



WINTER 2026

COUNTY LEADER



FEATURING

Strengthening County Government: Property Tax Reform and Human Services Funding

2026 CCAO/CEAO Winter Conference: Importance of Collaboration

A Career of Service: John R. Leutz Retires After 25 Years with CCAO

CCAO Research and Educational Foundation Awards \$10,000 in Scholarships to Future Public Servants



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COVER: Todd Kleismert, Executive Director of America 250-Ohio, presented commemorative flags to leadership at the CCAO/CEAO Winter Conference — Engineers Doug Cade (Hancock) and Scott Coleman (Logan) along with Commissioners David Painter (Clermont) and Denise Driehaus (Hamilton).

ABOVE:

1: Hamilton County Commissioner Denise Driehaus speaks at a Breast Cancer Awareness event in October.

2: PCSAO Executive Director Angela Sausser presents the Partner of the Year award to Ross County Commissioner Jack Everson, CCAO Outreach & Member Engagement Manager Rachel Reedy, and CCAO Executive Director Cheryl Subler for CCAO's advocacy work.

3: CCAO, CORSA and CEBCO staff attended the grand re-opening of the beautifully restored Perry County Courthouse in New Lexington. Built in 1888, this building has been a proud symbol of Perry County for more than a century.

4: Ottawa County Commissioner Mark Coppeler, Sandusky County Engineer Carlos Baez, and Sandusky County Commissioners Scott Miller, Russ Zimmerman and Charles Schwochow at the fall NW CCAO/CEAO District Meeting in Mercer County.

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A MESSAGE FROM 2026 CCAO PRESIDENT



Denise Driehaus

CCAO President, Hamilton
County Commissioner

It is an honor to serve as the 2026 President of the County Commissioners Association of Ohio. I am grateful to my colleagues across the state for placing their trust in me, and I look forward to the work ahead on behalf of Ohio's counties and the residents we serve.

As we look ahead to a year with significant challenges, I am confident that county leaders from every corner of our state will work together to protect and strengthen the essential services our residents rely on. Counties play a vital role in ensuring safe communities, supporting economic opportunity, and delivering the everyday services Ohioans depend on. It is imperative that we continue to tell those stories—the stories of our constituents and our communities, and clearly communicate the value of county government.

CCAO has long been a respected and effective voice for Ohio's counties, and our mission is to empower that work and elevate those stories. Through strong legislative advocacy, education and training, and innovative programs, CCAO helps counties thrive and ensures county leaders are well equipped to meet both current and emerging challenges.

I look forward to working with my colleagues in every corner of Ohio, along with the dedicated CCAO staff, to advance policies that support counties and the communities we serve. Together, we will continue to strengthen county government and move our state forward—because stronger counties mean a stronger Ohio.

Thank you for the opportunity to serve.



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PARTICIPATING



LETTER FROM CCAO EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Stronger Together: Lessons From Improv, Public Service, and Partnership



Cheryl Subler
CCAO Executive Director

Last fall, I did something entirely outside my normal rhythm: I took an improv comedy class. It was a hilarious bit of levity, a much-needed break from the day-to-day responsibilities that come with serving Ohio's 88 counties. Yet beyond the laughter, improv offered something unexpected. It reminded me, in a powerful and refreshing way, of a lesson that has shaped my entire career: we are stronger together.

Stand-up comedy is usually a solo act. Improv, by contrast, is built on teamwork and trust. Every scene depends on listening closely, building on one another's ideas, and responding with the mindset of "yes, and..." That simple phrase keeps a story moving, invites collaboration, and encourages adaptability. It's the opposite of going it alone, and it felt strikingly familiar.

Partnerships have always been the bedrock of county government. Our state-county partnership is what delivers the human services, children services, elections, infrastructure, workforce development, and public safety systems Ohioans rely on every day.

Counties also join forces with one another to share resources, align priorities, and tackle challenges that no single jurisdiction could solve on its own. Whether it's a joint petition ditch project or a regional workforce and economic development strategy, counties show time and again what cooperative leadership can accomplish.

And CCAO itself is a partnership with 88 counties, 282 elected officials, and their dedicated staff working collectively to strengthen local government, advocate for practical and durable solutions, and provide pooled purchasing power for insurance, risk management, wellness, and energy.

That same spirit of collaboration has guided our policy work throughout the year. CCAO has partnered closely with the County Auditors Association of Ohio and other stakeholders to advance pragmatic property tax reforms, while educating policymakers and the public on why meaningful changes are

needed. We continue to emphasize that a complete repeal of property taxes would destabilize essential services that Ohioans depend upon.

