

March 10, 2025

CCAO held its first Regional Legislative Briefing on Friday in New Philadelphia, serving Guernsey, Washington, Stark, Tuscarawas, and Wayne counties.

Thank you to Senator Al Landis and Representatives Meredith Craig, Adrian Holmes, and Jodi Salvo for attending!

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SERB releases 2024 Wage Settlement Report

The State Employment Relations Board (SERB) released its [2024 Wage Settlement Report](#) last week. The report covers labor contracts that started in 2024. The report shares key statistics about public labor contracts and can be useful to counties entering labor contract negotiations later this year.

Report highlights include:

- The average three-year negotiated wage increase percentage for county labor contracts was 3.72% in 2024, 3.15% in 2025, and 3.20% in 2025.
- Safety services (fire and police) averaged the largest wage increases by bargaining unit type.
- Counties averaged the lowest one-time lump sum amounts in negotiated contracts at $994 in 2024, $260 in 2025, and $378 in 2026.
  - Far fewer contracts have lump sum amounts than percentage increases. Only 16 contracts had a lump sum in 2024, compared to 110 with wage percentage increases.

You can view prior reports and other useful resources on SERB's website.

CCAO Budget Amendment Requests

The House's first key budget deadline is this week. All amendment requests must be submitted to House leadership on Friday, March 14. It is important that Representatives submit the exact same amendments to show broad support, so CCAO has prepared a list of our budget amendment requests. The Association requests that you share these amendments with your House delegation to help secure these changes.

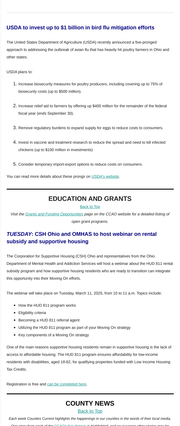
Priority Requests
Children Services
HC 0186: Appropriates an additional $6.5 million in each fiscal year to support county Family and Children First Councils.

Indigent Defense
HC 1867: Appropriates $43 million in SFY 2026 and $50 million in SFY 2027 for county indigent defense cost reimbursement. The amendment also provides funding for a performance audit of the indigent defense system and removes reimbursement rate caps.

Next Generation 9-1-1
HC 0450: Increases the user fee that generates revenue for Next Generation 9-1-1 from $0.40 per month to $1.00 per month

Other Requests
Senior Services
HC 0482: Appropriates an additional $10 million in each fiscal year for Senior Community Services.

Broadband
HC 0004: Appropriates $20 million in SFY 2026 to expand mobile-mile broadband infrastructure along Route 30.



A Special Thanks to our Pinnacle Partner

Anthem

STATE AND FEDERAL NEWS

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Ethics Commission Advisory: Domestic partners are family members

The Ohio Ethics Commission recently released its first advisory opinion of 2025. Advisory Opinion 2025-01 concerns the definition of "family member" for the purposes of "family hire" restrictions.

The Advisory finds that "domestic partners" fall within the definition of family since they are in a common-law marital relationship or otherwise cohabitates. This means that an elected or appointed official is prohibited from using their authority to benefit a domestic partner in the same way they are prohibited from doing so for a spouse, child, or other relation.

The full opinion is accessible here.

USDA to invest up to $1 billion in bird flu mitigation efforts

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) recently announced a five-pronged approach to addressing the outbreak of avian flu that has heavily hit poultry farmers in Ohio and other states.

USDA plans to:

1. Increase biosecurity measures for poultry producers, including covering up to 75% of biosecurity costs (up to $500 million);
2. Increase relief aid to farmers by offering up $400 million for the remainder of the federal fiscal year (ends September 30);
3. Remove regulatory burdens to expand supply for eggs to reduce costs to consumers.
4. Invest in vaccine and treatment research to reduce the spread and need to kill infected chickens (up to $100 million in investments)
5. Consider temporary import-export options to reduce costs on consumers.

You can read more details about these prongs on USDA's website.

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.

TUESDAY! CSH Ohio and OMHAS to host webinar on rental subsidy and supportive housing

The Corporation for Supportive Housing (CSH) Ohio and representatives from the Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services will host a webinar about the $10 million ELI rental subsidy program and how supportive housing residents who are ready to transition can integrate this opportunity into their Moving On efforts.

The webinar will take place on Tuesday, March 11, 2025, from 10 to 11 a.m. Topics include:

- How the HUD ELI program works
- Eligibility criteria
- Becoming a HUD ELI referral agent
- Utilizing the HUD ELI program as part of your Moving On strategy
- Key components of a Moving On strategy

One of the main reasons supportive housing residents remain in supportive housing is the lack of access to affordable housing. The HUD ELI program ensures affordability for low-income residents with disabilities, aged 18-62, for qualifying properties funded with Low Income Housing Tax Credits.

Registration is free and can be completed here.

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.

Northeast District

No Decision Made Regarding Pioneer Points Of Way Permit

Village Reporter, March 6, 2025

During the Williams County Commissioners' meeting held on Tuesday, March 4, the Williams County Sheriff's Department requested $32,000 to outfit two vehicles that were not included in the department budget.

Commissioner Scott Link suggested that the sheriff come in to discuss the possibility of selling cars that are no longer in use to help cover this expense.

"It seems like all of a sudden we're bleeding money in the county with JFS problems that they're having with kids and the fact the sheriff has been in here twice in the first two months of this year asking for money, I just think we need to get a handle on this," said Commissioner Link.

Commissioner Terry Rummel expressed his confusion over the commissioners' office approving a budget for the year, only to make significant modifications to various budgets throughout the year.

