Happy Holidays from CCAO!
CCAO
County Commissioners Association of Ohio
CEBCO
County Employee Benefits Consortium of Ohio
Health & Wellness
CORSA
Property & Casualty

December 23, 2024

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ASSOCIATION AND MEMBER NEWS

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Social Security Fairness Act passes Senate, heads to President Biden for signature

Early Saturday morning, the U.S. Senate passed H.R. 82, the Social Security Fairness Act. The bill will repeal the Windfall Elimination Provision (WEP) and Government Pension Offset (GPO) in Social Security, which currently reduce Social Security benefits for individuals who have worked in both the public sector and private sector. The repeal of the WEP and GPO will help many public servants throughout Ohio. The measure passed by a vote of 76-20, after clearing a procedural hurdle earlier in the week by a vote of 73-27.

CCAO President and Tuscarawas County Commissioner Chris Abbuhl sent a letter to the U.S. Senate urging passage this Congress, in addition to testifying on Ohio House Concurrent Resolution 6, which urged Congress to repeal the provision. Additionally, President Abbuhl sponsored a resolution to add the repeal of the WEP to the National Association of Counties platform, along with Shelby County Commissioner Julie Ehemann and Clermont County Commissioner David Painter. We are grateful to President Abbuhl for his leadership and advocacy on behalf of Ohio public servants.

CCAO thanks Senator Sherrod Brown for his many years of leadership on this issue, and Vice President-Elect JD Vance for his support on behalf of Ohioans. President Biden is expected to sign the bill into law.

CCAO will keep members informed about President Biden's action on H.R. 82, as well as details on implementation. Please contact Rachel Reedy at rreedy@ccao.org with questions.

Reimbursement for Expanded Sales Tax Holiday has begun

The Ohio Department of Taxation and the Ohio Office of Budget and Management have finalized their reimbursement calculations for the expanded sales tax holiday that was held from July 30 to August 8, 2024, and funds have begun to be distributed. The amounts will be provided separately from the standard sales tax distribution. The reimbursement for county and transit authority sales tax levies and the reimbursements for Local Government Fund distributions can be found on Taxation's revenue distribution site (full sales tax link; full LGF link).

As a reminder, House Bill 33, the state operating budget for FY 2024-2025, established an expanded sales tax holiday in August that provides an exemption for tangible goods costing $500 or less. Automobiles and watercraft that require titling, as well as alcohol, tobacco, and marijuana products, are not eligible for the exemption.

The expanded holiday is in permanent law and replaces the previous "back-to-school" sales tax holiday in years in which the state has a year-end General Revenue Fund budget surplus of at least $60 million. HB 33 set aside funds to reimburse counties and transit authorities for lost revenue from the holiday.

The first expanded sales tax holiday occurred from July 30 to August 8, 2024. Vendors reported sales tax revenue from August sales to the Ohio Department of Taxation in September, and the department distributed this revenue to counties in November. The November distribution did not include reimbursements for lost revenue from the holiday.

Ohio County Employee Retirement Plan to implement fund changes

As a result of extensive work and contract negotiations with our recordkeeper Empower, a new fund line-up will take effect in January. Participants will begin to receive participant communications from Empower regarding these changes.

The new fund lineup and mapping are a result of the work of CCAO, our fiduciary consultant, and Empower. As our Section 3(38) fiduciary, we have delegated discretionary authority over the plan funds to the Shuster Group. These changes will enhance our offerings and give participants even more flexibility with their funds, including new target date funds that previously have been offered.

Additionally, Morningstar will review and rebalance investments for participants who have elected the managed Account Services following the fund changes effective January 17th, 2025. The OCERP plan will have an increased line-up, going from the current 23 funds (including Self-Directed Brokerage) to 51 investment options (including Self-Directed Brokerage and the Target Date series - 11 funds). **The rebalancing process requires the Managed Account Service to lock out participants for several days from making changes to their accounts, investments ONLY, if enrolled in MTR. In addition, participants will not be able to enroll or unenroll from MTR during this period.**

If you have any questions regarding this, please contact the Client Service Center at 800-284-0444 or visit: OCERP457.com to set-up an appointment with an OCERP Retirement Plan Advisor.

The Ohio County Employees Retirement Plan continues to be a major resource for Ohio's county workforce. These changes will strengthen the plan and make OCERP even more valuable to our dedicated county workforce.

40 Years 1985-2025
OHIO COUNTY EMPLOYEES RETIREMENT PLAN
For the future you imagine

Applications open for jail funding projects

The Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections (DRC) is accepting applications for jail funding projects, to be funded through the $50 million made available through the capital budget. You can access the application here. Applications close on March 3.

