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September 9, 2024

The Polymer Industry Cluster in Akron was awarded $31.3 million from the Innovation Hubs Program.

Joining Summit County Executive and CCAO Secretary Ilene Shapiro (center) for the announcement were, from left to right, Senator Vernon Sykes, Representative Veronica Sims, Lt. Governor Jon Husted, Governor Mike DeWine, Representative Bill Roemer, Representative Casey Weinstein, Representative Jack Daniels, and Mayor of Akron Shammas Malik.

Photo courtesy of Ilene Shapiro

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ASSOCIATION AND MEMBER NEWS

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Ohio drought: latest news, resources, and an overview

Much of Ohio has been suffering from a drought since mid-June. This article will first provide two items of recent news concerning the drought, then highlight resources offered to hard-hit areas, and finally provide an overview of conditions across the state.

Recent News

Open Burning Ban

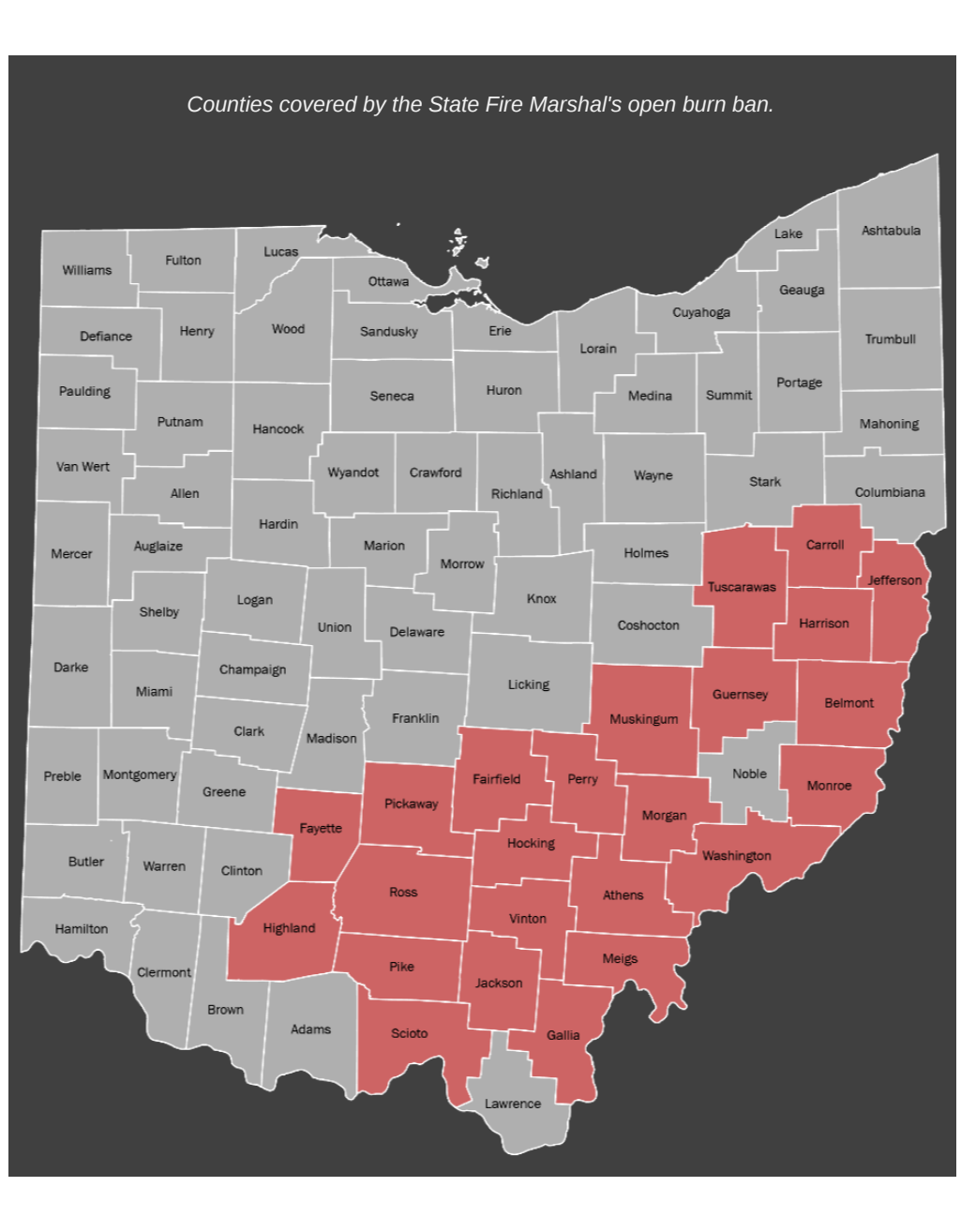
On Friday, the Ohio Fire Marshal issued a Ban on Open Burning effective immediately for counties designated as Extreme Drought or Exceptional Drought (more information regarding these designations can be found in the Overview section).