Our partnership with the Public Children Services Association of Ohio and the Department of Youth and Children remains critical as counties face escalating placement costs and growing needs. Likewise, alongside the Job and Family Services Directors Association and our state partners, we are working to improve SNAP administration and prevent a significant shift in federal benefit costs to Ohio.

On the justice front, a new state-administered indigent defense pilot - the Northwest Regional Hub serving Allen, Hardin, and Putnam counties, is now underway. This initiative reflects substantial collaboration among the Ohio Bar Association, the Judicial Conference, the State Public Defender, lawmakers, and CCAO.

Whether on an improv stage, in a county courthouse, or in conversation at the Statehouse, the truth is the same: progress happens when we listen to one another, build on each other's strengths, and say "yes, and..." to the work ahead. Together, we are stronger, and together, we will continue delivering for Ohio's counties and the people we are privileged to serve.

POLICY UPDATE Strengthening County Government: Property Tax Reform and Human Services Funding



Adam Schwiebert

CCAO Managing Director of Policy

CCAO QUARTERLY LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

As we enter the new year, CCAO continues to advance legislative priorities that strengthen county government and support the delivery of essential public services across our state. Two key areas have remained at the forefront of our advocacy: achieving meaningful property tax reform and securing adequate funding for county-administered human services programs.

PROPERTY TAX REFORM

Property tax reform has been one of the most significant and consequential issues addressed by the General Assembly in recent years. Ohio counties play a critical role in providing public safety, elections, infrastructure, and human services, all of which depend heavily on property tax revenues. At the same time, rising property values and other factors have driven sharp increases in tax bills for many homeowners, underscoring the need for reforms that balance taxpayer relief with fiscal stability for local governments.

CCAO has been deeply engaged in these discussions and is pleased to report that several major property tax reforms supported by the association were enacted late last year. House Bill 335, House Bill 186, House Bill 129, and House Bill 124 were all passed by the General Assembly and signed into law, representing meaningful progress toward a more transparent and predictable property tax system while providing meaningful tax relief.

House Bill 335 limits the growth of inside millage revenue to the rate of inflation, ensuring that unvoted property taxes do not increase faster than taxpayers' ability to pay. House Bill 186 places a similar inflationary cap on school district 20-mill floor revenues, addressing one of the largest structural drivers of property tax growth in many communities. House Bill 129 modernizes the 20-mill floor calculation by including additional levy types, creating a fairer and more comprehensive assessment of local taxing capacity. Complementing these reforms, House Bill 124 strengthens the property valuation process by empowering county auditors to more accurately establish property values, helping to enhance transparency and public confidence in the system.

CCAO strongly supported each of these bills and would like to sincerely thank our membership for their engagement, advocacy, and collaboration in helping to pass these significant reforms. Your outreach to legislators played a critical role in these successes.

While this progress is meaningful, there is still more work to be done. CCAO will continue to advocate for additional targeted relief, including expanding the homestead exemption for seniors and disabled homeowners, and exploring other options that protect taxpayers while preserving counties' ability to meet essential responsibilities.

SNAP ADMINISTRATION AND FUNDING

Another top legislative priority for CCAO remains securing adequate funding for county costs associated with administering the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). Counties administer SNAP on behalf of the state, ensuring that eligible Ohioans receive essential food assistance in a timely and accurate manner.

Recent federal changes enacted through the One Big Beautiful Bill Act reduced the federal match for SNAP administrative expenses from 50% to 25%, shifting substantial new costs onto counties. In the fall, the state provided additional funding to the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services; however, counties received no additional resources to offset their increased administrative burden.

CCAO will continue advocating for additional state investment in county SNAP administration in the coming year. Counties remain committed to being full partners with the state in administering the program efficiently and accurately, but that partnership must include adequate and sustainable funding.

At the same time, CCAO is working closely with the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services to establish a methodology for calculating county SNAP error rates, as required by law. As this work moves forward, it will be critical to hold counties harmless as the state and counties jointly work to bring Ohio's SNAP error rate below the six percent federal threshold. Achieving that goal will require continued investment in staffing, training, and technology at the county level. CCAO will need continued support from our membership in emphasizing the importance of a collaborative, statewide approach that recognizes counties' role in program administration while avoiding punitive financial consequences.

LOOKING AHEAD

Our advocacy is only as strong as the collective voice of our membership. We thank commissioners, executives, and council members across the state for their continued engagement with legislators. Together, we will build on recent successes and continue promoting sound public policy that strengthens counties and serves Ohioans well.

FEATURE Healthy people, healthy finances, and healthy relationships: Extension programming focuses on multiple aspects of health

by Marissa Mullett, Ohio State University Extension

Health can be achieved in different aspects of life—physical health, financial health, and relationship health. Extension outreach and programming throughout Ohio focuses on these areas that are incredibly important to building stronger, healthier, more stable, and vibrant communities.

