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December 2, 2024

Mercer County Commissioner Jerry Laffin and his wife Nancy with CCAO Executive Director Cheryl Subler and Assistant Director John Leutz. Commissioner Laffin is completing his 44th year as Mercer County Commissioner, believed to be the longest tenure of any commissioner in Ohio history!

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The 144th Annual CCAO / CEAO Winter Conference is this week!

The wait is over — the CCAO / CEAO Winter Conference is this week! You can still register online; on-site registration will open on Wednesday at noon on the third floor.

The conference program is available online. Among the highlights of the conference are Wednesday's opening session featuring Ohio Public Works Commission Director Linda Bailiff and Professional Speaker Brian Blasko and Thursday's General Luncheon featuring Lt. Governor Jon Husted and Ohio Commission for the US Semiquincenntial Executive Director Todd Kleismit.

For the third year, the conference has a mobile app to help attendees keep track of the schedule and access digital copies of presentations. If you attended last year's Winter Conference and kept the app on your phone, you do not need to re-download it! It has been updated to reflect this year's event.

If you didn't attend last year's event or deleted the app, you can redownload it by searching "CCAO CEAO" in your phone's app store and downloading the app with the logo at the bottom of the article.

Alternatively, you can click the link below that matches your mobile provider. QR codes will also be available at the conference for quick downloads.

Please note: you must use the email address you registered with to access the app after it's been downloaded. If someone else registered you, please ask them what email they used to register you. If you run into problems accessing the app, please use the app's Support function, and we will work quickly to ensure that you get access.

Winter Conference App, Google Play Store (Android Devices)

Winter Conference App, App Store (Apple Devices)

Tuscarawas County CSEA Director receives statewide award

Earlier this year, the Ohio Child Support Professionals Association (OCSPA) created the Sarah E. Fields Leadership and Advocacy Award to honor Sarah E. Fields, a longtime child support professional with Montgomery County Job and Family Services who passed away earlier this year. The award will go to a member of OCSPA who has a strong passion for advocacy and has shown outstanding leadership.

The inaugural recipient was Traci Berry, the Tuscarawas County Child Support Enforcement Agency Director. Berry is a past president of OCSPA and as an officer, has chaired many OCSPA committees, has provided testimony to the General Assembly numerous times, and is a frequent presenter at state and national conferences.

OCSPA released a video giving more information about Fields, Berry, and the award.

Congratulations on receiving the honor, Director Berry!

Tuscarawas County Child Support Enforcement Agency Director Traci Berry (center-right) received the inaugural Sarah E. Fields Award for her leadership and advocacy on child support issues.

From left to right, OCSPA President Joyce Bowens, Director of Delaware County Child Support; Mike Carey, Sarah E. Field's husband; Director Berry; and OCSPA Executive Director Amy Roehrenbeck.

Photo courtesy of OCSPA

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STATE AND FEDERAL NEWS

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Ballot initiative to eliminate qualified immunity moves to next stage

Last week, Attorney General Dave Yost certified as "fair and accurate" the summary of a proposed constitutional amendment to end qualified immunity. The proposal had been held up by Yost, who rejected the summary several times. The most recent rejection came due to the lack of a title.

This caused a lawsuit over whether the attorney general has the authority to reject a summary due to the lack of a title. The Ohio Supreme Court determined that the attorney general does not have such authority since the summary and title are two discrete elements, and the Revised Code only gives the attorney general authority to deny petitions based on the summary.

The proposed amendment would eliminate immunity for government actions, including qualified, sovereign, and prosecutorial immunities in civil cases.

It would also:

- Allow the state and its political subdivisions to be held accountable for the conduct of their employees.
- Permit a judge to order the state or government "to take reasonable measures to prevent a similar rights violation from re-occurring" when someone wins a civil case.
- Provide the state or political subdivision the option to terminate the public employee's employment, agreement, or contract when someone wins a case against the government.

The Ohio Ballot Board will review the petition to ensure it contains only a single amendment. This review occurs no later than 10 days after receiving the petition from the Attorney General. In this case, given holidays and weekends, the Ballot Board will have to meet no later than December 10. If the Ballot Board verifies the petition contains a single proposed amendment, the organizers of the petition may begin to gather signatures.

The elimination of qualified immunity would have significant impacts on counties, particularly in the area of public safety. CCAO will continue to monitor the petition as it navigates the process and will keep members informed of any developments.

As a reminder, the signature requirements are a total of at least 10% of the total votes cast for the office of governor at the last gubernatorial election (currently, the threshold is at least 413,487 signatures) and signatures from at least 44 counties. For a county to count, the organizers must gather at least 5% of the total votes cast for government in the last gubernatorial election (currently, this ranges from 198 signatures in Vinton County to 21,287 signatures in Franklin County). If the Secretary of State certifies the validity of the required number of signatures, additional steps follow.

If the Ballot Board determines that the petition has multiple amendments, it divides it into individual petitions, each containing a single proposal. The organizers behind the petition must then submit summaries of which individual petition and repeat the process accordingly.