The ban prohibits the following outdoor actions: lighting and/or maintaining a fire at any location, smoking (be it cigarettes, similar items, or as part of a cooking process), non-electric cooking (any fuel source), using fireworks, discarding lighted materials (such as matches or cigarettes), campfires, bonfires, live fire training events, flame effect-based displays, and using spark-causing devices.

Violations of the ban are punishable by civil penalties and the existing criminal penalty for negligently causing fires to spread to any structure, field, or wooded lot.

The affected counties are presented below.

Counties covered by the State Fire Marshal's open burn ban.



CCAO Webinar

This Thursday, CCAO will be hosting a webinar with the Ohio Department of Agriculture, featuring Director Brian Baldridge and Assistant Chief of the Division of Soil and Water Conservation Robert Hamilton, to brief counties on the ongoing drought conditions and to make themselves available as a resource to help counties navigate the natural disaster.

The webinar will be held from 2:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m.. After the webinar concludes, a recording and any materials shared by the Department will be made available (recordings typically take about an hour to process, so CCAO anticipates sharing the recording and materials by 4:30 p.m. on Thursday or early Friday).

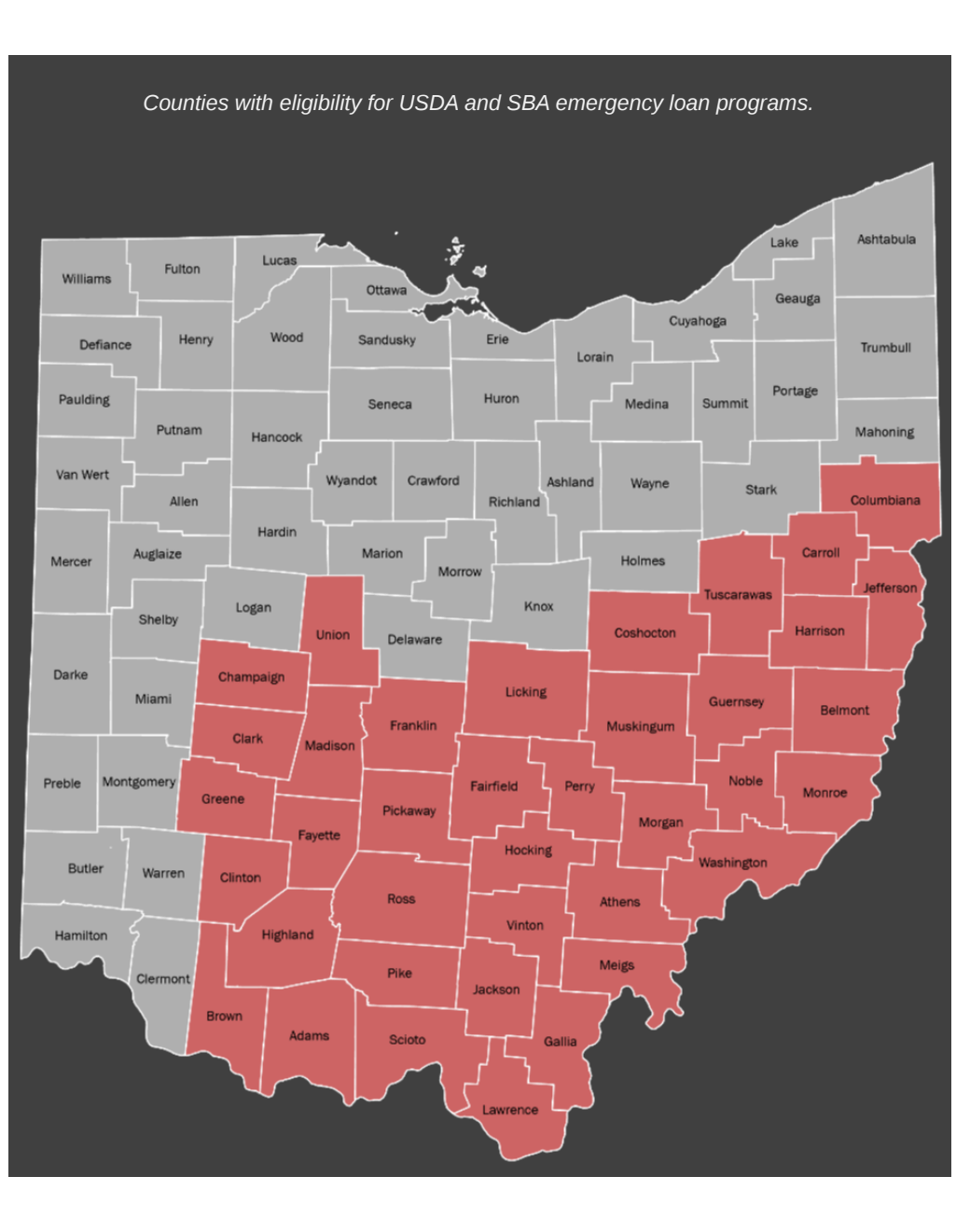
Meigs County and Washington County formally declared a drought emergency within their jurisdictions. Emergency declarations apply certain portions of the Revised Code to be effective and may be helpful for other counties.

