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**September 30, 2024**

**CCAO thanks Governor DeWine and his team, first responders, and emergency management officials for the swift response to flooding and power outages caused by the remnants of Hurricane Helene in Scioto County.**

*Photo courtesy of Governor Mike DeWine*

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## ASSOCIATION AND MEMBER NEWS

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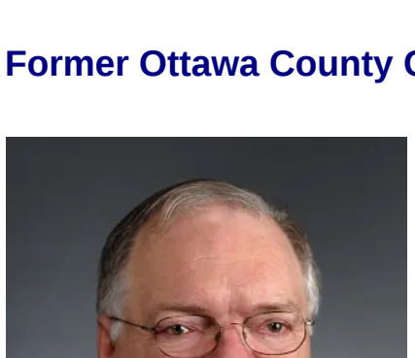
### Former Ottawa County Commissioner, legislator passes away



Last week, Darrell W. Opfer passed away at the age of 83.

Darrell was a life long public servant with a long career as a public school teacher. This includes a three-year stint teaching at a high school in Kenya during his time with the Peace Corps.

He was elected as an Ottawa County Commissioner in 1984 and served two terms before representing the county in the Ohio House of Representatives. Darrell later served as the director of the Ottawa County Improvement Corporation.

You can read Darrell's full obituary here.

### Governor activates disaster relief program for 11 counties

On Friday, Governor Mike DeWine authorized the State Disaster Relief Program (SDRP) to support 11 counties significantly impacted by severe weather events this year.

The SDRP is a reimbursement program that can be used when storm damage amounts do not meet the threshold for federal assistance but meet state program requirements. This program is intended to provide supplemental state assistance to local governments and eligible private non-profit organizations for costs associated with debris removal, emergency protective measures, and permanent work. The authorization also allows the Ohio Emergency Management Agency to request additional funding for these supports from the Controlling Board.

The counties covered by the authorization are:

- Monroe County: Flooding and severe storms, Jan. 24-25 and April 1-4
- Belmont, Guernsey, Jefferson, Meigs, Morgan, Noble, and Washington counties: Flooding and severe storms, April 1-4.
- Darke and Mercer counties: Tornadoes, May 7-8.
- Cuyahoga County: Tornadoes and severe storms, Aug. 6.

### Stepping Up Initiative coordinator survey reminder, due by October 11

As many of you know, the Stepping Up initiative has been active in Ohio since 2015. During this time, the initiative has worked to reduce the number of people with mental illness in Ohio's jails. As with any program, they are continually looking to evaluate and improve the program in the state. To that end, they are currently working on an updated evaluation of the program. The last evaluation occurred in 2021, when 54 counties participated in the initiative.

Today, over 60 Ohio counties are involved with the initiative, and this evaluation will help determine the program's impact in all participating counties and help the staff determine what services and resources are still needed going forward.

The survey was sent directly to your Stepping Up County Coordinator; ***only they can respond***. The link above contains the contact information for each county coordinator, so please follow up with them if you have any questions.

It is important to note that your Stepping Up County Coordinator will require assistance and information from several members of your County Stepping Up Committee, if you have one, including staff from your jail, Common Pleas Court, Municipal Court, Probate Court, treatment providers, housing providers, and mental health and substance abuse services board.

We have linked a copy of the Stepping Up 2024 questionnaire to facilitate the gathering of information from the persons who represent their respective areas, as noted above. Specifically, there are the following number of questions covering these topics:

- 13 general questions
- 29 questions geared towards jail and/or law enforcement
- 4 questions for the Municipal and Common Pleas Courts and probation
- 3 Probate Court questions
- 7 questions on the crisis continuum
- 9 questions on projects, improvements, and challenges

The questionnaire must be completed by Friday, October 11. If you have any questions or need additional information, please contact Melissa Burek at mwburek@bgsu.edu or 419-372-9542.

