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May 19, 2025

CCAO President and Clermont County Commissioner David Painter and CCAO 1st Vice President and Hamilton County Commissioner Denise Driehaus testified to the Senate Health Committee on behalf of their counties to urge the Senate include additional funding for Naloxone, a critical overdose prevention drug.

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ASSOCIATION AND MEMBER NEWS

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Former Lucas County Commissioner and CCAO President passes away

Earlier this month, former Lucas County Commissioner James Holzemer passed away at the age of 89.

James spent more than 40 years as a public servant. He served four years as a state representative and then 24 years as Lucas County Commissioner. In 1985, James served as the CCAO President, the first Lucas County Commissioner to hold the position.

He served on the board of directors for the Toledo Zoo and recorded three holes in one at the Heatherdowns Country Club.

You can read James' full obituary here.

CCAO endorses Stark County Commissioner Harold for OPERS Board of Trustees

Later this year, members of the Ohio Public Employee Retirement System (OPERS) Board of Trustees will be hosting an election for three seats:

- County Employees - Those working at a county job.
- Miscellaneous Employees - Those working at jobs for other governmental groups, such as townships, public libraries, health districts, and conservancy districts.
- Retirees - Those who have retired, including re-employed retirees.

At CCAO's May Board of Directors meeting, **the board formally endorsed Stark County Commissioner Alan Harold for the County Employee seat**.

For a member seeking an employee seat to be on the ballot, they must obtain 500 signatures from active members of their employee group, with at least 20 signatures from 10 counties.

Completed petitions with signatures must be submitted by August 4. Voting information will be sent to qualified voters on August 26, and votes must be cast by midnight of October 3.

If you have questions concerning the OPERS Board of Trustees election, you can contact OPERS outreach staff at either 888-400-0965 or employeroutreach@opers.org.

COUNTY COMMISSIONERS ASSOCIATION OF OHIO
CCAO
SAVE THE DATE!
August 24-26, 2025
(Sunday-Tuesday)
CCAO SUMMER SYMPOSIUM 2025
Hocking Hills
LODGE & CONFERENCE CENTER
Registration & Reservations
opening June 6!

A Special Thanks to our Pinnacle Partner

Anthem

STATE AND FEDERAL NEWS

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WEDNESDAY: OHFA to hold public hearing on draft SFY 2026 Annual Plan

On Wednesday, the Ohio Housing Finance Agency (OHFA) will hold a public hearing on its upcoming Annual Plan. The meeting will be held at in Columbus (2600 Corporate Exchange Drive) and held virtually (accessible here).

The hearing is for OHFA to obtain input on the administration of OHFA programs, guidelines, policies, and the draft SFY 2026 plan. Comments will be limited to five minutes if attendees wish to provide them. Comments can also be sent to OHFAPublicHearing@ohiohome.org through May 30.

The draft plan can is accessible here.

Ballot initiatives with significant county implications begin gathering signatures

Last week, the Ohio Ballot Board certified that a proposed constitutional amendment to abolish property taxation contains a single subject. The certification allows supporters of the amendment to begin gathering signatures. There are currently three initiative campaigns that can gather signatures. They are discussed below, starting with the most recent.

Property Tax Abolition
The initiative cleared this week would abolish existing taxes on real property and prohibit any future taxes on real property. It defines real property as land itself, all crops growing therein, and all buildings, structures, and improvements permanently attached to the land.

The impact on counties if this amendment were to be passed would be severe. While sales taxes are the main source of revenue to the county general fund, property taxes are the backbone of many county services, particularly those related to human services. An abolition of property taxes would require services such as DD boards to be funded from the general fund. Many counties would need to increase their sales tax rates to accommodate the funding pressure on the general fund, but with 52 counties at the maximum sales tax rate (predominantly rural counties) the ability of many counties to support these services is minimal.

Elimination of Qualified Immunity
An initiative that was cleared to gather signatures late last month would give a private cause of action for persons whose rights, privileges, and immunities under the state constitution against government actors. This amendment would have the effect of essentially eliminating the judicial concept known as “qualified immunity,” which protects governments and government employees from lawsuits for actions taken in the course of their job duties. For example, qualified immunity shields a government garbage collector from being sued personally if they damage a parked car.

Eliminating qualified immunity would likely significantly impact insurance costs for political subdivisions as proving coverage would become riskier. Recruitment for critical positions such as sheriff deputies and social workers, both already struggling to attract sufficient labor pools, would become even harder as individuals may avoid fields were they could be sued excessively.

Voter Bill of Rights
An initiative that was cleared for signature gathering in late 2024 would make many changes to Ohio’s election system. Out of the 25 changes proposed in the amendment, seven either would or may have an impact on county election administration. These are discussed below, with the applicable amendment summary number and the potential county impact.

