PMPM (per member per month). CEBCO participants that do not visit a PCP, cost on average, \$415 PMPM.

As we await the final numbers, we know that nearly 20,000 members earned over \$1.6 million in incentives. This includes over 12,000 wellness exams, which is the primary goal of the program. Each county has their own wellness coordinator/team and we are thankful for them carrying the message to the employees and spouses that have access to the wellness program.

NEW CEBCO BENEFIT SPECIALIST

We are pleased that Cindi Herring joined the CEBCO staff in September. Cindi has over 25 years of experience in employee benefits and property and liability insurance. Cindi spent that last twenty-seven years serving Delaware County.

Cindi will be replacing Wendy Dillingham, who will retire at the end of 2024. Wendy has spent the last 18 years with CEBCO and will be missed by the entire CCAO/CEBCO organization and the counties that she has served. We wish her health and happiness in her upcoming retirement.



CORSA NEWS

CORSA'S 2024 CYBER SECURITY AND LAW ENFORCEMENT REIMBURSEMENTS

by Ali Redmond, CORSA Membership Services Manager and Frank Hatfield, CORSA Assistant Director

Cyber-attacks continue to increase and CORSA is committed to providing ongoing risk management services to help members. For 2024 CORSA allotted \$465,000 (\$5,500 maximum per member) to reimburse members for cybersecurity expenditures during calendar year 2024.

CORSA will reimburse up to \$5,500 for cybersecurity project, program, or acquisition designed to mitigate or eliminate cyber/computer property/causality risk including, but not limited to: anti-phishing, MFA/Dual factor authentication, HG Consulting scans/assessment, GPS Vehicle Monitoring, Net Diligence, ACH, Positive Pay, firewall upgrade; hardware upgrade; email upgrade; IT certifications.

Also, available to our members are several online cybersecurity training courses through CORSA University and/or template cybersecurity policies and protocols accessible at: www.corsa.org.

For more information, please contact Frank Hatfield, CORSA Assistant Director at (614) 560-1474 or fhatfield@ccao.org.

LAW ENFORCEMENT REIMBURSEMENTS

CORSA is once again proud to announce the 2024 Law Enforcement and Corrections Reimbursement Program. These reimbursements have proven in the past to help agencies build strong personnel rosters, equip those personnel with the right tools, and continue to help agencies remain ahead of the demanding expectations of the people you serve.

Please see the included list of reimbursements below. There are limited funds available so reimbursements will be awarded on a first come, first serve basis. CORSA will process the requests as quickly as possible and distribute the reimbursements in a timely manner. Deadline for submission is January 3, 2025.

PERSONNEL

- Pre-employment Polygraph and/or Psychological Evaluations (on condition of employment upon a satisfactory evaluation). Full cost is reimbursable.

EQUIPMENT

- Jail Body Scanner (entirely new machine, first time purchase): up to \$10,000 each reimbursement.
- Jail Body Scanner Update (previously purchased machine was fully upgraded by original manufacturer with recommended hardware and software that optimizes detection, imagery, and data collection. This upgrade has been described as "gutting the original and replacing everything except the shell."): Current costs of the upgrade appear to be \$65,000+. Up to \$5,000 each reimbursement.
- Cameras: body worn cameras, in-car dash cameras, jail surveillance cameras and related data storage. Each request capped at \$7,500 maximum per member.
- Cameras: back up / crash avoidance on vehicles; factory installed or aftermarket. Up to \$325 per camera.
- Guard1 The Pipe and Guardian RFID tracking systems for jails. Three grants at \$2,000 each.
- Jail Booking Software: Five grants @ \$2,000 each.

For more information, please contact Ken Hilty at (614) 357-6966 (khilty@ccao.org) or Steve Flory at (614) 981-3414 (sflory@ccao.org).





CCAOSC NEWS

CCAOSC LAUNCHES PARTNERSHIP WITH AMAZON BUSINESS



by Steve Caraway, OCERP Administrator and Special Projects Manager

Last month, the County Commissioners Association of Ohio Service Corporation announced a new partnership with Amazon Business, bringing a host of exclusive benefits to all county offices and departments in Ohio. This collaboration, the first of its kind with county governments nationally, will streamline the procurement process, enhance cost savings and provide unparalleled convenience for county operations.

The key benefits of the program are:

Free Business Prime Membership, courtesy of CCAO:

- All participating county offices and departments will receive a complimentary Business Prime membership (up to 100 users), valued at \$1,299. This membership offers a range of benefits, including fast, free shipping on eligible items and access to exclusive deals and discounts.

Pre-Approved Line of Credit:

- Participants will have access to a pre-approved line of credit of \$10,000 or more, with the option to pay by invoice. This feature simplifies the purchasing process and helps manage cash flow more effectively.