If you are not a Stepping Up County and are interested in learning more about the initiative, please contact CCAO Managing Director of Policy Kyle Petty at kpetty@ccao.org or Stepping Up Ohio Project Director Eve Stratton at evelyn_stratton@yahoo.com.

### Northwest District Meeting to be held in Henry County on October 16, register by tomorrow!

On October 16, the CCAO-CEAO Northwest District will host a meeting in Henry County.

The meeting will have guest speakers from New Vision Farms, a conglomeration of family farms, and Graminex, a farm science company that extracts natural nutrients from pollen grains.

Registration for the event is $25 per person, with checks made payable to the Northwest Ohio Commissioners and Engineers Association. To register, complete this form and send it to Henry County Clerk Kristi Schultheis at kristi.schultheis@henrycountyohio.gov no later than October 1.

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***A Special Thanks to our Pinnacle Partner***

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## STATE AND FEDERAL NEWS

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### DeWine-Husted Administration awards brownfield remediation, site revitalization, and critical infrastructure grants

Earlier in September, the DeWine-Husted Administration announced the fifth round of awards for the Brownfield Remediation Program and the Demolition and Site Revitalization Program. The awards granted for brownfield remediation total $16.2 million and will fund 52 projects across 31 counties. The site revitalization awards total $33.1 million and will fund 341 projects across five counties.

You can view the complete list of brownfield remediation and demolition and site revitalization projects.

Also awarded earlier this month was $18.2 million in Neighborhood Revitalization and Critical Infrastructure grants. These grants will fund projects across 34 communities. Examples of projects funded through these grants include replacing well fields and electrical lines at the City of Coshocton's water plant (Coshocton County), replacing a water tower in the Village of Lyons (Fulton County), and assisting the Village of Beallsville (Monroe County) purchase a fire truck.

A full list of the awards can be found here.

### SNAP recipients urged to protect their benefits

*The following is a news release issued on September 26 by the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services regarding SNAP theft. Please consider sharing it with your community.*

Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS) Director Matt Damschroder is urging Ohioans receiving Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits to act now to protect those benefits. The warning comes as SNAP recipients across the country continue to fall victim to fraud schemes such as skimming.

"Criminals continue to prey on vulnerable Ohioans who rely on these benefits to supplement their monthly grocery costs," Damschroder said. "Fortunately, we do have tools such as the ConnectEBT app and its "Lock Everywhere" feature to help Ohioans avoid becoming victims."

Criminals use a process called skimming to steal EBT card numbers. This is when a fraudulent device is placed over a point-of-sale card reader to steal payment card information. When a recipient swipes their card over a compromised device, they are unsuspectingly sharing their card information with criminals.

SNAP is a federal food assistance program of the USDA's Food and Nutrition Services (FNS) that is overseen in Ohio by ODJFS and administered by county departments of Job and Family Services. A federal program currently authorized by Congress allows recipients whose funds have been stolen since Oct. 1, 2022, to apply for replacement benefits.

SNAP recipients are encouraged to take some simple steps to reduce the likelihood of becoming a victim:

- Manage your benefits through the secure ConnectEBT app on your mobile phone or tablet. Through the app's card lock features, users can:
  - Block in-person transactions at out-of-state retail locations.
  - Enable a feature that requires users to unlock their EBT prior to making any purchases, including in-state.
- Create a PIN for your card that is unique and difficult to guess.
- Change your PIN monthly, before each scheduled deposit.
- Never share your card number or PIN. ODJFS will never ask for these numbers.
- Carefully examine point-of-sale card readers before using them to check for skimming devices.
- When using your card, cover the keypad with your body or hand to stop others from seeing your PIN.

ODJFS uses a variety of methods to detect potential fraud, including suspicious activity and identifying point-of-sale terminals where skimming or criminal transactions may be taking place. ODJFS shares that information with the Ohio Investigative Unit, local law enforcement, and FNS.