Extension Family and Consumer Science professionals in Ohio use multiple tools, strategies, and networks of community connectors to help Ohioans lead healthier lives at every stage of life. The following is a snapshot of the educational resources, programming, and outreach our professionals provide Ohio communities.

HEALTHY PEOPLE

Chronic disease management and prevention, and food safety education are a focus of our healthy people initiatives.

Nutrition plays an important role in managing diabetes, and our Dining with Diabetes program focuses on helping participants manage their condition through practical skills-based education. It is a four-class series that focuses on live cooking demonstrations, menu planning, carbohydrate-counting, portion control insights, and more. In 2024, Dining with Diabetes was offered in 11 counties, reaching 240 Ohio citizens.

Extension professionals often partner with local businesses, schools and community groups to train staff and volunteers on proper food handling, especially in high-risk settings like restaurants and sporting event concessions. Our faculty and staff regularly deliver ServSafe and Person in Charge trainings, which safeguard public health and serve as valuable workforce development opportunities for food establishments. This educational outreach helps protect public health and build confidence in community food service operations.

HEALTHY FINANCES

Healthy finances are important in helping Ohioans secure some of life's necessities. From organizing youth financial literacy programs to implementing homebuyer education workshops, our faculty and staff are dedicated to helping families improve their present and future economic well-being.

Real Money. Real World. (RMRW) is a youth financial education program that increases youth knowledge and awareness about finances and how their decisions can make a big impact on their lives. Extension professionals work with many

community partners including schools, banks, juvenile justice centers, and homeschool groups to deliver RMRW. In 2024, more than 20,000 Ohio youth participated in Real Money. Real World. programs throughout the state.

Extension partners with the Ohio Housing Finance Agency (OHFA) to bring homebuyer education into Ohio communities. Because of this partnership, Extension has 13 U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development-certified counselors who provided homebuyer education and counseling sessions to nearly 2,000 homebuyers in 2024. It is particularly noteworthy that in 2024, Extension was the top counseling program in Ohio for OHFA reaching Ohioans in all 88 counties.

HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS

Our professionals provide resources and education to help individuals and families build healthy relationships and support overall well-being. Programs include parenting education, mindful wellness, and classes that encourage personal growth while addressing the needs of families and aging populations.

Across many counties, in-person mindfulness walks and activities are offered at parks, senior centers, and schools, creating opportunities for relaxation and community connection.

We also deliver healthy relationship programming online. For example, virtual Tai Chi classes promote good posture and balance while increasing mindfulness and body awareness, with the goal of reducing the risk of falls. Another online workshop we offer is Successful Co-Parenting (SCP), which equips parents with information, skills, and techniques to minimize the negative effects of separation and divorce on children and to promote positive adjustment during the dissolution process. In 2024, SCP reached more than 1,000 divorcing or separating parents with children.

Overall health takes many forms—physical, financial, and relational. Through statewide outreach and education, we help Ohioans live well and build stronger, healthier communities for the future.

Learn more about health-related Extension programming in your community by contacting your local office of Ohio State University Extension or visiting fcs.osu.edu.



2026 CCAO Officers - Commissioners Pete Gerken (Lucas County & Secretary); Casey Kozlowski (Ashtabula County & 1st Vice President); and Denise Driehaus (Hamilton County & President); Executive Ilene Shapiro (Summit County & 2nd Vice President); Commissioner Joe Antram (Logan County & Treasurer). Homecoming & Picnic program at the Statehouse.

FEATURE 2026 CCAO/CEAO Winter Conference: Importance of Collaboration

by Steve Caraway, Managing Director of Enterprise & Retirement Services

From meaningful conversations to forward-looking ideas, the 145th Annual CCAO/CEAO Winter Conference brought county leaders from across Ohio together to reflect on our shared history—and prepare for what lies ahead. Held at a time when counties continue to play a vital role in public service, innovation, and leadership, the conference underscored the importance of collaboration as our nation approaches its 250th anniversary.

Conference programming highlighted both the challenges counties face and the opportunities ahead. New and seasoned leaders alike engaged in thoughtful discussions, including the New Members Session: Lessons Learned from the First Year in Office, moderated by Greene County Commissioner Sarah Mays and Guernsey County Commissioner Dave Wilson. Attendees also heard directly from state lawmakers during the Luncheon with Lawmaker Panel, moderated by Ashtabula County Commissioner Casey Kozlowski, featuring Senator Shane Wilkin and Representative Brian Stewart. Attendees also had the opportunity to participate in one-on-one retirement planning consultations with the Ohio County Employee Retirement Plan, providing valuable individualized guidance.