As a reminder, DRC will give priority to projects that:

1. Target county jails that the Department of Rehabilitation and Correction determines to have the greatest need for construction or renovation work;
2. Improve substantially the condition, safety, and operational ability of the jail; and
3. Benefit jails that are, or will be, used by multiple counties.

Another important aspect of this round of funding is that ***there is no*** prescribed local match. While the amount of match funding the county offers may affect the likelihood of receiving funding, the match is open to negotiation between DRC and the county rather than a mandatory rate.

CCAO is happy to help counties craft robust applications. If you would like any suggestions or assistance from the Association, please contact Managing Director of Policy Kyle Petty, either at kpetty@ccao.org or 614-220-7977.

A Special Thanks to our Pinnacle Partner

PALMER ENERGY COMPANY

STATE AND FEDERAL NEWS

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Ohio Department of Medicaid releases draft waiver for work requirements

This week, the Ohio Department of Medicaid (ODM) released a draft waiver it plans to submit to the Centers for Medicaid & Medicare Services (CMS) regarding work requirements for Group VIII, or the Medicaid expansion population. CMS is the federal oversight agency for Medicaid. House Bill 33, the most recent state operating budget, included language requiring ODM to submit a work requirement waiver in calendar year 2025. If CMS approves the waiver, it states a goal to begin implementation in January 2026.

County departments of job and family services would play a role in determining eligibility. The draft waiver also mentions job training and search services available through OhioMeansJobs centers and funded by WIOA.

ODM's summary webpage can be found here, and the draft waiver in full can be found here. ODM will host two public hearings and is accepting public comments through 5 p.m. on January 16, 2025. Public comment will be accepted:

- By email: GroupVIII@medicaid.ohio.gov
- By mail: Group VIII 1115 Waiver, Bureau of Health Plan Policy, Ohio Department of Medicaid, 50 W. Town St, 5th Floor, Columbus, OH 43215
- By courier or in person submission to: Group VIII 1115 Waiver, Bureau of Health Plan Policy, Ohio Department of Medicaid, 50 W. Town St, 5th Floor, Columbus, OH 43215

CCAO will continue to monitor the waiver process, and any accompanying proposals through the legislature to prepare for possible implementation. If you have questions, please contact GroupVIII@medicaid.ohio.gov.

ARPA December 2024 obligation deadline reminder

Counties and other local governments that received Local Fiscal Recovery Funds from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) ***must obligate these funds by December 31, 2024***. Funds that remain unobligated after that date must be returned to the US Treasury. If funds are properly obligated, they may be expended until December 31, 2026. (Funds used for federal Surface Transportation Projects or Housing and Community Development Title I projects must be expended by September 30, 2026.)

The obligation deadline applies to all ARPA funds, including those that are expended under the revenue loss category.

Please review CCAO's overview of the deadline and how the deadline affects certain scenarios.

Attorney General issues opinion on county engineer right-of-way authority for broadband projects

Last week, Attorney General Dave Yost issued Opinion of the Attorney General (OAG) 2024-006 in response to a request from Madison County. The request concerned whether the county engineer has the authority to permit installations within a road right-of-way to a private broadband provider, and secondary questions were based on whether such an authority exists.

OAG 2024-006 finds that the county engineer does not have unilateral authority to permit broadband installations within the right-of-way along county roads but that the board of county commissioners may enter into agreements with broadband providers to permit the installation of such infrastructure. Any agreements are subject to easement deed terms and competitive bidding requirements.

Further, while the county may charge a fee for administrative and inspection costs related to such an installation, it must be set at a "reasonable" level, and revenue from such a fee cannot be used to compensate property owners for using their property (as was asked in the initial request).

As broadband expansion continues to be a high priority for many communities across the state, CCAO encourages counties to familiarize themselves with the newly issued 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.

PUCO to open safe digging grant program in January

Excavation damage is a leading cause of pipeline related injuries and fatalities. That's why it's so important to educate the public about safe digging. Whether it's pipelines, cable, fiber, conduit, water, sewer or other underground infrastructure, Ohio law requires one to contact underground locating services prior to any digging or excavating.

The PUCO is pleased to announce a new grant funding opportunity. Up to $50,000 is available for:

1. Public awareness programs established by a protection service;
2. Training and education programs for excavators, operators, designers, persons who locate underground utility facilities, or other persons;
3. Programs providing incentives for excavators, operators, persons who locate underground utility facilities, or other persons to reduce the number and severity of compliance failures.

The official application window opens on January 1, 2025, and closes on March 1, 2025.