Ohio selected as part of federal TANF Pilot

(Aggregated from the Ohio Job and Family Services Directors Association newsletter)

This week, the US Department of Health and Human Services announced that Ohio was 1 of 5 States selected to participate in a 6 year TANF Pilot Program. The six finalists were chosen from applications from 22 states and one United States territory. Congratulations to ODJFS on crafting a competitive proposal!

ODJFS Assistant Director Melinda Kowalski sent the following message this afternoon:

As part of the pilot, we will be able to bypass the traditional [OWF] work participation rates. The model will emphasize holistic services and utilize resources from DCY's Family Success Network to meet families where they're at. This approach will enable us to offer more personalized, person-centered support for families receiving TANF as they transition to self-sufficiency.

As we move forward with implementing the TANF Pilot, we will share more details and outline the next steps. We look forward to working with you to make this pilot a success and thank you for your ongoing dedication to serving Ohioans in need.

To learn more, click the links below:

- Announcement for the US Department of Health and Human Services
- Slides from the ODJFS/DCY presentation at the OJFSDA September membership meeting
- Ohio's application

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.

Application window for FEMA Assistance to Firefighters Grant open until December 20

The 2024 round of FEMA's Assistance to Firefighters Grant program is open for applications until December 20. The federal grant program enhances firefighters' safety by providing direct assistance for critical training and equipment.

FEMA expects to award about $291.6 million awards under the 2024 program. The match rate for grants depends on the size of the applicant's jurisdiction:

- Applicants serving 20,000 residents or fewer must provide at least a 5% match;
- Applicants serving between 20,000 and 1 million residents must provide at least a 10% match;
- Applicants serving a jurisdiction of more than 1 million residents must provide at least a 15% match.

Among the eligible applicants are fire departments or agencies with a formal arrangement with a territory authority (such as a state, county, municipality, fire district, or township), including volunteer fire departments.

Applicants may request funds for operations and safety, vehicle acquisition, or regional projects.

FEMA's website provides more information about the grant program, including how to apply and more specifics about eligible requests.

Recordings of 2024 Ohio Grants Summit available online

Last week, the Office of Budget and Management held the 2024 Ohio Grants Summit, the latest iteration of the annual event that connects local governments with the partners and expertise needed to successfully compete for grants at the state and federal levels. Recordings of the two-day event are available on the Ohio Channel and are linked below.

Day One:

- Grant Writing 101: Tips for a Successful Grant Application
- Ohio's Unified Approach to Federal Funding
- People, Policies, and Systems: The Foundation for Establishing Sustainable Grants Capacity

Day Two:

- Obligating and Closing Out ARPA Fiscal Recovery Funds
- Uniform Guidance Update
- Water/Wastewater Roundtable

Experian hosts discussion on responding to cyber incidents

With cyber threats intensifying and data breaches rising, understanding how to respond to incidents is more important than ever. Experian hosted an interview between Michael Bruemmer, Experian's Head of Global Data Breach Resolution, and Matthew Meade, Chair of the Cybersecurity, Data Protection & Privacy Group at Eckert Seamans, to discuss the realities of data breach response. The session, "Cyber Incident Response: A View from the Trenches," brings insights from the field and offers a preview of Experian's 2025 Data Breach Industry Forecast, including the role of generative artificial intelligence (AI) in data breaches.

From the surge in business email compromises (BEC) to the relentless threat of ransomware, Bruemmer and Meade dive into key issues facing organizations big and small today. Drawing from Experian's experience handling nearly 5,000 breaches this year, Bruemmer sheds light on effective response practices and reveals common pitfalls. Meade, who served as editor-in-chief for the Sedona Conference's new Model Data Breach Notification Law, explains the implications of these regulatory updates for organizations and highlights how standardized notification practices can improve outcomes.

Bruemmer and Meade's insights offer a proactive guide to tackling tomorrow's cyber threats, making it a must-listen for anyone aiming to stay one step ahead. Listen to the full interview for a valuable look at both the current landscape and what's next.

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

Lucas County commissioners approve salary raises for employees

Toledo Blade, November 26, 2024

Lucas County commissioners on Tuesday approved a 3 percent wage increase and a $1,000 one-time lump-sum payment for non-bargaining employees who work for the commissioners.

The measure is effective Jan. 1, 2025, and passed by a 2-1 vote.

Commissioner Pete Gerken and Lisa Sobecki voted in favor of the wage increase and $1,000 payment. Commissioner Anita Lopez supported the wage increase, but not the lump-sum payment.

The commissioners have been holding budget hearings for 2025, asking county departments and offices to submit flat budgets, or the same amount they submitted last year due to the struggling economy.

Last month, the commissioners rejected a new contract for noncommand employees in the Lucas County sheriff's department because they thought the proposed salary increases of 10 percent per year for three years was unaffordable. Noncommand employees include clerks, counselors, corrections officers and deputies. The requested salary increase is currently before a fact-finder.

Northeast District

Push for hearing loop systems throughout Medina County

Medina Gazette, November 30, 2024

As public spaces throughout Medina County install hearing loop systems for people with hearing difficulties, Medina County Health Commissioner Krista Wasowski and community member Dale Weygandt are working to educate others about the system.