Property tax policy was a major focus throughout the conference. Attendees examined proposals, impacts, and legislative actions during several sessions, including

discussions on a proposed constitutional amendment for full repeal, the potential ramifications of property tax elimination, and legislative reforms underway in the 136th General Assembly. These sessions featured respected voices from across Ohio government and were moderated by county leaders committed to ensuring counties are prepared for any outcome.



Tammy Tincher, NACO's Director of Member Engagement speaks at the CCAO Annual Business Meeting.

Looking to the future, sessions explored emerging issues shaping county government. Topics ranged from capital planning and fiscal risk management, to Ohio's new cybersecurity law for local governments, to the rapid growth of data centers driven by the AI revolution. Attendees also gained practical insight into effective public engagement, as the Montgomery County Board of County Commissioners'

Communications Department shared strategies for storytelling, media relations, and community outreach.

The conference also provided opportunities to celebrate leadership and service, including the installation of officers for 2026. The CCAO Board of Directors will be led by Hamilton County Commissioner Denise Driehaus, along with the 2026 CCAO Officers: Commissioner Pete Gerken (Lucas County, Secretary); Commissioner Casey Kozlowski (Ashtabula County, First Vice President); Executive Ilene Shapiro (Summit County, Second Vice President); and Commissioner Joe Antram (Logan County, Treasurer).

During the business meeting, Clermont County Commissioner and CCAO President David Painter and Mrs. Painter presented a contribution to the CCAO Research and Educational



The Montgomery County Board of County Commissioners' Communications Department shared how they use media relations, social media storytelling, plug-and-play partnership toolkits and both commissioner-led and community-focused events to bring the county's story to life. Pictured are Reba Chenoweth, Assistant Director, Communications, Montgomery County Commissioners Office and Randi Dillon, Public Information Officer, Montgomery County Environmental Services.



Ohio Lt. Governor Jim Tressel speaks at the CCAO/CEAO General Luncheon.

Foundation Scholarship Fund, reinforcing the association's commitment to developing future county leaders. Painter was also recognized for his leadership as President of the CCAO Board of Directors by CCAO Executive Director Cheryl Subler.

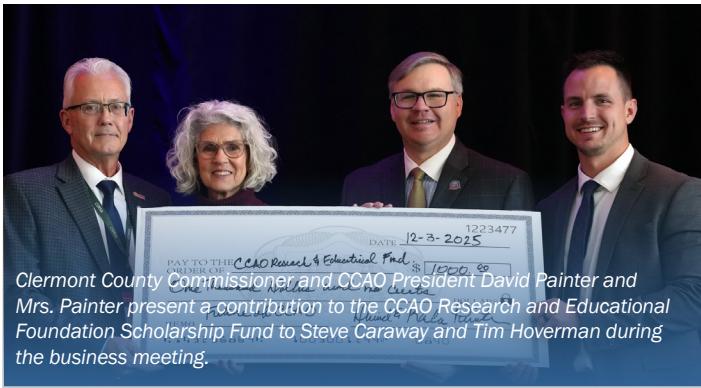
The week concluded with a Policy Update from Managing Director of Policy Adam Schwiebert and the CCAO policy team, preceded by CCAO/CEAO District meetings, providing members the opportunity to discuss regional priorities, share insights, and carry conference conversations forward into the year ahead.



Ashtabula County Commissioner Casey Kozlowski moderates the Luncheon with Lawmaker Panel Discussion with Senator Shane Wilkin and Representative Brian Stewart.



Conference attendees heard from respected property tax experts to learn more about the scope of property taxation in Ohio and the impact that a potential loss of this revenue stream would have on local services. Pictured are speakers Brian Perera, Senior Policy Advisor for ZHF Consulting, Moderated by Medina County Commissioner Steve Hambley.



Celebrate America 250 with a Limited-Edition Ohio County Lapel Pin

As our nation approaches its 250th birthday, Ohio's counties have been outstanding partners in preparing for this historic moment—and the work continues. County leaders across the state have played a vital role in helping plan, promote, and support America 250 efforts, ensuring that this once-in-a-lifetime celebration reflects Ohio's communities and shared history.



One way to mark this milestone is through the limited-edition America 250 Ohio County Lapel Pin. Each pin is beautifully crafted and features the unique shape of an Ohio county alongside the official America 250 Ohio logo, intricately etched for detail. It's a stylish way to show county pride while celebrating 250 years of American independence.

Ohio's 88 counties—each with its own unique boundaries—have long served as the backbone of our state and nation. Their partnership, leadership, and community spirit continue to shape how Ohio tells its story. As America 250 approaches, counties remain at the center of efforts to honor the past, celebrate the present, and inspire future generations.