Significant Discounts on Essential Products

The program offers substantial savings on a wide range of products:

- 25% off 4,500+ office products: From paper and pens to office furniture, county offices can enjoy significant discounts on essential supplies.
- 25% off 4,000+ MRO (Maintenance, Repair, Operations) products: Ensure your facilities are well-maintained with discounted prices on maintenance and repair items.
- 25% off 2,200+ IT products: Upgrade your technology infrastructure with savings on computers, peripherals, and other IT essentials.

With the addition of this service, the CCAO Service Corporation continues to have a laser focus on providing resources and cost saving measures to counties.

To learn more about this exciting new program for Ohio Counties or to join the program, contact Steve Karlberg at karlbers@amazon.com or CCAO Operations Manager Tim Hoverman at thoverman@ccao.org



CCAO's Caraway Reappointed to NAGDCA Committee

OCERP Administrator Steve Caraway has been reappointed to the legislative committee for the National Association of Government Defined Contribution Administrators. NAGDCA is the voice of state and local public plan sponsors at the federal level, and the NAGDCA Legislative Committee is responsible for ensuring the message reflects the needs of members across the United States. Each year the committee works in concert with the Government Affairs Director to develop NAGDCA's Legislative Priorities. The priorities are then presented annually to regulators, members of Congress, and their staff, so that the voice of even the smallest member reaches key decision-makers to drive change.

The Ohio County Employee Retirement Plan is active in all 88 counties has over 20,000 participants across the state and with our recordkeeper and fiduciary consultant manage nearly \$1B in retirement assets for Ohio's hardworking county employees and elected officials. In 2025, OCERP will celebrate four decades of preparing our employees for the future they imagine.



OHIO COUNTY EMPLOYEES RETIREMENT PLAN

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To learn more about OCERP, to meet with a licensed Retirement Plan Advisor or to enroll, visit: OCERP457.com.



CCAO R&E NEWS

CCAO R&E MAKES A DIFFERENCE WITH 2ND ANNUAL GOLF OUTING AND SCHOLARSHIPS



COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
ASSOCIATION OF OHIO
RESEARCH & EDUCATIONAL
FOUNDATION

by Steve Caraway, OCERP Administrator and Special Projects Manager



2024 County Classic Champions Jimmy Wolf and David Salisbury (not pictured: Sean Dunn and Andrew Huffman)

On July 19th, under the warm midsummer sun, the 2nd Annual County Classic Golf Outing brought together golf enthusiasts, commissioners, and other leaders for a day that perfectly blended sport and purpose. The event, with its picturesque fairways and the enticing aroma of a delicious lunch spread, was a resounding success. Participants were not just swinging their clubs; they were swinging for scholarships, with proceeds benefiting the Scholarship Fund for the CCAO Research and Educational Foundation.

A SWING FOR A CAUSE

The essence of the County Classic Golf Outing lies in its dedication to the CCAO Research and Educational Foundation Scholarship Fund. With each stroke of the club, participants directly contributed to the future of promising students throughout Ohio. This year, the Foundation proudly awarded five deserving students with \$2,000 scholarships, empowering them to pursue their academic endeavors and shape the leaders of tomorrow.

BONDING THROUGH BIRDIES

Beyond the competitive thrill, the County Classic fostered connections that extended far beyond the greens. Amidst friendly banter and shared victories, participants forged lasting friendships, united by their passion for golf and their commitment to education.

The 2024 County Classic Champions were Jimmy Wolf, David Salisbury, Sean Dunn and Andrew Huffman from Sean P. Dunn and Associates. Over the past two years, the CCAO Research and Educational Foundation has awarded \$20,000 in scholarships to high school students across Ohio who seek a career in public service.

The success of this year's outing promises even greater things for the future. As the sun set on a day filled with camaraderie and purpose, participants left with a sense

EVENT SPONSORS



CCAO Board Members Greene County Commissioner Dick Gould, Jackson County Commissioner Donnie Willis and Clark County Commissioner Melanie Flax Wilt

of accomplishment, knowing they had contributed to a brighter future for Ohio's students. Here's to another year of swinging for scholarships and making a meaningful impact!