I encourage you to learn more about this exciting opportunity by visiting PUCO.ohio.gov/DamagePreventionGrant

Should you have any questions, please contact UTCGrants@puco.ohio.gov

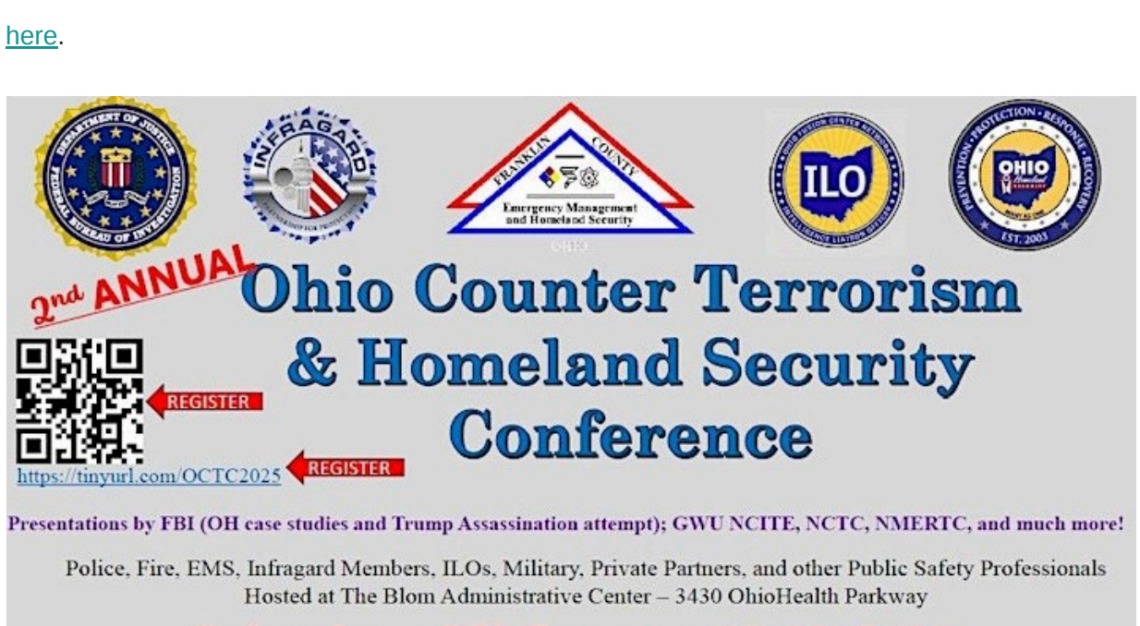
Ohio Counterterrorism Conference to be held on January 15-16

Ohio Homeland Security, in conjunction with the FBI and Franklin County Emergency Management & Homeland Security, is hosting the 2025 Ohio Counterterrorism Conference at Riverside Hospital's Ohio Health Administrative Campus auditorium on January 15 and 16.

Sessions will include drone assessment and response tactics, domestic terrorism, case studies, including the investigation into the 2024 assassination attempt on then-candidate Donald Trump, and a discussion on how to manage an active shooter situation.

The training provided is approved for CPT for law enforcement officers, and CEU credits may be available for Fire/EMS (still under review).

Registration for the event is $195. You can register and view more information about the event here.



2nd ANNUAL Ohio Counter Terrorism & Homeland Security Conference

REGISTER

https://tinyurl.com/OCTC2025 REGISTER

Presentations by FBI (OH case studies and Trump Assassination attempt); GWU NCITE, NCTC, NMERTC, and much more!

Police, Fire, EMS, Infragard Members, ILOs, Military, Private Partners, and other Public Safety Professionals
Hosted at The Blom Administrative Center – 3430 OhioHealth Parkway

Columbus, OH January 15-16, 2025

14.5 hours CPT for LEOs AND pursuing CEUs for EMS/Fire

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

Ottawa County commissioners aim to hold the line on property tax increases

Toledo Blade, December 16, 2024

Property taxes in Ottawa County aren't going up as much as they could have, thanks to action taken by county commissioners.

Ottawa County Administrator Callie D. McConahay and Ottawa County commissioners are asking the county's Budget Commission to collect only 1.5 mills for the county's general fund next year, according to a news release.

Commissioners are authorized to collect 2.0 mills, but asked for the lesser amount because an "unprecedented rise in property values" would cause them to collect $1.5 million more for the general fund than is needed. Collecting only 1.5 mills "will keep the collected property tax near the same amount that was collected in 2024," the statement said.

After conferring with other county officials, the board agreed that collecting fewer mills than authorized "is the proper action to take for the 2025 tax year to help alleviate some of the financial burden for the Ottawa County residents."

Northeast District

Cuyahoga County Planning Commission Granted National Award for Zoning

Hoodline, December 17, 2024

The Cuyahoga County Planning Commission has been recognized with an Award of Excellence for its Single-Family Zoning Analysis initiative. This accolade from the American Planning Association's County Planning Division and the National Association of County Planners honors counties' best practices in planning work nationwide.