Planning is ongoing, and we are still working together to make this celebration truly unforgettable.

Pins are available in both large and small quantities. To place an order, please contact Steve Caraway at CCAO at scaraway@ccao.org, or visit OhioCountyStore.com. A portion of the proceeds will benefit the CCAO Research and Educational Foundation, supporting education and research for Ohio's counties.

GUEST COLUMN Mistakes to Avoid when Markets are Volatile

by Empower

Are you nervous about how recent swings in the market may affect your retirement savings? Market volatility is a normal and inevitable part of the stock market cycle and should be factored into your long-term investment strategy. Before you decide that you need to rethink your retirement strategy in the event of a market downturn, keep in mind the following potential mistakes to avoid:

- Ignoring your evolving risk tolerance – Your tolerance for investment risk is an important part of your investment strategy – and it may change as you approach your retirement date. In general, investors may want to shift to a more conservative mix of investments as they get closer to retirement to help reduce the risk of the assets they'll rely on for retirement income. Younger investors may want to consider a more aggressive mix of investments with a higher risk/return potential because they have more time to recover from market downturns. In other words, the ups and downs of the market shouldn't dictate your risk tolerance – it's more a factor of your goals, your age, and your planned retirement date.
- Worrying about the short term – Remember, saving and investing for retirement is a long-term process. While a sudden drop in the market may be unsettling, it helps to stay focused on your long-term goal. If you choose to move your money into conservative investments when the market drops, you may miss out on a market's recovery and any performance improvements, which could "lock in" any losses you've experienced.
- Not taking advantage of dollar-cost averaging – You may be tempted to stop contributing to your retirement account when the market drops – but if you do, you could miss out on the potential advantages of dollar-cost averaging. Dollar-cost averaging is a risk-management tactic where you invest in equal dollar amounts at regular intervals, regardless of increases or decreases in the cost of an investment (such as a mutual fund). You buy more shares of an investment when the price is low and fewer when the price is high, which may help "average out" the price you pay for a chosen investment option.

Understanding and sticking to your strategy through a volatile period may ease your worries and help you stay on track to meet your retirement goals. Your local retirement plan advisor is available to help guide you through market volatility and can meet with you to review your investment strategy.¹ Schedule a meeting at ocerp457.com.

1 The retirement income review is provided by an Empower representative registered with Empower Advisory Group, LLC and may provide investment counseling and/or recommendations at no additional cost to you. There is no guarantee provided by any party that use of the review will result in a profit. Investing involves risk, including possible loss of principal. Dollar-cost averaging does not ensure a profit or protect against loss. Investing involves risk, including possible loss of principal.

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 risk.¹

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.



**Working with you
to create the future
you imagine.**



Ohio County Employees Retirement Plan (OCERP)

Economic Development Is A Team Sport

JobsOhio is your partner in showcasing the advantages of doing business in Ohio – the heart of it all.

At JobsOhio, we're all about helping businesses grow and thrive. As Ohio's private economic development partner, we help Ohio's businesses grow, and we work to bring new business investments and job opportunities to the state. We partner with local and state leaders and a network of seven regional partners who share our commitment to helping Ohio businesses succeed. Together, we provide businesses with world-class service and ensure they get the personalized support they need to stay competitive and grow.

Let's work together as Team Ohio to drive Ohio's competitive advantage.

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JobsOhio Ohio's Economic Development Corporation

jobsohio.com/gov

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FEATURE Payment Redirection Cybersecurity: How to Protect Your Organization from One of Today's Fastest-Growing Threats – CCAOSC Cyber Defense Program



Tim Hoverman
Managing Director, IT/Operations

Payment redirection fraud, also known as Business Email Compromise (BEC) or invoice redirection, is a fast-growing cyber threat where criminals trick organizations into sending legitimate payments to fraudulent bank accounts. Because these attacks mimic normal vendor communications, they often bypass technical security tools.

HOW THE SCAM WORKS

Attackers impersonate vendors, contractors, or internal staff to request:

- Updated banking information
- Payment to a “new” or “urgent” account
- Replacement invoices that look legitimate

They commonly use spoofed domains, hacked email accounts, fake phone numbers, and messages that pressure employees to act quickly.

ALWAYS DO THIS FIRST

- Verify All Banking Changes by Phone

Before making ANY change to a vendor's banking information, call your vendor using a trusted phone number already on file (not the number in the email).

This single step prevents the vast majority of payment-redirect attacks.

