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Lt. Gov. Husted speaks with CCAO members on partnerships and innovations to strengthen Ohio

Thank you to Ohio Lt. Gov. Jon Husted for joining the CCAO Board of Directors meeting on Friday to discuss the DeWine-Husted administration's vision for moving Ohio forward and its partnership with counties.

During its Friday meeting, the CCAO Board of Directors was proud to host Ohio Lt. Governor Jon Husted to discuss with members policy developments to advance Ohio.

Husted spoke on a number of areas where the state and counties had successfully partnered together throughout the DeWine-Husted administration to advance common goals. These include areas like transportation funding, support for children services, funding for Appalachia Ohio, jail construction and much more.

Husted also spoke about tools to address workforce challenges, including expanding childcare, transportation and housing. These issues limit labor supply to many employers across the state. CCAO looks forward to working with the administration in addressing many of these challenges moving forward.

CCAO members thanked Husted for the renewed partnership between the state and counties and members remain committed to advancing the partnership in additional areas to come.

Opioid settlement foundation makes progress in establishing its structure

The OneOhio Recovery Foundation this week took action to hire a CFO and establish other procedures to continue develop the entity.

Kathryn Whittington, chair of the foundation board and an Ashtabula County commissioner, introduced Jim Quinn as CFO and Jules Coleman as board secretary at Wednesday's board meeting. Quinn mostly recently served as CFO for the Ohio Department of Education (ODE).
Coleman said she's had experience as an administrative assistant for various nonprofits, most recently working on the development team for the PAC and foundation of the Columbus Association of Realtors.

The board also approved a slate of committee chairs: Region 12 representative Don Mason for the Investment Committee; gubernatorial board appointee Larry Kidd for the Finance and Audit Committee; Region 15 representative Julie Ehemann for the Personnel Committee; and gubernatorial appointee Tom Gregoire for the Grant Oversight Committee.

The foundation also welcomed two new board members: Judge David Matia of Cuyahoga County Common Pleas Court, representing Region 3, and Evan Kleymeyer of the Ohio Bankers League, appointee of Senate Minority Leader Kenny Yuko (D-Richmond Heights).

Whittington said she'd been informed Wednesday morning that Attorney General Dave Yost's office had deposited $1 million for the startup of operations. Holly Gross, one of the attorneys from Benesch, Friedlander, Coplan & Aronoff helping to facilitate startup of the foundation, said the money came from the state's settlement with McKinsey & Co, which predated the establishment of OneOhio.

The board voted to adopt the code of regulations debated throughout the past few meetings after a few final tweaks, including clarification of the applicability of ethics laws to public officials serving on the board. The board also approved policies on transparency and gifts.

The board approved spending authority for up to $25,000 for items like computers and software to facilitate operations, and revisited prior spending authority approved for insurance to allow $100,000. Kidd said the foundation faced major challenges in securing director and officer insurance, with just one of 30 firms contacted willing to provide coverage, and the $3 million in aggregate coverage provided is not sufficient. He said they want to increase that to at least $5 million, and eventually $15 million or more, and will also need fraud insurance.

"It's opiates, and insurance companies don't like it," he said of the difficulty in finding companies willing to write coverage for OneOhio.

Board leadership repeated the assessment from the prior meeting that actual grant money likely won't be awarded by the foundation before next year.

"The monies haven't come in yet. The monies are now sitting at the national settlement administrator. So that is still being structured. They don't have their infrastructure for those dollars to go back out," Whittington said.

Legislative study committee reviews "benefit bridge" pilot program with county JFS directors

The Public Assistance Benefits Accountability Task Force met this week to review a pilot program aimed at transitioning individuals off of public benefits. The "Benefit Bridge" program was implemented in June 2021 in Licking, Allen, Fairfield, Hamilton, Meigs and Stark Counties, with the goal of smoothing the transitions for those receiving public assistance and moving toward self-sufficiency. According to Licking County Department of Job and Family Services Director John Fisher, the program is showing favorable results.

The program is necessary because current public assistance eligibility requirements can discourage individuals from seeking raises and promotions, as the benefits they would lose are often more valuable than the wage gains earned from advancement, Fisher said.

"Individuals decline employment opportunities and/or advancement because of the loss of public assistance benefits. Why? … Individuals are rational. Look at a mother with two children, and look at them paying a portion of their child care, look at what they might get on Medicaid, what they might get on food stamps. Congratulations, mom, you get a 50-cent raise, so you're going to make an extra $20 a week, and guess what? Your food stamps went down $25 and your co-pay for day care went up $10, so now you're really $15 behind. What would a rational mother do for her children? I know what my decision would be," Fisher said.