Resources Available to Affected Counties

On September 4, the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the Small Business Administration (SBA) announced that emergency assistance programs are open to Ohio counties.

The programs are open to 22 primary counties and their neighbors. The map below shows the eligible counties (Ohio River counties in West Virginia are also eligible but not mapped below).

Counties with eligibility for USDA and SBA emergency loan programs.



Under the USDA Emergency Farm Loan Program, producers who have suffered farm-related losses directly caused by a declared disaster or designated disaster area may qualify for emergency loans. To qualify, applicants must be established family farm operators and have suffered at least a 30% loss in crop production or physical loss to livestock or associated property. Applicants can receive the lesser of the actual production or physical losses or $500,000.

Under the SBA Economic Injury Disaster Loan Program, eligible farm-related and nonfarm-related entities suffering financial losses can apply for up to a $2 million loan. Interest rates are 4% for businesses and 3.25% for private nonprofit organizations, and terms are up to 30 years. These loans ***are not available*** to agricultural producers, farmers, or ranchers.

CCAO encourages affected counties to share information about these programs with farmers and small businesses in their communities to help them weather the effects of the ongoing drought.

Drought Overview

In the United States, droughts are defined as periods when several factors, including but not limited to precipitation, are significantly below the expected value. Since there are multiple factors at play and droughts have a cumulative effect, isolated occurrences of rainfall do not necessarily mitigate the drought's effects.

USDA determines droughts using the US Drought Monitor (USDM), a joint project between USDA, the University of Nebraska, and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

The USDM classifies areas by intensity according to the following scale:

- None - Areas with normal or wet conditions
- D0 - Abnormally Dry
- D1 - Moderate Drought
- D2 - Severe Drought
- D3 - Extreme Drought
- D4 - Exceptional Drought

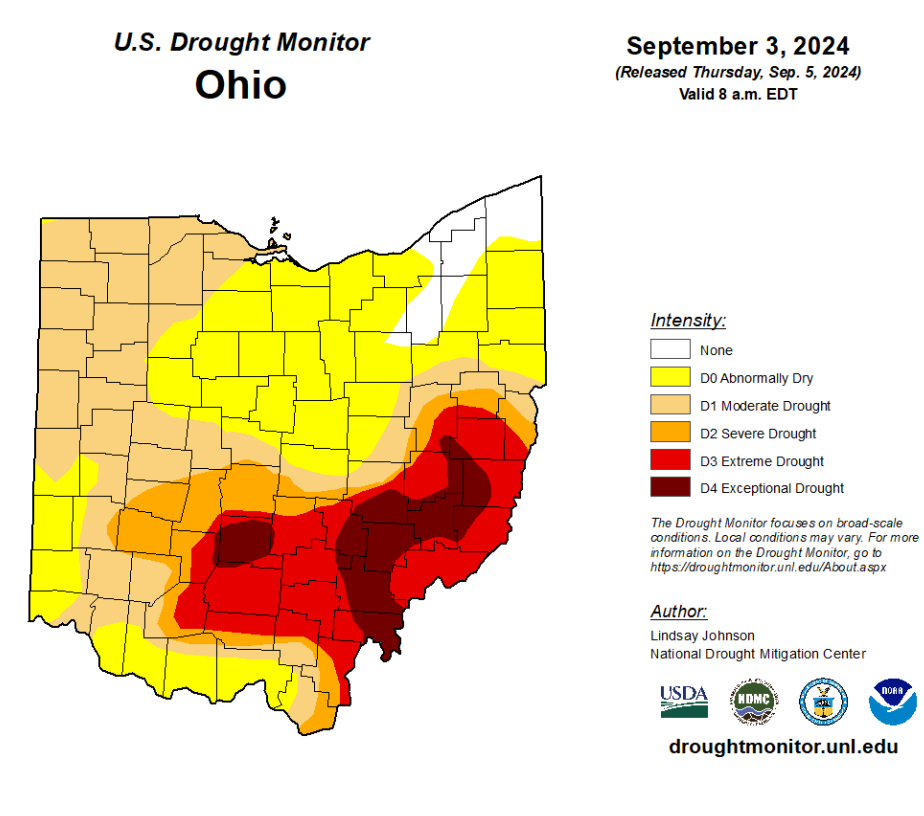
The USDM updates its data every Tuesday and releases updated maps every Thursday.