EBT cardholders can reduce their risk by following these tips on avoiding skimmer devices:

- Do not use the card reader if you notice anything unusual.
- Pull at the edges of the keypad before swiping your EBT card to ensure there is nothing over the reader.
- Notify store staff if you notice anything suspicious with the card reader.

Currently, individuals who have had their SNAP benefits stolen electronically can seek reimbursement by contacting their local County Department of Job and Family Services.

From October 1, 2022, to September 13, 2024, ODJFS issued $6.8 million in reimbursements to 11,859 Ohioans.

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## 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.*

### Secretary of State to host election security webinar on October 4

This Friday, the Secretary of State will host an election security stakeholders webinar to share information on how Ohio's elections are safe, secure, and accessible. You can register for the webinar here.

The webinar will include an overview of potential disruptions that the office mitigates and prevents through cybersecurity and physical security standards and requirements, a summary of campaign finance, and an overview of how the office investigates and pursues instances of voter fraud and attempts to obstruct, intimidate, or interfere with registration or voting activities. The webinar will also cover readiness efforts throughout the administration of elections, including certifications, audits, and Election Night Reporting.

If you have difficulties registering, please contact Operational Readiness Manager Matthew McCrystal at MMcCrystal@OhioSoS.gov.

### CCAO, Ohio REALTORS, and BrickerGraydon to host Fairfield County housing forum in October; Save the Dates for two future events

On October 18, BrickerGraydon, Ohio REALTORS, and CCAO will host a collaborative discussion on the future of housing in Ohio. The event will be held at the Wigwam Event Center in Pickerington and is free, but space is limited. Registration will close on October 11.

The program will feature speakers such as Lt. Governor Jon Husted, Fairfield County Commissioner Jeff Fix, CEO of One Columbus Kenny McDonald, and others.

Registration for the event can be completed here.

Details for two additional events are still being finalized, but the dates and host county are listed below.

- 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.

### Low-interest loan programs available to drought-affected areas

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.

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.

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## 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

Seneca County EMS unveils new Bloomville Station

**Advertiser-Tribune, September 21, 2024**

When EMS service began in 1978, First Responders tended to patients with a small medical bag and a prayer they would get the patient to the hospital before it was too late.

"Paramedics were unheard of in rural areas at that time," said Seneca County EMS Director Chris Hafley. "Now we respond to the side of a patient with a mini emergency room."

Although technology has transformed the level of care provided to EMS patients, paramedics still faced a dangerous obstacle in Seneca County. They couldn't reach patients quickly enough. Now, that has changed. The new Seneca County joint EMS district is building new stations, creating collaboration across the county, and opening the door for better, more efficient emergency care. In the end, that means more lives will be saved.

On Sept. 14, the Seneca Regional Chamber of Commerce hosted a ribbon cutting and open house for Seneca County EMS's first new station, Bloomville Station #4. During the ceremony, Seneca County Commissioner Anthony Paradiso thanked countless people for helping bring Seneca County EMS into a new era of service. Paradiso was joined by Seneca County Commissioners Bill Frankart and Tyler Shuff and Seneca County Administrator Barb Patterson. Patterson worked extensively with Hafley toward the success of the countywide system.

#### Northeast District

Ashtabula County Commissioners agree to provide funding to alleviate short term jail overcrowding

**Meadville Tribune, September 23, 2024**

The Ashtabula County Board of Commissioners agreed last week to provide $135,000 in funding to the Ashtabula County Sheriff's Department to help decrease overcrowding in the jail by having some inmates serve time in the Geauga County Jail over the next three months.

Ashtabula County Sheriff William Niemi approached the commissioners seeking assistance after a state inspection at the present jail found the facility was overcrowded due to new standards applied by state officials.

Niemi said the jail has had a maximum population of 112 inmates, but following the inspection, that number dropped to 98.

"We need to come to a solution to our problem," Niemi said to kick off the Tuesday morning meeting.