RED FLAGS TO WATCH FOR

- Unexpected or urgent bank-detail changes
- Emails sent at unusual times or with unusual tone
- Misspelled domains or unfamiliar sender addresses
- Requests to bypass normal approval processes
- “New bank,” “security reasons,” or “process change” explanations



PREVENTION BEST PRACTICES

- Use dual approval for vendor changes, large payments, and wire transfers
- Maintain a verified vendor master file with official contact numbers
- Train employees on phishing, spoofing, and payment redirection tactics
- Enable security controls (MFA, anti-spoofing email protections, external-email banners)
- Keep sensitive vendor data offline or in secure systems

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SERVICE CORPORATION NEWS

A Career of Service: John R. Leutz Retires After 25 Years with CCAO

After 25 years with the County Commissioners Association of Ohio, John Leutz will be stepping away from his full-time role at the end of the year.

For a quarter century, John has been a steady and trusted presence at CCAO — a familiar voice in committee rooms, legislative hearings, and conference halls. As a Policy Analyst, Legislative Counsel and Assistant Direct he has been at the center of countless policy discussions, helping counties navigate the challenges of public safety, corrections, and justice system reform.

John joined CCAO in 2000 as a policy analyst and soon became known for his deep understanding of how state decisions affect local governments. Over the years, his thoughtful approach, dry wit, and institutional knowledge made him a go-to resource for commissioners, staff, and lawmakers alike.

Two of his legislative achievements stand out as examples of his impact. John helped establish the Medicaid reimbursement rate as the maximum amount that could be charged for inmate medical care in Ohio — a protection that only two other states, Oklahoma and Kansas, have in place. He also helped create what is now the Statewide 9-1-1 Steering Committee, a group that continues to guide Ohio's efforts to modernize emergency communications and dispatch systems.

Before coming to CCAO, John built a career that blended public service and law. He worked in the Ohio Senate for several years, including as an aide to the late Senator Paul Gillmor, and later ran a government relations law practice that represented clients across local government and industry. He also served his hometown of Grandview Heights as mayor and on city council — experiences that gave him a personal understanding of the responsibilities county and local officials shoulder every day.

Outside of government, John has always found ways to stay involved in his community. He's spent two decades coaching Science Olympiad teams, worked with the Northwest Kiwanis Club, and even served as a licensed softball umpire — roles that speak to his commitment to mentorship and service in every corner of his life.

As John looks ahead, he says his retirement won't mean saying goodbye entirely.

"Upon retiring I will neither be forgotten nor gone," he said. "I'm looking forward to continuing to consult with the Service Corporation on programs and projects that help our county governments become more efficient and better serve their constituents."



COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
ASSOCIATION OF OHIO
SERVICE CORPORATION



CCAO Executive Director Cheryl Subler presents John Leutz with his retirement gift.

Reflecting on his time at CCAO, John adds that it's the people he'll remember most.

"It's been a great ride over the last 25 years — a pure joy and a privilege to work with a multitude of county commissioners and establish so many friendships that will endure throughout the future. I've loved being surrounded by our CCAO staff, and have truly appreciated their steadfast, loyal and constant dedication and commitment to our members and the institution of county government."

CCAO wishes thanks John for his service and wishes him all the best in the next chapter.



Healthier communities lead to healthier people

We believe that people are only as healthy as the communities they live in. Anthem values and nurtures our local ties — it's why we have been working with CEBCO since 2004. Together, we can improve overall health, advance equity, and strengthen communities.



Anthem Blue Cross and Blue Shield is the trade name of Community Insurance Company. Independent licensee of the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association. Anthem is a registered trademark of Anthem Insurance Companies, Inc.

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CEBCO NEWS

CEBCO Health and Wellness



Mike Kindell

Interim Managing Director, Health and Wellness

CEBCO EXPANSION

Effective 1/1/2026, Wyandot County became the 48th Ohio county to join CEBCO for their medical and pharmacy benefits. CEBCO now covers over 16,570 employees with approximately 37,000 members. CEBCO remains Anthem's largest employer group in the state of Ohio.

BOARD OFFICERS

The CEBCO board voted for Champaign County Commissioner, Steve Hess, to serve as the new board Treasurer. He also chairs the board Finance Committee. In addition, Delaware County Commissioner, Jeff Benton, was voted in as the new board Secretary.

RENEWAL MEETING AND SURVEY

CEBCO held our 2026 renewal meeting, virtually, at the end of August. For 2026, the average rate increase was 9.9%, with the minimum/maximum renewal increases being 2%/18%, respectively. To continually improve upon the renewal experience, a survey will be going out to CEBCO counties to gather their feedback regarding the 2026 Renewal and Open Enrollment process. Once results are in, we will be partnering with our actuarial consultant, Aon, to provide more information and education so counties can have a better understanding of renewal rate calculations and various plan design options, to help them make the best and most economical benefit choices for their employees in the next renewal and open enrollment cycle.