Ohio's drought began in mid-June. On June 11, 100% of Ohio's land area was in the "None" category. By the following Tuesday, 55% was in the D0 category. Conditions across the state have deteriorated since. As of last Tuesday, only 4.6% of the state is in the "None" category, while 7.4% are in the D4 category.

The USDM estimates that about 10.3 million Ohioans, or 89.1% of the state's population, live in a drought-affected area.

Lake County is the only county with none of its land area categorized as at least D0, although that may change by Tuesday when the latest data is compiled. Below is a map of the current drought conditions and an animation of the spread of drought conditions since June 11.

Current drought conditions in Ohio, overlaid by county.


U.S. Drought Monitor
Ohio
September 3, 2024
(Released Thursday, Sep. 5, 2024)
Valid 8 a.m. EDT
Intensity:
None
D0 Abnormally Dry
D1 Moderate Drought
D2 Severe Drought
D3 Extreme Drought
D4 Exceptional Drought
The Drought Monitor focuses on broad-scale conditions. Local conditions may vary. For more information on the Drought Monitor, go to https://droughtmonitor.unl.edu/About.aspx
Author:
Lindsay Johnson
National Drought Mitigation Center
droughtmonitor.unl.edu

CCAO announces partnership with Amazon Business, explanatory webinar to be held on Wednesday

CCAO is thrilled to announce a new partnership with Amazon Business, bringing a host of exclusive benefits to all county offices and departments in Ohio. This collaboration aims to streamline procurement processes, enhance cost savings, and provide unparalleled convenience for county operations.

Key Benefits of the Program

1. Free Business Prime Membership

- 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.

2. 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.

3. 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.

To learn more about this exciting new partnership and how to opt in, please join us for an informational webinar on September 12th at 11 a.m. If you have any questions, please contact Steve Karlberg at karlbers@amazon.com.