Niemi asked for assistance for several reasons, including the ability to get people already in custody in city jails throughout the county into the county jail, a hope to lower the amount of people waiting to serve their time.

Niemi said there are 76 people waiting to serve time on operating a vehicle impaired charges and 32 on non-support charges. He said many of these people are ready and willing to serve their time but there is no room.

These "walk-in" misdemeanor violators often take vacation time and try to serve their sentences but are turned away due to lack of available space. He said one man has had to reschedule his jail time 15 times.

#### Central District

Franklin County Children Services asking voters for renewal of levy

**ABC6, September 25, 2024**

We are just weeks away from the November election, and this year there are some big requests for voters to decide on that are not in Washington D.C.

Franklin County Children Services' mission is to help keep children and teens safer and make families stronger for longer, Scott Varner with Children Services says it will go a long way.

Every few years voters will see this request on the ballot.

Franklin County Children Services is asking voters for a slight increase to approve a $1.9 mill renewal with a $0.6 mill increase in property tax levy for 10 years.

According to FCCS, they're funded primarily by two 10-year levies. That's more than 72% of the agency's total funding.

This time there's a slight property tax increase of $1.75 per month for every $100,000 of a home's value.

"We've looked at studies that show one in four children that come into the care of a children's service agency comes to use with a complex set of challenges. Usually, a mental health challenge that's high levels of trauma, maybe there's developmental issues and often it's also involvement with the other system. The juvenile justice system," said Scott Varner.

#### Southwest District

Greene County to acquire land next to Lewis A. Jackson airport for future development

**Dayton Daily News, September 24, 2024**

Greene County has purchased 60 acres of land next to the Lewis A. Jackson Regional Airport that may be used to expand the airport in the future.

County commissioners last week approved the purchase of 60.38 acres adjacent to the airport in Beavercreek Twp. for $2.35 million.

"This would be a strategic acquisition that would allow us to, one, protect that property from anything that would negatively impact the airport going forward, but also has the county in the driver's seat for what that ultimate disposition may be," County Administrator Brandon Huddleson said.

There are no concrete plans for the property, Huddleson said, but the 60 acres has a "plethora" of potential uses, including residential development, warehousing and logistics, hangar space or other commercial or industrial development related to the airport.

Additionally, if the airport were ever to extend its runway or taxiway, this would be the only direction it would be possible to do so, Huddleson said.

#### Southeast District

Auditor: Coshocton County farmers may see increase in property taxes

**Farmers Advance, September 19, 2024**

A rise in agricultural use valuation can be hard with the recent drought conditions across Ohio, according to Coshocton County Auditor Grant Daugherty.

"In a year when crop prices are low and it has been very dry in our area the last three months, seeing an unexpected increase in Current Agricultural Use Valuation (CAUV) values can be an unwelcome surprise for Coshocton County farmers. Such is the case for our local farmers enrolled in the CAUV program," he said in a news release.

CAUV values have been updated for Coshocton County by the Ohio State Department of Taxation for tax year 2024. All CAUV soils increased from a low of 77.01% (previous value $1,870 to a new value of $3,310) on the soil of Euclid Silt Loam (EuA) to a high of 420% (previous value $350 to a new value $1,820) on the soil of Chili-Urban (CgA).

What is happening is that CAUV values are increasing because of higher grain prices in the past, Daugherty explained. The State Department of Taxation determines the new CAUV values by using a formula with the following components − yield info (of the soil type), cropping pattern, crop prices, non-land production costs and capitalization rate.