Additionally, individuals often fear the uncertainty of losing benefits, lack an ongoing plan for the future and do not have the resources to financially address personal or family crises, he said. The Benefit Bridge program is designed to address all of those issues, as a customized success plan is created with the participant.

One of the key services provided is a time-limited offset, or "top off," he said.

"If you're in the Benefit Bridge program, and you succeed in getting a wage increase … and let's say it's going to increase your day care by $20. We may come in the first month and subsidize that at $20. The second month, maybe $15, and wean you off that immediate cliff, so it's a much softer landing," Fisher said.

There are currently 53 individuals enrolled and active in the program, while 11 have left the program. Nine of those who exited the program received pay raises and/or job promotions, and now receive fewer public assistance benefits, Fisher said.

The task force also heard from Ohio Job and Family Services Directors' Association Executive Director Joel Potts, Allen County Department of Job and Family Services Director Joe Patton and Hancock County Department of Job and Family Services Director Randy Galbraith.

Potts noted that most individuals receiving assistance across the state are "working poor," not unemployed individuals. To be most successful, agencies should focus more on helping program participants achieve financial independence, utilizing programs such as the Benefit Bridge program outlined by Fisher, he said.

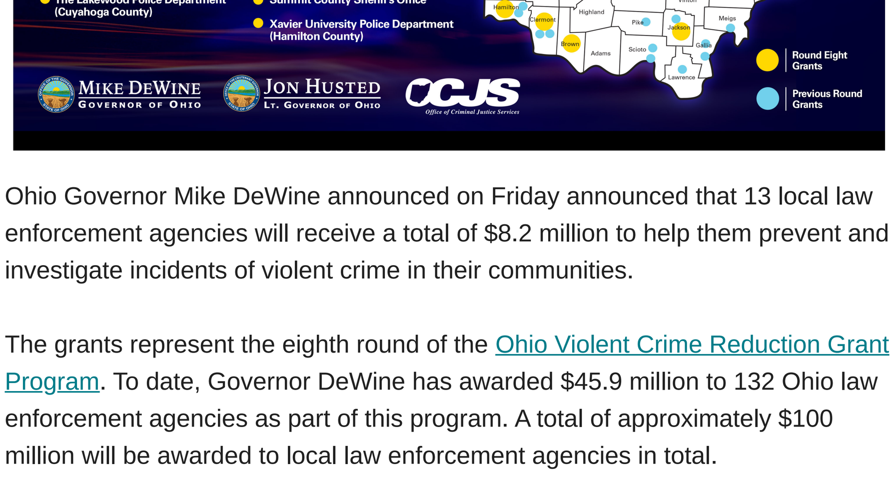
Potts also mentioned the need to change from being "reactive" to being "proactive" in meeting people's needs.

"If somebody comes to us and says, 'Hey, I just found out I'm going to be laid off. I don't know how I'm going to pay for my rent. I don't know how I'm going to pay for my car.' We say, 'Well there's really nothing we can do until you lose your job, and we'll put you in a training program. We'll help you stabilize housing. We'll help you get transportation.' He's like, 'Wait a second, I already have a house. I already have a car, I just don't want to lose it.' Our system needs to be in a position to address it at that point, and not wait for it to become a more drastic and much more dire consequence," Potts said.

Potts also emphasized that simply cutting government benefits would likely not create results anyone wants to see.

"Getting people off assistance is easy, but they're still in your community. If they still have needs that aren't being addressed, those needs are going to be magnified. Anything we can do to help stabilize those lives … is going to benefit the community as a whole," Potts said.

Latest round of Ohio Violent Crime Reduction Grants announced



Ohio Governor Mike DeWine announced on Friday announced that 13 local law enforcement agencies will receive a total of $8.2 million to help them prevent and investigate incidents of violent crime in their communities.

The grants represent the eighth round of the Ohio Violent Crime Reduction Grant Program. To date, Governor DeWine has awarded $45.9 million to 132 Ohio law enforcement agencies as part of this program. A total of approximately $100 million will be awarded to local law enforcement agencies in total.

County offices receiving grants include the Jackson and Summit County Sheriff's offices and the Ottawa County Prosecutor's office.

"By investing in our law enforcement agencies and our peace officers, we're also investing in the safety of our citizens," said Governor DeWine. "The goal of this grant program is to support the around-the-clock work of local law enforcement authorities so that they can enhance their efforts to keep citizens safe."