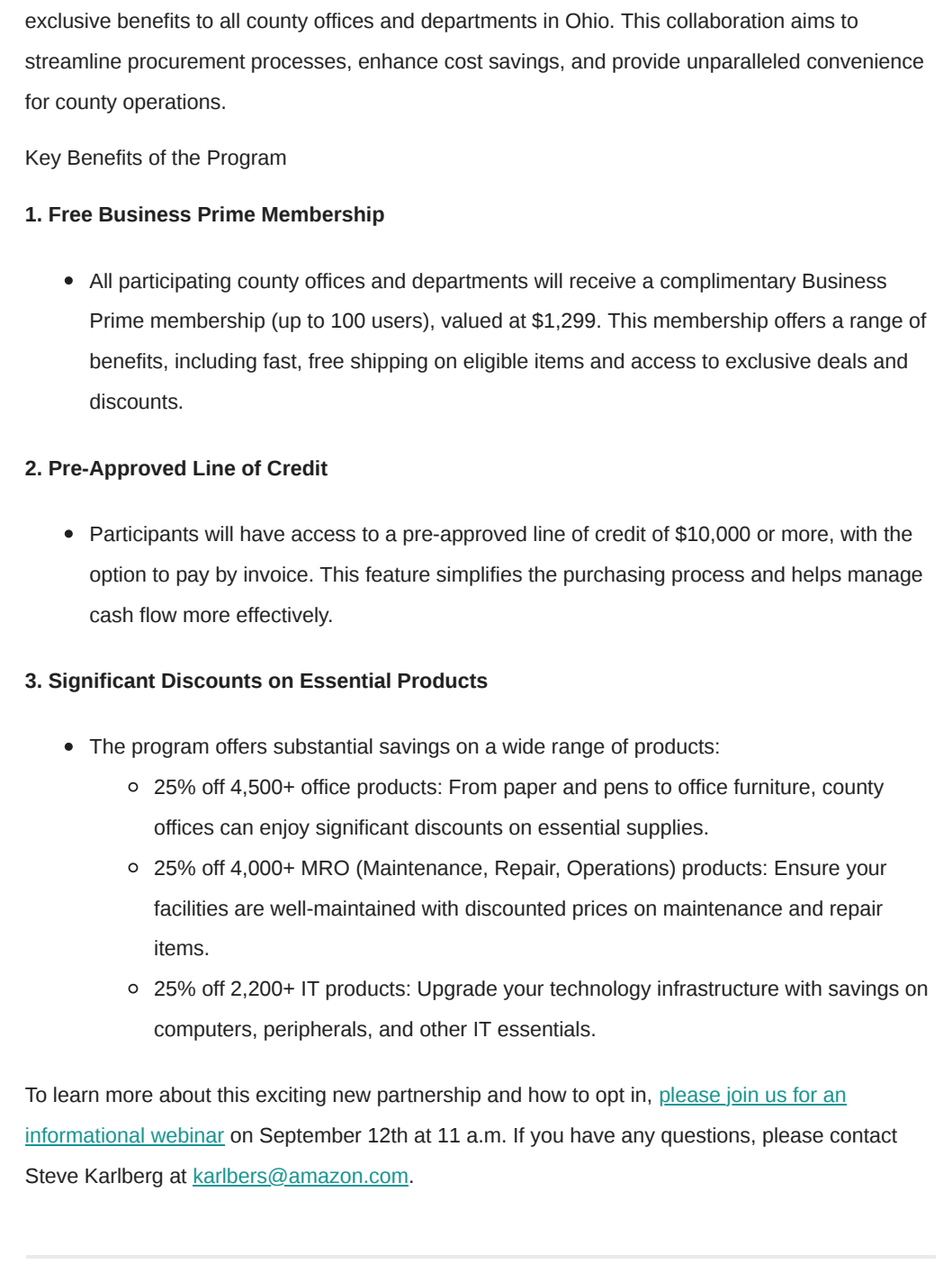
Central District Meeting to be held in Champaign County on October 4

On October 4, the CCAO-CEAO Central District will host a meeting in Champaign County.

The meeting will include a tour of the Sutphen Corporation, a company that manufactures and services fire trucks and other fire suppression supplies. **Please note that close-toed shoes must be worn for this tour.**

After the Sutphen tour, the event will conclude with a tour of the Champaign Aviation Museum. The museum is known for its ongoing project of restoring a B-17 Flying Fortress, the primary Allied high-altitude bomber during World War II.

If you are interested in registering for the event, please contact Champaign County Clerk Natalie Ransdell at nransdell@co.champaign.oh.us or 937-484-1611. Please register by September 18.



Save the Date!

OCCO
Ohio Council of County Officials

Legislative Reception

November 12, 2024 | 5:00p.m.–7:00p.m.

Ohio Statehouse Rotunda

Free to Attend

The Ohio Council of County Officials (OCCO) is hosting a legislative reception on November 12, 2024 from 5 to 7 p.m. for county elected officials, members of the Ohio General Assembly, and statewide office holders. We look forward to celebrating the work of county government together.

OCCO is an organization that unites the associations representing county auditors, commissioners, clerks of courts, coroners, engineers, prosecuting attorneys, recorders, treasurers, sheriffs and judges in order to promote sound, efficient and fiscally responsible government.

Please email Diana Morris with the Ohio Prosecuting Attorneys Association at diana@ohiopa.org if you have any questions or would like to RSVP. We look forward to seeing you!

A Special Thanks to our Pinnacle Partner

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STATE AND FEDERAL NEWS

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SOS Directives issued for November general election

Secretary of State Frank LaRose has issued two directives to county boards of elections since last Friday.

First, Directive 2024-21 was sent on August 31 and concerns absentee voter ballot provisions. The directive instructs boards to place signage at the ballot drop box informing individuals that only the voter may place their ballot in the drop box. Any individual delivering ballots for a family member or disabled voter must enter the office and complete an attestation form.