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## DATES TO REMEMBER

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

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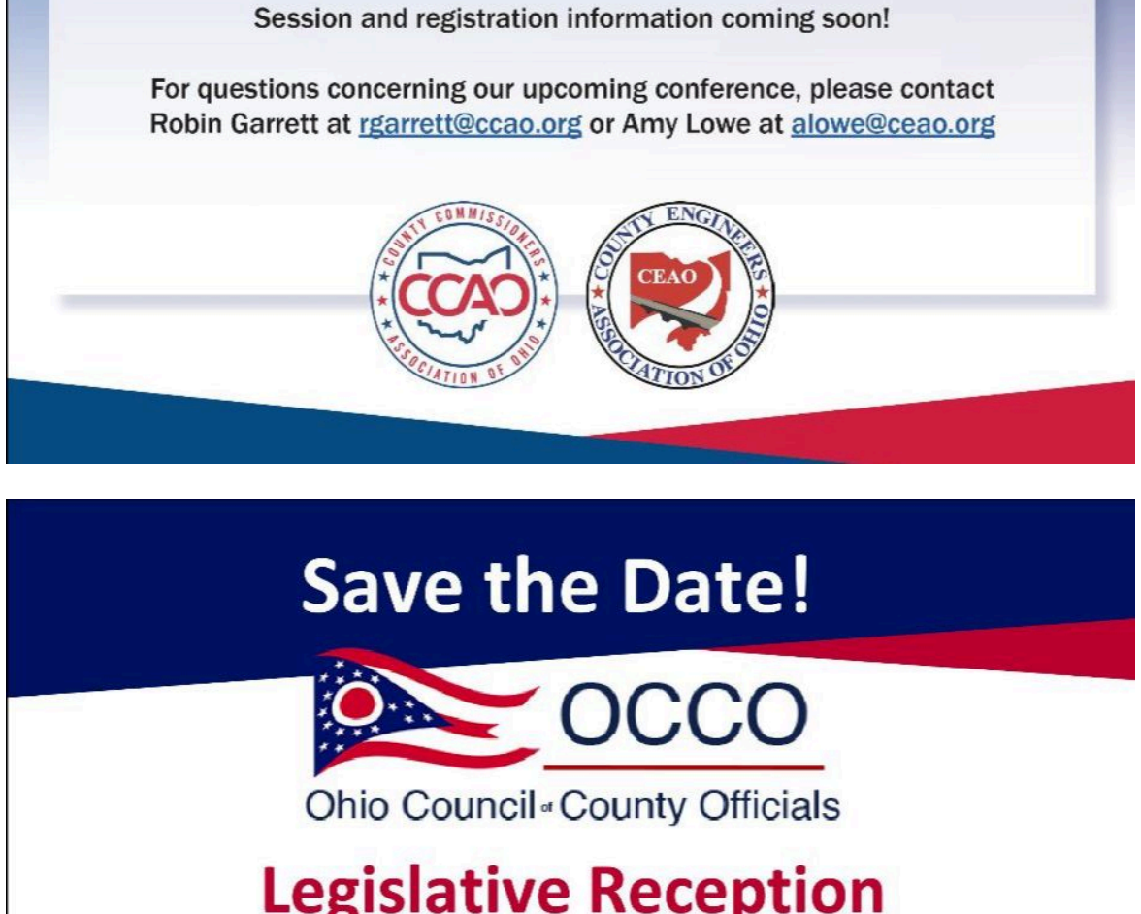
**OCTOBER 4**
**Central District Meeting - Champaign County**