WELLNESS PROGRAM

CEBCO held a virtual fall Wellness Meeting in mid-October with 55+ staff and county wellness contacts from our member counties. For the past wellness program year, our members did a great job with nearly 21,000 earning over \$2.1 million in incentives. Almost 14,000 received wellness exams, which is the primary goal of the program. Looking ahead, spearheaded by our board Wellness Committee, chaired by Huron County Commissioner, Harry Brady, CEBCO is taking a comprehensive review of the Wellness Program. We are working with an outside vendor to review current program offerings and evaluate industry best practices. There will be a pending survey and meetings with county stakeholders to gather information, with plans for implementing enhancements to the program to be undertaken in 2026.

CEBCO ANNUAL MEETING

The CEBCO Annual Membership Meeting is scheduled for



Friday, April 10, 2026. Highlights of the program will include elections for Board of Director Seats, a review of our 2025 benefit year, and potential program changes for 2026 and 2027. The meeting will be held at a new location this year, The Quest Conference Center – Polaris, in Westerville, Ohio.

A buffet lunch will be served.

WELLNESS TOPICS

Wellness topics that are being emphasized this winter include Preventive Care Guidelines and Preventive Questions to Ask Your Doctor, and Health Literacy 101 Tips & Resources. Please use the following links to learn simple steps to help improve your and your family's overall health.

Preventative Care

Preventative Questions

Health Literacy 101



Your business is what fuels us and we're honored to have you as a partner.

Thank you for 15 years of partnership with the CCAO.

Kirkland Mizerek
Executive Vice President
Palmer Energy Company
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CORSA NEWS

Celebrating James Hale: 19 Years of Dedication



Ali Redmond

CORSA Membership Services Manager

Today, we celebrate the remarkable career and well-earned retirement of James Hale, a cornerstone of CORSA's risk management team for nearly two decades. Jim's 19 years of service have been defined by unwavering dedication, deep expertise, and a genuine commitment to helping others.

A proud resident of Portage County, Jim brought both local insight and statewide impact to his role. With a bachelor's degree, an Associate in Risk Management (ARM), and certifications from the American Institute of Chartered Property Casualty Underwriters, Jim exemplified professionalism and excellence. He even extended his expertise to the playgrounds, becoming a certified playground inspector—just one of many ways he ensured safety in our counties.

Jim's contributions to CORSA have been nothing short of transformative. Whether traveling across Ohio to train safety committees, leading building inspections, or developing IT and cybersecurity loss control programs, Jim consistently went above and beyond. His efforts helped CORSA members reduce claims, improve operational efficiency, and save significantly on costs.

His analytical skills were equally impressive. Jim's ability to turn complex data into actionable insights helped countless counties identify exposures and implement effective mitigation strategies. His spreadsheets and charts weren't just numbers, they were roadmaps to safer, smarter operations.

But perhaps what stands out most is Jim's spirit of service. As one CORSA member shared:

"Jim has been an exceptional resource and trusted expert in risk management. For many years, he's been a vital link between CLCCA and CORSA - always ready to lend his time, share his knowledge, and offer support with county risk managers across the state. Those who were fortunate enough to work with Jim know how much wisdom, patience, and good humor he brought to every conversation (even loss control audits). He will be deeply missed as he begins this well-earned next chapter."

– Ginger Yonak, Union County

Outside of work, Jim found peace on the water—fishing in the summer and ice fishing in the winter. It's fitting that someone who spent his career navigating risk now gets to enjoy the calm of the lake.

Jim, your legacy at CORSA is lasting. You've made Ohio's counties safer, stronger, and better prepared. Thank you for your years of service, your leadership, and your friendship. We wish you tight lines, smooth waters, and all the best in your next chapter.



THE FORWARD PATH

The year ahead may bring twists and turns for employers. But no matter what obstacles come, the right partner can help you remain steady on the path forward. Sedgwick supports Ohio clients and their employees by simplifying workers' compensation claims. We help mitigate risks, control costs, administer discount programs, share safety best practices, and provide expert program consultation. Taking care of people is at the heart of everything we do.

For additional questions, contact Tony Sharrock at:
P. 614.376.5450 E. t.tony.sharrock@sedgwick.com

At Sedgwick,
CARING COUNTS
on the path forward

FEATURE

CCAO Research and Educational Foundation Awards \$10,000 in Scholarships to Future Public Servants



Steve Caraway

Managing Director of Enterprise
and Retirement Services

The County Commissioners Association of Ohio (CCAO) Research and Educational Foundation through the Ohio Counties Scholarship Program awarded a total of \$10,000 in scholarships to outstanding high school seniors across the state who are pursuing a career in public service in 2025.