The Secretary of State provides the attestation form and a sample ballot box sign. The county's exact sign may differ as long as it uses substantially similar language to the sample.

The directive also reminds boards to continue monitoring drop boxes, particularly for individuals dropping off more than one ballot. Suppose a board believes that an individual drops off more than one ballot (a practice called "ballot harvesting"). In that case, it should report the allegation to the Election Integrity Unit of the Secretary of State.

The second directive, Directive 2024-22, is a routine directive regarding canvass and certification procedures for the upcoming general election. Some examples of information in the directive include a reminder that boards may begin processing absentee ballots on October 8 but are prohibited from tabulating these ballots before the close of polls, a reminder of the reporting schedules for each county, and the length of the post-election cure period for provisional ballots or deficient absentee ballots.

CCAO is in contact with the Ohio Association of Elections Officials to better understand the impact of these directives on county boards of elections. We would encourage members to reach out to their boards of elections to discuss local implementation of the directives.

Juvenile Justice Working Group releases recommendations for reforms

This week, Governor Mike DeWine and the Ohio Juvenile Justice Working Group released its report on recommendations for changes to Ohio's state and local juvenile justice system.

The report makes 26 recommendations, including some that are already in progress. The recommendations will likely play a role in the Executive Budget and the full operating budget process.

The full list of recommendations, including explanations of each, can be found in the full report. A few of the recommendations that have direct county implications are summarized below.

- **Recommendation 6**: Provide funding through the Department of Youth Services to assist county prosecutors in prosecuting felony offenses in DYS facilities.
- **Recommendation 8**: Allow juvenile judges to use discretion when sentencing youths adjudicated of gun specifications.
- **Recommendation 10**: Evaluate Ohio's statutes on bindovers, specifically evaluating whether the current mandatory bindover provisions should be eliminated.
- **Recommendation 13**: Require juvenile judges to commit youth with special needs (such as blindness, deafness, wheelchair confinement, and other similar physical disabilities) to alternative placement facilities.
- **Recommendation 19:** Have juvenile judges explore services designed to help youth and families such as OhioRISE and Prevention Services Plans and urge juvenile courts to partner with DYS to develop front-end family resources.
- **Recommendation 20**: Have state agencies lead in analyzing whether to implement the Stepping Up Initiative in the state's juvenile justice system.
- **Recommendation 23**: Implement a reentry continuum to improve linkage to local resources, such as OhioRISE.

If you have questions about the report, please contact the CCAO Policy Team at policy@ccao.org.

ODJFS pursues new SNAP waiver

At a recent Governor's Executive Workforce Board Meeting, Lt. Governor Jon Husted shared that the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services submitted a Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) waiver to urging the U.S. Department of Agriculture to exclude the income of secondary students under the age of 21 in the State of Ohio so more young Ohioans are encouraged to participate in work-based learning.

Currently, the main deterrent for some is the fear that any wages they earn could reduce or even eliminate their household's SNAP benefits. Lt. Governor Husted submitted a letter of support with the waiver, noting that if this waiver is approved, as many as 50,000 young Ohioans between the ages of 18 and 21 would be able to work without impacting their family SNAP benefits.

Text adapted from Ohio Job and Family Services' Directors Association article

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AG accepts opinion request on commissioner authority to create unified stormwater utility

Earlier this month, Attorney General Dave Yost accepted a request from the Fairfield County Prosecutor regarding the authority for a board of county commissioners to transform multiple drainage maintenance districts (DMDs) into a single stormwater utility (SWU).

The request has four additional questions if the AG determines that commissioners do have that authority:

- **Question 2** - Can the assessments collected for the previously individual DMDs for the general benefit of the SWU?
- **Question 3** - If the answer to Question 2 is "no," can the assessments previously collected for individual DMDs be used to offset the SWU assessment for those landowners covered by the now-defunct DMD?
- **Question 4** - If the answer to questions 2 and 3 is "no," what are the legal ways that a county may dispose of the previously collected DMD funds?
- **Question 5** - Would the creation of a SWU supersede the DMDs that are recorded on a final plat?

The request arises out of the Fairfield County Board of Commissioners seeking to improve efficiency. The county has 119 DMDs, so when the county wants to change the assessment base, it must hold a discrete public hearing for each of the 119 DMDs. Allowing the county to consolidate the DMDs into a single SWU would allow the process to be conducted more efficiently, and since there would be more landowners in the SWU, costs to landowners would generally be lower in aggregate.

