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December 23, 2024

Thank you for a great and successful 2024!

CCAO is excited to continue the momentum into 2025.

Association and Member News | State and Federal News |
Education and Grants | County News |
Job Postings

Statehouse Report and Counties Current Archive | Dates to Remember

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ASSOCIATION AND MEMBER NEWS

Back to Top

OCERP contribution limit for employees aged 60-63 increases

Great news! Retirement savers in their early 60s have a chance to turbocharge their 457(b) contributions starting in 2025. Employees aged 60-63 on December 31 of any calendar year beginning 2025 can contribute an extra $11,250 to their 457(b) each year through a new increased catch-up provision. This is a significant jump from the current catch-up limit of $7,500 available to employees 50 and older. The catch-up limit will revert to $7,500 in the year an employee turns age 64.

The IRS is raising the general 457(b) deferral limit to $23,500 for 2025, up from $23,000 in 2024. Catch-up contributions are in addition to the general limit. People who qualify for the newly announced catch-up contribution can invest a maximum of $34,750 into their 457(b) for the year. This change, part of the Secure 2.0 Act, aims to help older workers boost their retirement savings. As a reminder, age-based catch-up contributions cannot be done in the same year as a special catch-up contribution.

If you meet the age requirement for the super catch-up and would like to increase your deferral, please follow the normal payroll change protocol. If you have questions, please contact your Retirement Plan Advisor, or visit: OCERP457.com to find your area RPA

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

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.

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

Anthem.

STATE AND FEDERAL NEWS

Back to Top

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.

EDUCATION AND GRANTS

Back to Top

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

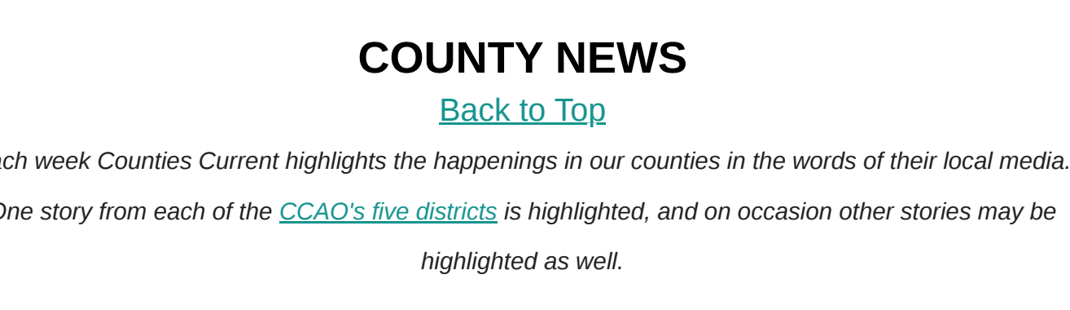
Ohio Counterterrorism Conference to be held on January 15-16

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

Back to Top

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

Wood County commissioners approve $55M budget after paying out $1.5M for ransomware attack

Toledo Blade, December 26, 2024

After paying a $1.5 million ransom earlier this week after computer records and systems were compromised, the Wood County Commissioners approved $55 million in appropriations for 2025 and pledged to significantly increase information technology investments.

"While Wood County has spent substantial funds in the past on the security of its digital data and computer network, the top priority for 2025 will be focused investment in this area," Carri Stanley, county administrator, said at Thursday's commissioners meeting. "We will be partnering with a nationally recognized third-party consultant to obtain ongoing security evaluations, guidance, and recommendations for our systems."

"Despite the recent cybersecurity incident, Wood County finances remain healthy going into 2025," she said.

The county announced Monday it had "negotiated and paid a $1.5 million fee to ensure a full and efficient resumption of services."

The money will come from the county's reserve fund, monies that have been set aside for emergencies and other "unanticipated expenditures."

The attack was first detected about 6 a.m. Dec. 9. It blocked the ability of Wood County offices to access the county's servers, impacting functions at the sheriff's office, jail, common pleas court, and other county offices.