Hole Sponsors:

- Aflac
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- Cheryl Subler & John Leutz
- Granville Mechanical
- HCA Asset Management
- Sedgwick
- Southern Ohio Publishing Group
- VS Engineering

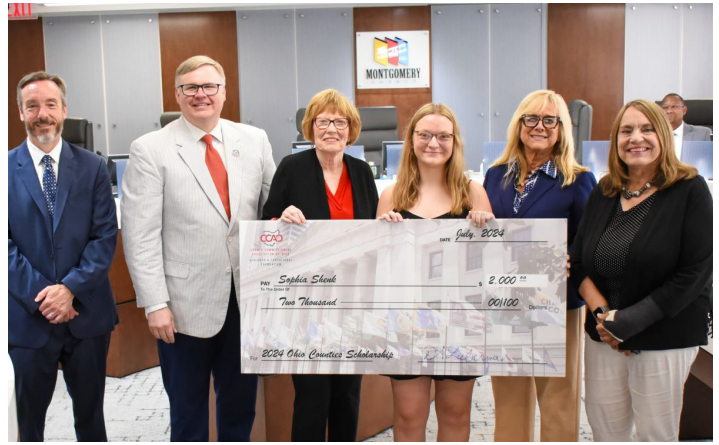
Thank you to our Event Sponsors and Hole Sponsors who helped make the 2nd Annual County Classic a success! See the photos from the event [here](#).

The County Commissioners Association of Ohio (CCAO) Research and Educational Foundation is proud to announce the 2024 Ohio Counties Scholarship recipients. Established in 1991, the foundation operates as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization dedicated to providing our members and the people of Ohio with the high-quality information, tools, and education. The scholarships, funded through private donations and events like the County Classic, support outstanding students pursuing higher education.

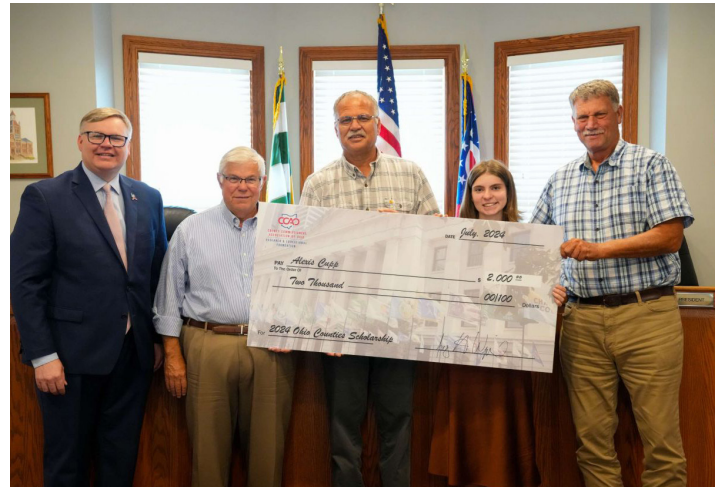
Congratulations to the following recipients:

- Central: Alexis Cupp, Pickaway County
- Northeast: Nicholas McClure, Ashtabula County
- Northwest: Riley Barhorst, Shelby County
- Southwest: Sophia Shenk, Montgomery County
- Southeast: Ava Fierbaugh, Harrison County

These scholarships reflect the foundation’s commitment to investing in future leaders who will contribute to the continued growth and development of Ohio’s counties.



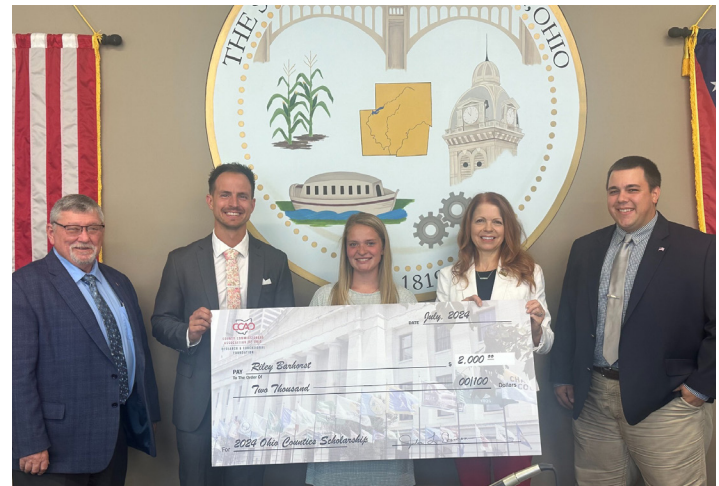
Montgomery County Commissioners Judy Dodge, Debbie Lieberman and Carolyn Rice presented Sophia Shenk with her scholarship. Also pictured are Assistant Prosecutor Ward Barrentine and CCAO’s Steve Caraway.