CCAO will continue to monitor this request and alert members when the AG issues an opinion.

EDUCATION AND GRANTS

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Visit the Grants and Funding Opportunities page on the CCAO website for a detailed listing of open grant programs.

OBM Connect$: A useful resource for county officials

On Thursday, OBM released the September 2024 edition of OBM Connect$, a monthly newsletter circulated by the Ohio Grants Partnership within OBM. The newsletter has a focus on informing subscribers about active grant programs, making it a valuable tool for county officials.

For example, featured in this month's edition are the local government cybersecurity grants that have been highlighted in past issues of Counties Current (to enhance local governments' cybersecurity portfolio), the federal Bridge Investment Program Planning Grant application period opening (to improve safety and efficiency over movement over bridges), and the federal Good Jobs Challenge grant program (to support high-quality workforce training programs).

CCAO encourages all members to subscribe to this valuable resource. If you want to be added to the mailing list, please contact diane.hare@obm.ohio.gov.

Three weeks remain for all county staff to fraud reporting training

All county commissioners, executives, council members, other county elected officials and all current county staff are required to complete a new, mandatory fraud reporting training through the Auditor of State's office by **September 28, 2024**. All public employees and elected officials are required to take the training once every 4 years.

Elected officials are unable to delegate this training to another employee and must complete the training themselves.

Any new county employees hired after September 28, 2024, must take the training within 30 days of the first day of employment and all elected officials must take the training within 30 days after taking office. The requirement is ongoing and training must be completed once every four years.

The training is a free, 8-minute video that is available on demand on the Auditor of State's website. Each elected official and county employee will register, watch the video, and then receive a certificate of completion. All certificates should be collected from employees and retained for audit.

The Auditor of State website includes FAQs and sample tools for tracking employee participation.

If you have questions regarding the training, you can contact the Auditor of State's office here.

Save the dates! Housing forums to be held in October, November

After the successful housing forum held earlier this month in Allen County, CCAO has worked with BrickerGraydon and OhioRealtors to schedule additional events around the state.

Details are still being finalized, but the dates are listed below. While the events are targeted at regional audiences, attendees from any area of the state are welcome.

- October 18 - Fairfield County (Central Ohio audience)
- November 1 - Portage County (Northeast Ohio audience)
- November 13 - Ross County (Southern Ohio audience)

As times and venues are cemented, CCAO will circulate registration information through e-blasts and Counties Current.

COUNTY NEWS

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Each week Counties Current highlights the happenings in our counties in the words of their local media. One story from each of the CCAO's five districts is highlighted, and on occasion other stories may be highlighted as well.

Northwest District

Henry County Courthouse to be renovated

WTOL, August 30, 2024

The Henry County Courthouse will soon get major renovations to repair and preserve its historic elements.

The Henry County Commissioners received $750,000 from the Save America's Treasures grant program, through the Historic Preservation Fund, to complete renovations to the courthouse.

The grant funds assist governments to preserve and repair historic locations across the United States.

Henry County's historic landmark has been around in the community for nearly a century and a half and is home to several governmental offices.

In addition to the grant funds, the Henry County Commissioners will contribute $750,000 as their cost-sharing requirement towards the renovation project.

"The funds will provide a beautiful and renovated courthouse that reflects our past history and allows for continued use for our citizens and governmental functions," said Tracy Busch, Henry County Operations Director, who is managing the project. "Through completing these renovations, the courthouse will remain a constant staple in the community for many generations to come."

Renovations will begin approximately in Oct. 2024 and will continue through 2025.

Northeast District

Commissioners, McNally rail against bump in property tax

The Vindicator, September 6, 2024

State Rep. Lauren McNally, D-59th of Youngstown, joined with the Mahoning County commissioners on Thursday to talk to reporters about what McNally called an "unprecedented increase in property taxes." They spoke at the Mahoning County Courthouse.

McNally started talking to the commissioners about the issue several months ago, including a public meeting in May. She said Thursday the public needed an "update" to understand that the increases property owners are seeing in their property taxes "solely rests on the state legislature, and it's a choice."

She said legislators over a couple of decades have engaged in "tax shifting," which is "shifting taxes away from the state and onto local homeowners and communities." She said it is "forcing communities and local homeowners to pay more than their fair share to keep police, fire and safety personnel on the streets."