A hearing loop allows people with a cochlear implant or hearing aids to hear more clearly in public spaces. The loop itself is a wire that goes around the outside of the room and is connected to an audiovisual system, which pairs directly with cochlear implants and hearing aids equipped with a telecoil or T-coil.

Earlier in the year, the Medina County Board of Commissioners unanimously passed a resolution authorizing the purchase and installation of hearing loops at the County Courthouse, 225 E. Washington St. Medina County Commissioner Colleen Swedyk said it would cost about $2,300 for each room.

The plan was to install hearing loop systems in all the courtrooms and a hearing room for each judge. Later, the Medina County commissioners agreed that additional systems should be installed in a hearing room in the Medina County Probate and Juvenile courts and another in the Medina County Domestic Relations Court.

"For me, it's a quality of life issue for our citizens," Wasowski said. "I think people assume that hearing loss is only among older adults. Certainly, half of our adults over the age of 70 have some hearing changes, but the truth is, 3 percent of our population in Medina County has hearing loss to some degree."

Central District

Franklin County OKs funds for Mid-Ohio Farm

WCMH-TV, November 26, 2024

The Mid-Ohio Farm at NBC4 is expanding, thanks to the Franklin County Commissioners approving over $221,000 in funding.

The 2.7-acre lot behind NBC4 studios sat unused for years; it now serves the local community including students and a growing community of new Americans.

The Mid-Ohio Food Collective (MOFC) as well as NBC4 want to continue to give back as well as educate the community. This funding allows the expansion of the systems that are already in place while also adding new ones.

"We're going to double the size of the production of the farm," MOFC CEO Matt Habash said. "We've got more garden stocks that are going to go in, more veto boxes that are going to go in vertical grow towers where we can grow and teach people how to grow in what looks like a bunch of stack pots together, but growing, you know, on their own patio."

The purposes of the Mid-Ohio Farm at NBC4 are to bolster the local food system, increase access to locally grown produce, and support local residents. Seven years ago, a full-service grocery store less than half a mile away from the station closed. Local residents were left with limited options to find healthy, affordable food. The urban farm combines traditional and modern agricultural techniques such as vertical growing towers, greenhouses and community garden boxes.

Southwest District

Butler County to hire coordinator to assist in solving homelessness

WCPO, November 27, 2024

To address homelessness in their county, Butler County commissioners are planning to hire a coordinator whose job it is to help solve a growing problem.

Family Promise, an organization that houses homeless families in Butler County, said at last count there were 11,000 homeless people throughout Ohio. About 246 of them were living in Butler County.

"These was the ones actually living in the parks, living in their cars ... weren't able to couch surf," said Kamar Beaco, the organization's executive director.

The new position, commissioners said, will manage millions of incoming federal and state dollars dedicated to finding solutions and services for those in need. That money also includes funds from sources like the Butler County Mental Health and Addiction Recovery Services Board, which just passed a $6.6 million levy.

"Having the money go to some group and they meet and never come up with results is not the way that I want to go," Commissioner T.C. Rogers told WCPO. "That is why we have this coordinator, which is going to be under the commission."

Southeast District

Jefferson County commissioners petitioned for water line break relief

Herald Star, November 29, 2024

A county resident approached the Jefferson County commissioners with a request for funding to provide relief to his area, which he said has been plagued recently by water line breaks.

Dale Poole told commissioners Wednesday that Jefferson County Water and Sewer District Service Area J, around Wilson Avenue, has suffered from nearly 15 water main line breaks since May. Seeing these frequent failures has been relatively new, he said, adding that it's "getting a little bit ridiculous."

"Most of them are leaks that have caused 48-hour water boils. Lines need replaced. Some cases, you'd think 50 years is not that bad, but they're just in bad shape. I don't know how you go about it, how you get money to replace them. … It's extra cost going on for the consumer, for our families at home."

Commissioner Tony Morelli said, "We are constantly looking for money to replace (lines.) It's not just in Area J … and it's a lot of money, but we're working toward it."

Commissioner Dave Maple added, "We get a report from (JCWSD Director Mike Eroshevich) every week. That report lists how many breaks, and where they were. We're trying to use that data to say where (are) the worst places. Right now, over the years, Bergholz, Irondale and Amsterdam have been — from a statistical point of view — the most common areas of breaks."

Earlier, Eroshevich had given his report, and he noted the department's repairs to three service lines and three main lines, including Cadiz Road in Wintersville and Wilson Avenue and Jefferson Boulevard, both in the Steubenville Township area.

Maple said the ultimate challenge is finding how the county can pay for projects in these areas without having to charge customers more money. That's reportedly been the board's focus during recent conversations with the Environmental Protection Agency. Maple later added that a significant portion of the county's American Rescue Plan money was allocated to water system fixes.

DATES TO REMEMBER

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

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DECEMBER 4 - 6
CCAO / CEAO Winter Conference

DECEMBER 25
Christmas

DECEMBER 31
New Year's Eve

JANUARY 1
New Year's Day

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