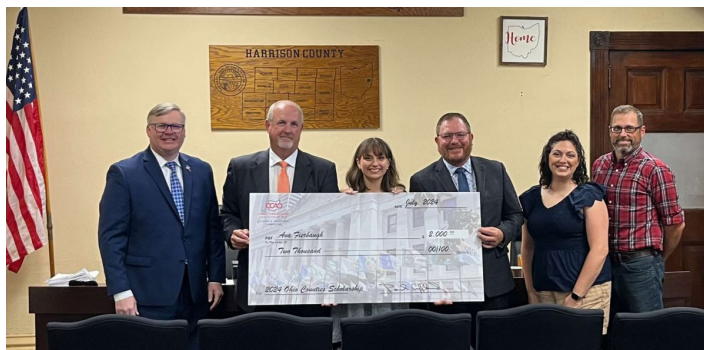
Alexis Cupp of Pickaway County received the 2024 Ohio Counties Scholarship for the Central District. She is pictured here with Pickaway County Commissioners Gary Scherer, Jay Wippel and Harold Henson, and CCAO’s Steve Caraway during the presentation of her scholarship.



Nicholas McClure was named the recipient for the NE District 2024 Ohio Counties Scholarship provided by the CCAO Research and Educational Foundation. Pictured is Nick along with his parents, Ashtabula County Commissioners JP DuCro, Kathryn Whittington and Casey Kozlowski along with CCAO’s Steve Caraway.



Shelby County Commissioners Bob Guillozet, Julie Ehemann and Mack Knupp recognized Riley Barhorst as the Northwest District 2024 scholarship winner. Also pictured is CCAO’s Tim Hoverman.



Harrison County Commissioners Paul Coffland and Dustin Corder presented the SE District 2024 Ohio Counties Scholarship to Ava Fierbaugh. Also pictured with Ava are her parents and CCAO’s Steve Caraway.



GUEST COLUMN

TIPS FOR NAVIGATING VOLATILE INVESTMENT MARKETS

The stock market has undergone some pretty big shocks during the past few decades, and those events had a major impact on investor portfolios. At times, it was hard to imagine how stock prices would ever recover. But they did. For those who were saving and investing for retirement, the temporary drop in account balances was likely unnerving. But those who stayed the course generally saw their accounts bounce back eventually.

Weathering periods of market volatility is a normal part of the investing process. Nobody likes to see their account balance drop, especially if it seems as though the money they've worked so hard to earn has just disappeared. But there are ways to help minimize some of the anxiety related to market volatility:

- Think long term – Building your retirement nest egg is a long-term project. People can spend decades planning, saving, and investing. During that period, markets will swing up and down. Factors such as world events, business trends, and even the weather can affect market performance. Don't let short-term volatility distract you from your long-term plans.
- Don't try to time your investing – You may be tempted to shift your assets into more conservative investments following a market downturn and reinvest when markets start to bounce back. But think twice before you engage in this practice, known as "market timing". No one can predict when and how markets will recover. Missing out on just a few periods of strong market performance can lower your overall returns over time.
- Keep contributing – When markets drop and bad economic news fills the headlines, some people consider putting their retirement contributions on hold. But continuing to contribute during such periods can actually work to your advantage. A drop in stock prices can mean that your contributions buy more of your chosen investment funds at a lower price, which puts you in a better position for growth when markets recover.
- Manage your asset allocation – Remember, you'll probably want to gradually shift your portfolio to a more conservative mix of assets as you approach your retirement date. Why? To help manage the risk of the assets you'll soon be relying on for retirement income. Near-retirees don't have as much time to recover

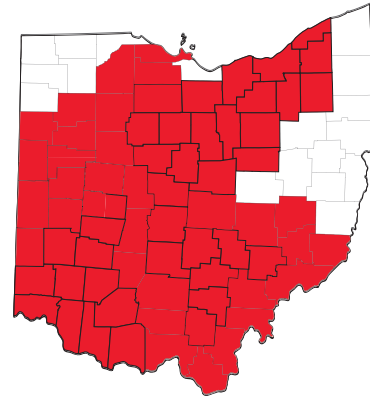
from a downturn as younger investors do, which is why many shift toward a more conservative asset mix. If you're nearing retirement, take a look at your asset allocation and make any needed adjustments to help manage your risk¹

While it's a good idea to regularly check your account and adjust your saving and investing strategies, logging in each day can shift your attention to short-term gains and losses rather than long-term performance and goals. Always keep in mind that building your retirement nest egg is more like a marathon than a sprint. If you have any questions, schedule some time with your local plan representative.

1 Asset allocation, diversification, dollar-cost averaging, or rebalancing does not ensure a profit or protect against loss.

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County Leader, CCAO's quarterly e-magazine, provides an in-depth look at the news, programs and policies affecting Ohio's 88 counties. The e-magazine also showcases our members, offers best county practices as well as ways to enhance the state-county partnership practices and shares the offerings of the association. If you have questions or story submissions, contact Editor Jessica Newbacher at jnewbacher@ccao.org or 614-220-7986.