Launched in 2021, this zoning analysis examined 19 inner-ring suburbs, evaluating how outdated regulations may impede infill housing, affordability, and community reinvestment. According to a statement by Mary Cierebiej, AICP, Executive Director of County Planning through the Cuyahoga County Planning Commission website, "The Single-Family Zoning Analysis identified more than 5,300 vacant, single-family lots in these communities, and evaluated how outdated zoning was hindering redevelopment." The initiative aimed to address issues brought upon by archaic laws that limit housing diversity and foster disinvestment in First Suburbs.

In the wake of the study, several communities are revamping their zoning codes to support infill housing. Following the recommendations, places like Brooklyn, Euclid, and Maple Heights have updated their zoning code, drawing directly on data and resources from the initiative. For instance, the City of South Euclid launched 56 new infill housing projects since implementing a new infill overlay district in early 2023, with a forecast of 100 new homes over two years.

Central District

Richland County commissioners OK $500K for Wayfinders relocation project

Richland Source, December 17, 2024

Wayfinders Ohio is $500,000 closer to a larger homeless shelter in Mansfield.

The Richland County Board of Commissioners on Tuesday agreed to appropriate a half million dollars to the organization, which plans on relocating to former medical offices at 661 Park Ave. East.

The funds will likely come from the county's expected $8 million budget surplus at the end of 2024 and would be passed through the Richland County Land Bank, which currently owns the property.

The unanimous vote came during a meeting with Miles Parsons, the executive director for the shelter now located at 124 W. Third St. in Mansfield.

Parsons said architects and engineers have estimated remodeling the Park Avenue East site would take $2 million to $2.6 million.

"I'm in favor of it wholeheartedly," Commissioner Tony Vero said. "Miles has done great work.

"It makes sense for many reasons. We need to improve the quality of life for individuals (at the shelter)."

Southwest District

Hamilton County Commissioners to appoint 3 new members to veteran commission

Dayton Daily News, December 3, 2024

After our Homefront investigation revealed tens of millions of dollars meant for veteran services within Hamilton County were being left on the table, a movement of change has happened.

Throughout 2024, veterans raised their concerns, and some — like Steven Staniford, Urulee Watson and Richard Headen — decided to join the Veteran Service Commission and contribute to the change.

Now, just over a year after the investigation, the commission has requested a budget large enough to begin fixing issues and increasing services for veterans. The larger increase comes with more oversight by the county.

Typically, Veteran Service Commissions operate independently of their county's Board of Commissioners, whose only responsibility is to fulfill the VSC's annual budget request. The budget is paid for through a state-set tax millage or mill based on each of the 88 Ohio counties' respective property taxes.

The Hamilton County Veteran Commission presented a budget request for $2.984 million for 2025, up from $1.49 million in 2024. Since it is more than a 10% increase, it has triggered part of Ohio state law that allows the county to put additional commissioners on the VSC for five years.

"We had the ability to put six people on the board where we would have had the majority but in the interest in partnership, we said we will just do three," Hamilton County Board of Commissioner Alicia Reece said.

Southeast District

Gallia County Commission approves key projects, renews chamber membership

WVNews, December 14, 2024

The Gallia County Commission held its regular session Thursday, approving measures for county projects and receiving updates on various initiatives.

Commission President Jay Stapleton, Vice President Leslie Henry, and Commissioner David Smith attended the meeting, along with County Administrator Brian Rutherford, Grant Administrator Karen Sprague, Special Projects Manager Tom White, Commission Clerk Amanda Phillips, and Commission Assistant Janie Peck.

The commission approved renewing its membership with the Gallia County Chamber of Commerce for 2025 at a cost of $200.

Rutherford informed the commission about unexpended jail bond proceeds that have matured and need to be applied toward reducing the bond debt. The commissioners agreed to release up to $4 million. While the actual amount is estimated at approximately $3 million, the higher figure accounts for potential interest accrual and legal fees associated with the filing process.

To facilitate the action, the commission signed engagement letters with the law firms R.W. Baird Inc. and Dinsmore and Scholl.

The third-quarter 2024 Hotel Lodging Tax distribution, totaling $64,680, was issued to the Ohio Valley Visitor's Center, as required by the Ohio Revised Code, Rutherford reported.

DATES TO REMEMBER

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

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DECEMBER 25
Christmas

DECEMBER 31
New Year's Eve

JANUARY 1
New Year's Day

JANUARY 10
CORSA Board of Directors Meeting

JANUARY 20
Martin Luther King, Jr. Day

JANUARY 24
CCAO Board of Directors Meeting

JANUARY 31
CEBCO Board of Directors Meeting

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