It was proposed that funds from the repair budget could be utilized. County Administrator Vond Hall will review the repair fund situation.

The sheriff's repair budget is set at $40,000. Hall believes he can reallocate some funds to address the repairs, but he anticipates that there will still be a shortfall by the end of the year.

Northeast District

Commissioners talk difference between general fund and non-general funds

Times Review, March 6, 2025

Columbiana County Commissioner Mike Halleck shared what he called an interesting document about county budgets on Wednesday, offering copies to the public.

Halleck said he received the information during a recent trip to Columbus for the County Commissioners Association of Ohio and found it pertinent at a time when the commissioners are seeking renewal of the 1% sales and use tax.

"There's a lot of misinformation in terms of what this money is used for," he said about the sales tax.

Halleck also mentioned there are a lot of areas where the commissioners don't have any control over the money, such as the Board of Developmental Disabilities, which doesn't receive any general fund money, therefore no sales tax money either.

"I think we need to continue to clarify how the budget operates with the upcoming sales tax renewal," Commissioner Tim Ginter said.

The document presented by the County Administrators' Association of Ohio gives an overview of the budget process, explaining the difference between the general fund and non-general funds.

Central District

Ohio dog watchers want harsher penalties for attacks. Here's why

Newark Advocate, March 6, 2025

Certain work stories haunt Jeremy Grant, the assistant chief dog warden in Licking County.

"It just looked like a murder scene," Grant said, recounting the house where a little boy had been attacked by his uncle's dog. Grant just cannot forget the sight of the bloody handprints smeared on the wall of the house.

Hurt children are the worst part of the job, Grant said. But he can quickly rattle off other weird, dangerous and distasteful cases: hungry dogs devouring their deceased owners, sexual assault of a dog, or pulling a dog out of a truck cab where the driver had died by suicide, the trucker's finger still on the gun trigger.

Grant, who has been a warden in two different counties for 11 years, carries a gun, taser and handcuffs and wears a vest. He's been shot at twice in his career. "It's not just the dogs you have to worry about. It's the people."

Licking County wardens take in about 750 stray dogs each year. In larger counties, such as Franklin next door to Licking, the wardens and shelter deal with 10,000 dogs each year.

Wardens respond to calls about dog problems and write tickets for lack of tags or letting dogs run loose. They also follow up with owners of dangerous dogs.

Southwest District

Commissioners approve debt collection agreement with the DC Municipal Court

Daily Advocate, March 5, 2025

All the Darke County Commissioners were present during the regular session on March 3. The commissioners are Commission Chairman Matthew Kaufman, Commissioner Vice Chairman Marshall Combs, and Commission Member Aaron Flatter.

The commissioners approved an agreement with the Ohio Attorney General and the Darke County Municipal Court for delinquent debt collection. With this agreement Judge Julie Hemmert will be able to submit past debts for collection to the Attorney General. The example of categories of debt, from the agreement, that will be certified are: statutory fees as assessed by a political subdivision, civil court cases, criminal court cost so long as the defendant is not incarcerated on the date the debt is certified, debt must be declared final with no chance of appeal or no future changes to the amount of the debt sent to the Attorney General for collection purposes, debt from a school system must be as a result of a contractual agreement, debt must be less than 10 years old and debt must be over $100.

Susan Lacy, Community Development Director, was present during the commissioner's session. Lacy brought forward information about adding a property in Palestine to be added to the FY2023 Lead Safe Ohio Grant. This project on the property received a bid that was opened on Feb. 28. The lowest bid for the work on the project was from C.C. Seamless, LLC from Pandora. The repair this company will do is replacement of roof, siding, windows, and doors along with interior water line repair. The project bid amount is $46,950. The commissioners approved awarding the grant funds for this project.

The commissioners approved the support of State issue two (renewal of State Capital Improvement Program) on May 6 Statewide Ballot. This program helps fund local infrastructure projects in communities across Ohio. The SCIP has provided over $7 billion for improvements to keep Ohio's roads and bridges safe and in good condition for everyone traveling on them. It provided essential grants, loans and loan assistance to local governments, including townships. Darke County has benefited from SCIP by receiving, between 2020-2023, more than $600,000 yearly in grant funds and loans for road projects.

Southeast District

Zanesville & Western Scenic Railroad Under Threat

WHIZ, March 3, 2025

The Muskingum River is known as being a major means of historic transportation but many of the surrounding hills and hollows have been carved into by railroads.

Zanesville and Western Scenic Railroad Consultant Tom Barrett met with the Muskingum County Commissioners to discuss a local railway closure that will eliminate a local tourist attraction as well as the ability to conduct any future rail commerce along that corridor.

"Once upon the so-called, 13 mile-long, Glass Rock Line," Barrett said. "Which runs from South Zanesville out through Avondale, East Fultonham and over into Mount Perry and Glass Rock. And it is being considered for scrapping. We think the line has a lot of potential and we believe it should not be cut up for scrap at the time."

The railway, which is owned by the state, is currently operational and is being leased by the Zanesville and Western Scenic Railroad. The State Route 93 Crossing in Avondale has already been removed and the Ohio Rail Development Commission has been seeking legislative approval for the removal of the rest of the corridor.

DATES TO REMEMBER

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

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MARCH 14
CORSA Board of Directors Meeting

MARCH 21
CCAO Board of Directors Meeting

APRIL 4
CSBCO Annual Business Meeting

APRIL 8
OCCO Legislative Reception

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