McNally said she has been working in Columbus and with local leaders like the Mahoning County commissioners to "find solutions that will lower our property taxes and create a fairer system that doesn't constantly require property owners to pick up the tab."

She said Thursday's press conference was to urge state leaders in Columbus to "get serious about proving real relief to all Ohioans. We absolutely can lower our property taxes, reduce costs and still support essential services if we ensure that the state pays its fair share and returns our tax dollars to our local communities."

Central District

Marion Rotary Club Foundation awards grant to Marion County Board of Developmental Disabilities for "Smart Space"

Marion County Now, September 5, 2024

The Marion Rotary Club Foundation has awarded the Marion County Board of Developmental Disabilities (MCBDD) a grant to create a space introducing "smart" technology and adaptive equipment to families. The space simulates a home environment where families can explore innovative ways technology and equipment can provide independent solutions.

Designed with people of Marion County with developmental disabilities in mind, the space also benefits seniors and the general disabled population. MCBDD Superintendent Cheryl Plaster announced that the board received a $12,500 grant to create an area resembling a home, featuring various technologies and adaptive equipment. The area has been named the "Smart Space."

"This grant was exactly what we needed to implement a dream that we have had for some time," Plaster said. "Many times, the idea of technology supporting people in the home is scary for families and hard to understand. With this new space, we can physically dial a 24/7 call center and get a real person that will be there to support them however they need it." She added that having the opportunity for families to feel and explore the possibilities will be instrumental in changing mindsets.

The Smart Space includes 24/7 remote monitoring capabilities, a medication dispenser to remind individuals and their caregivers of medications, a smart speaker to perform tasks, give reminders, and help with executive functioning, a mattress shaker to alarm or wake a person who is deaf or hard of hearing in case of an emergency, and many other small but impactful accessibility supports.

Southwest District

Commissioners approve delinquent accounts

Daily Advocate, August 28, 2024

Commissioners approved delinquent accounts and airport project costs. Commissioners Marshall Combs and Larry Holmes were present.

Each year, the commissioners approve the lists of delinquent accounts for the different Sewer Districts. If the sewer charges are not paid, they may be certified to the Darke County Auditor for collection and the county auditor shall place them on the real property tax list and duplicate against the real property served by the sere connection and proceed to collect the unpaid charges in the same manner as other taxes.

Charity Hutt, Sewer Districts Administrator, advised the commissioners that out of the 800 people billed, only 81 are unpaid as of Thursday. The county sent 177 letters out to delinquent accounts on Aug. 16, and they received 96 payments by the deadline. It was also reported that the number of delinquents is two percent higher this year than it was last year.

Total dollar amounts for the sewer districts include $5,067.48 is still owed for new Weston-Burkettsville, $17,616.51 is owed for the Village of Wayne Lakes Sewer, $1,112.27 for Stillwater, $1,905.16 for Rolin Acres, $8,217.07 for Rossburg, $2,591.26 for Yorkshire, and $1,137.62 in Osgood, and $1,122.45 in North Star. Pitsburg, however, is a little different.

Southeast District

Washington County Commissioners vote to raise dog license, kennel license fees

Marietta Times, August 30, 2024

Washington County Commissioners voted to increase dog and kennel registration fees by more than 50% Thursday.

During Thursday's regular meeting, commissioners unanimously approved a resolution that increases the fees by approximately 56.25%.

Commissioner James Booth read the resolution which states there is a "present and longstanding shortfall" in dog license fee revenues relative to the expenses covered by the dog and kennel fund and the only way to fix the shortfall is to raise the amount of the "county dog registration fees."

The dog and kennel fund pays for a dog warden, who picks up stray dogs, makes sure all county dogs are licensed and performs other duties. The fund gets its money from a fee for a dog license that is required for all dogs over the age of 3 months and a fee for a kennel license required for any person, corporation, partnership or other who are engaged in the business of breeding dogs for sale, according to the county website.

Washington County Sheriff Larry Mincks asked the commissioners to raise the fees, according to a letter he sent to commissioners about the issue.

DATES TO REMEMBER

Please view the CCAO Calendar for a comprehensive list of events to note.

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SEPTEMBER 13
CORSA Annual Meeting

SEPTEMBER 27
CEBCO Board of Directors Meeting

BY SEPTEMBER 28
County elected officials and employees must take Fraud Reporting training

OCTOBER 4
Central District Meeting - Champaign County

OCTOBER 14
Columbus Day - Legal Holiday

NOVEMBER 12
OCCO Legislative Reception

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