Specifically, five \$2,000 scholarships were awarded to one student in each of CCAO's five districts:

- Central District: Katelyn Wynkoop, Fairfield County
- Northeast District: Angela Freeman, Summit County



Congratulations to Katelyn Wynkoop of Fairfield County. Pictured with her are Katelyn's brother Dylan, Commissioners Steve Davis, Dave Levacy and Jeff Fix along with CCAO's Steve Caraway.



The CCAO Research and Educational Foundation congratulates Summit County's Angela Freeman on being awarded the 2025 Ohio Counties Scholarship. Pictured is Angela's mother, Kathleen, Executive Shapiro, Angela Freeman, Council President Rita Darrow and CCAO's Steve Caraway.



Congrats to Highland County's Halle Ann Jones, who was the 2025 Ohio Counties Scholarship recipient for the Southwest District. Pictured are Halle's parents, Halle Jones, CCAO's Steve Caraway and Highland County Commissioners David Daniels, Brad Roadeas and Terry Britton.



- Northwest District: Keaton Foster, Van Wert County
- Southwest District: Halle Ann Jones, Highland County
- Southeast District: Anna Ritter, Washington County

The Ohio Counties Scholarship Program is sponsored by the County Commissioners Association of Ohio Research and Educational Foundation and reflects the foundation's ongoing commitment to cultivating the next generation of public service leaders.

Funding for these scholarships is made possible through generous contributions and annual fundraising efforts—including the popular County Classic Golf Outing—which support the foundation's mission to promote research, education, and public awareness of county government.

Through this program, CCAO continues to invest in Ohio's future by encouraging talented students to pursue careers that strengthen communities and uphold the values of effective and ethical local government.

If you would like to support the work of the CCAO Research and Educational Foundation, visit CCAO.org/foundation.



Congratulations to Van Wert County's Keaton Foster on being presented with the 2025 Ohio Counties Scholarship for the Northwest District. Pictured is Keaton's Mother, Kelly, CCAO's Tim Hoverman, Keaton Foster, along with Van Wert County Commissioners Todd Wolfrum and Stan Owens.



Congratulations to Washington County's Anna Ritter on being a recipient of the 2025 Ohio Counties Scholarship for the Southeast District. Pictured are Washington County Commissioners Charlie Schilling, James Booth and Eddie Place, Anna Ritter and CCAO's Steve Caraway.

A MESSAGE FROM 2025 CCAO PAST PRESIDENT



David Painter

CCAO Past President, Clermont
County Commissioner

As I concluded my service as President of the County Commissioners Association of Ohio, I reflected with gratitude and pride. Serving in this role throughout 2025 was one of the greatest honors of my career in public service. Together, we worked tirelessly to build stronger counties for a stronger Ohio, and I remain humbled by the dedication and resolve each of you showed.

County government is the bedrock of our state's success. It is where policy meets people, where services are delivered, and where leadership is tested every day. Over the past year, we proved that when counties are strong, Ohio is strong. Our collective efforts advanced priorities that matter deeply to our communities—strengthening children's services, expanding access to affordable childcare, securing resources for indigent defense, modernizing jail infrastructure, and implementing Next Gen 9-1-1 systems to protect lives. These initiatives were not isolated goals; they were interconnected commitments that continue to shape the health, safety, and resilience of our communities.

We also faced significant challenges. Sweeping tax reforms reshaped local revenue streams, forcing counties to reevaluate budgets, communicate transparently with residents, and advocate for sustainable funding models. And when the federal government shutdown disrupted SNAP benefits, counties stepped forward to ensure families had access to food until funding was restored. These moments reminded us that county government is often the first line of response when higher levels of government falter.

Advocacy has never been more important than it is today. Earlier this year, I had the privilege of testifying before the Ohio House Finance Committee on behalf of CCAO. That experience reinforced a fundamental truth: county voices must be heard in state policymaking. Our collective voice matters, and when we speak together, we shape outcomes that benefit all Ohioans.

As I transitioned into the role of Past President, I encouraged each of you to remain engaged. Participate in our committees, contribute to our task forces, and continue strengthening this association with your ideas and energy. To our new members, welcome. Your commitment to public service enriches our mission and ensures that the future of county government in Ohio remains bright.

This was not a farewell, but a passing of the torch. The challenges ahead are real, but so too is the strength of our association. Together, we proved that advocacy, collaboration, and resilience define county leadership. Thank you for your dedication, partnership, and unwavering commitment to building stronger counties. It was my honor to serve as your President, and I look forward to continuing our work together in new ways as we shape Ohio's future.



CCAO LEADERSHIP

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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 Ryan Horns at rhorns@ccao.org or 614-220-7986.