Northeast District

Commissioners approve pact with new group of public defenders

Salem News, December 23, 2024

The name of the non-profit providing public defender services in Columbiana County has changed again, but indigent criminal defendants likely won't notice any difference.

The commissioners approved a one-year contract Wednesday with the new group known as Public Defenders of Columbiana County Inc., led by Shelli Freeze, the incorporator/statutory agent, at a price of $795,000.

For the past two years, the public defender non-profit had been known as Defendants Have Rights Inc., with a group of 10 or so attorneys representing indigent defendants. Freeze explained that each attorney gets a salary. Some are focused on county Municipal Court, some on Common Pleas Court and some on Juvenile Court. Those same services will continue under Public Defenders of Columbiana County Inc.

"We are one of the few counties in the state of Ohio that have a non-profit set up like this," Commissioner Mike Halleck said, adding it saves the county millions of dollars.

Central District

Knox County Land Bank, Habitat start 2 more houses

Knox Pages, December 26, 2024

Two more houses are being built on Columbus Road through the Knox County Land Bank and Habitat for Humanity's workforce housing partnership.

Excavators dug the foundations for the houses at 12 Madison Ave. and 2 Monroe St. The houses fit on the lots and required no city variances.

Habitat for Humanity Knox County is reviewing 13 applications for the 12 homes being built through the Welcome Home Ohio grant.

"We've already identified five, so we have seven houses left for 13 applicants," Land Bank Vice President Sam Filkins said. "Not all of them will qualify, but it's a good start."

The Habitat review committee will recommend applicants to the land bank.

The houses at 47 and 61 Columbus Road are dried in with volunteers working on the interior.

All four houses are scheduled to be done by April.

Southwest District

New County Plan Starting Up: Chillicothe & Ross County Economic Celebration Breakfast

Scioto Post, December 21, 2024

A new "Comprehensive Plan" for the county is starting up, and Ross County Commissioner Jack Everson described it in the "Annual Celebration Breakfast" of Greater Chillicothe & Ross County Development.

Economic development and community plans were the topics of seven speakers in the two-hour event at the Chillicothe County Club on December 11th. In my previous story from the event, I covered local economic development director Tammy Eallonardo, and keynote speaker Lydia Mihalik, Director of the Ohio Development of Development.

Commissioner Everson focused on the Ross County Comprehensive Plan that will replace the 1990s plan. He outlined its eight characteristics and four guidelines in more than nine minutes, and you can hear him in his own words in my below video.

He said that when the city and county took the lead role in a regional "epic plan" for the Appalachian Community Grant that is under way to renovate Yoctangee Park, they asked themselves what to do if that grant request failed.

Everson said they decided to look at the future. They did get the grant, but went ahead with the plan, which is currently gearing up, and has an online survey form. He praised Ross County Planner Devon Shoemaker, who led both the Appalachian Community Grant and is leading the county study.

Among its characteristics, Everson said "Future Land Use" will guide the best use of available land in the county's 16 townships: where housing, businesses, and agriculture will go or stay.

Southeast District

Chris Abbuhl looks back on 20 years as Tuscarawas County commissioner

Times Reporter, December 27, 2024

From an early age, Chris Abbuhl knew that he wanted to devote his life to public service.

Following graduation from Claymont High School, he served as a precinct committeeman for the Tuscarawas County Democratic Party and then as a Mill Township trustee. He wanted to do public service full time, but he needed to earn enough money to support his family. So, he did public service part time while working at Associated Groceries, Empire Detroit Steel and then American Electric Power (AEP) for 13 years.

In 2004, the opportunity arose for him to run for commissioner and serve in that position full time.

"It was a risk. Others were telling me, 'I don't know if that's a good idea. You'll have to get elected every four years. You're leaving a great job,' which it was. American Electric Power was a great job to work at. I've always been fortunate to have good jobs. But I knew what my passion was. My passion was to serve in the public. The opportunity came up, and I did it. I was rewarded for that and able to sit in this seat for 20 years," Abbuhl said.

His opponent in 2004 was then Commissioner Bill Ress. Today, he serves on the board of commissioners with Ress' son Greg.

DATES TO REMEMBER

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

Back to Top

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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