**OCTOBER 14**
**Columbus Day - Legal Holiday**

**OCTOBER 16**
**Northwest District Meeting - Henry County**

**NOVEMBER 12**
**OCCO Legislative Reception**

**DECEMBER 4 - 6**
**CCAO / CEAO Winter Conference**


2024
CCAO/CEAO WINTER CONFERENCE
TEAMWORK FOR A BETTER TOMORROW
Reserve Your Room
CCAO
CEAO

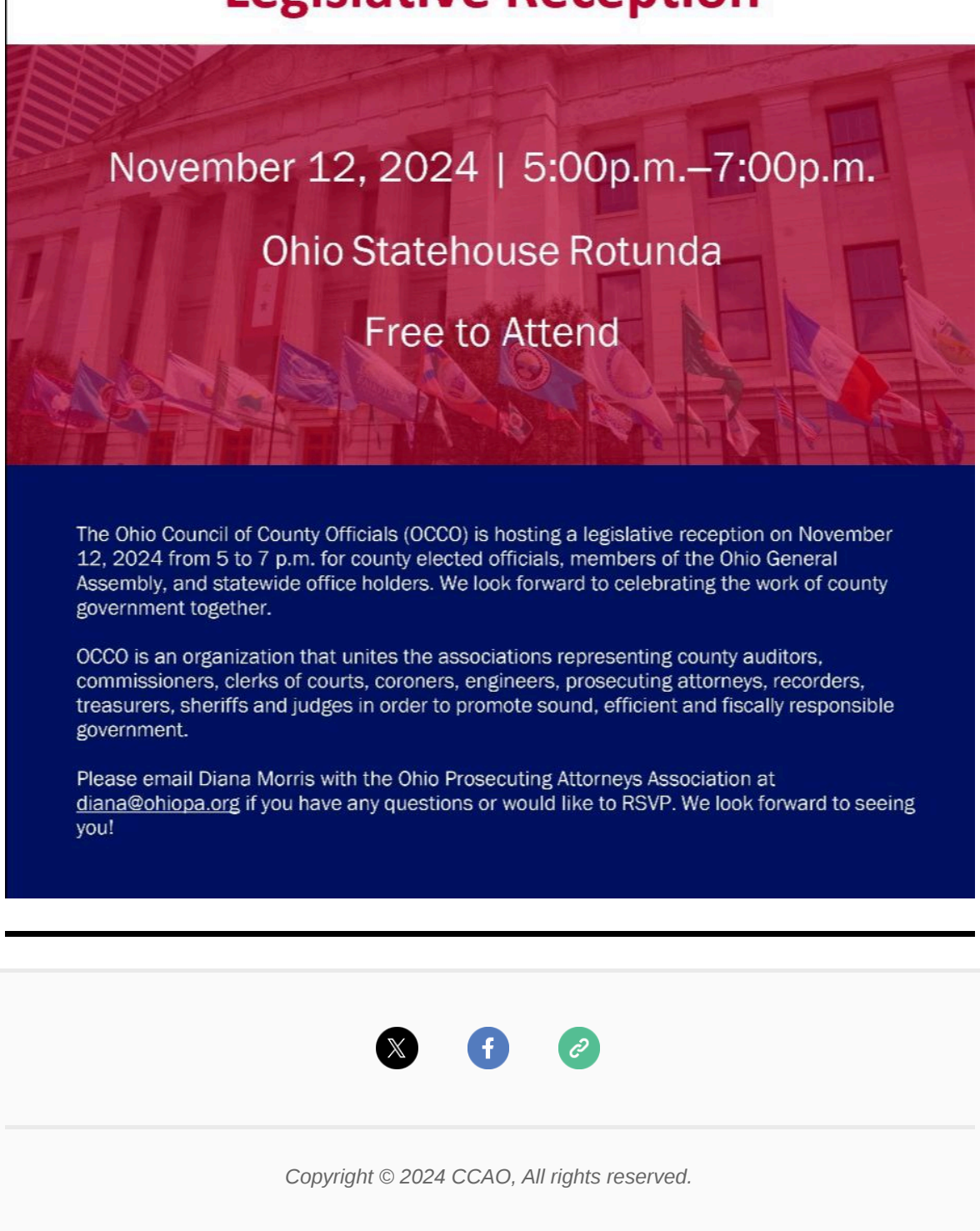
SAVE THE DATE!
December 4-6, 2024

Hilton Columbus Downtown
402 N High St, Columbus, OH 43215

Hotel reservation link is for conference attendees only, including conference exhibitors and conference sponsors.

Session and registration information coming soon!

For questions concerning our upcoming conference, please contact Robin Garrett at rgarrett@ccao.org or Amy Lowe at alowe@ceao.org


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!

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