- Summary Point 3(C): Requires early voting to begin 28 days before the election and run until noon on the day before the election. Early voting shall be allowed between 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. on weekdays and 10:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. on weekdays.
    - County Impact: The increased early voting offerings may increase costs to county board of elections to provide requisite staffing.
- Summary Point 3(D): Requires voters to be automatically and securely registered to vote or to have an existing registration automatically and securely updated.
    - County Impact: The fiscal and administrative impact will depend on the extent this is not already implemented and, if not, the cost of coming online to a new system to fulfill the requirements.
- Summary Point 3(F) and (G): Requires the state to allow for same-day voter registration and same-day registration updating.
    - County Impact: Implementing same-day registration and registration updating may require county boards to recruit more staff to accommodate the increased election day administration.
- Summary Point 4: Provide local election authorities to have discretion to expand voting opportunities.
    - County Impact: Counties would be allowed to place additional secure drop boxes for the return of absentee ballots and designating multiple early voting sites. The amendment gives this authority to “local election authorities” which is undefined in the amendment but likely means boards of elections.
- Summary Point 9: Allow the state to institute reliable additional technological advancements in the voting process.
    - County Impact: The extent of the county impact will depend on if the state provides funding for counties to comply with any new technological requirements.
- Summary Point 10: Require the General Assembly to make timely and adequate appropriations to support the provisions of the amendment.
    - County Impact: The county impact of the requirement for the General Assembly to provide appropriations depends on how the General Assembly interprets “adequate” and if the General Assembly primarily funds state obligations or also provides funding to county boards.

To put an initiative on the ballot, the organizers must acquire valid signatures from 44 of Ohio’s 88 counties, equal to at least 5% of the votes cast in the most recent gubernatorial election, and a statewide total of at least 10% of the votes cast in the most recent gubernatorial election.

For 2024, these figures equal 413,487 signatures statewide and county signatures ranging from 21,287 (Franklin County) to 198 (Vinton County). The full list of signature threshold numbers can be found here.

The signatures must be submitted to the Secretary of State for verification at least 125 days before the next general election. This year’s general election will be held on November 4, meaning signatures must be submitted by July 2 if the organizers seek to place the amendment on this year's ballot.

CCAO will keep members informed on developments regarding these three amendment initiatives.

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.

Federal grants on transportation, domestic violence, and agriculture available

Five federal grants across different policy areas are available for applications, with the deadlines coming in late June and early July. These grants are listed below in order of when applications close.

Safe Streets and Roads Program

- Close Date: June 26
- Purpose: To support planning, infrastructure, and behavioral and operation initiatives to prevent fatalities and serious injuries on roads for all users (drivers, public transportation, cyclists, pedestrians, etc.).
- Funding available: $580 million for implementation grants, $402 million for planning grants.
- Eligible entities: Political subdivisions (among others).

Farmers Market Promotion Program

- Close Date: June 27
- Purpose: To support direct-to-consumer sales of farm products
- Funding available: $11 million
- Eligible entities: Local governments (among others).

Regional Food System Partnerships Program

- Close Date: June 27
- Purpose: To support regional coalitions working to coordinate food systems.
- Funding available: $4.5 million
- Eligible entities: Local governments (among others). Must be in partnership with another eligible entity.

Local Food Promotion Program

- Close Date: June 27
- Purpose: To support intermediaries (aggregators, distributors, processors) in local and regional food chains.
- Funding available: $11 million
- Eligible entities: Local governments (among others).

Prevention and Response to Violence Program

- Close Date: June 30
- Purpose: To support comprehensive,, community-based efforts to develop and expand prevention, intervention, treatment, and response strategies to address the needs of children and youth impacted by domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, stalking, or sex trafficking.
- Funding available: $9.5 million
- Eligible entities: Local governments (among others).

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

Commissioners asked to kick the tires on proposal for countywide transportation system

BG Independent News, May 13, 2025

Driving from point A to B is second nature for most Wood County residents. But for many, having an operable vehicle is an out of reach luxury.

While most counties in Ohio have countywide transportation systems, proposals for such a program here have never gotten into gear.

“Wood County is a very large county,” said Jim Oliver, who presented updated public transportation data to the Wood County Commissioners on Tuesday morning. At 620 square miles, Wood is one of the largest counties geographically in Ohio.

“It’s a tale of two counties,” divided into the haves and the have-nots, said Oliver, the mobility management coordinator with the Great Lakes Community Action Partnership.

The north half of the county has access to varying types of public transportation, and Bowling Green has a citywide transit service. But south, east and west of Bowling Green, people without their own transportation are hard pressed to find rides to destinations like jobs, doctor appointments and grocery stores.

“There’s a lot of folks who live in these smaller communities, and they can’t drive anymore,” Oliver said. Without some type of public transportation, it’s difficult for some aging seniors to remain in their own homes.

Then there are people who don’t have the means to maintain a vehicle.

“We’re so used to jumping in our cars and driving. But if you live in North Baltimore or West Millgrove, and your car doesn’t start, what do you do?”

Northeast District

Mahoning County Commissioners question deputy clerk of courts raise

WFMJ, May 13, 2025

Mahoning County Commissioners are planning to discuss a $36,000 raise given to the deputy Clerk of Courts. It's a raise that comes just four months after she started the position.

Geno DiFabio, Mahoning County Commissioner, said the raise is concerning, it's out of the commissioners' control.

“Is it concerning? Yes. Is there anything we can do about it at this point? I don’t see it,” said DiFabio. “Every public official has their own purview as to who they hire and how much they pay them. But I thought it was a little high for that position.”

Deputy Clerk of Courts Jennifer Ciccone was given a $36,000 raise in April.

According to the Mahoning County Auditor's office, Ciccone's pay started at $120,000. That amount went to $156,000.

Ciccone was also given $10,799 in retroactive pay.

DiFabio said he has already spoken with Clerk of Court Michael Ciccone and Jennifer Ciccone about the raise, and is planning on having more meetings about the raise.

Carol Rimedio-Righetti, Mahoning County Commissioner, said she also plans on having further discussions about the raise.

“They have to have it in their budget. I don't know if they do or do not. It's an elected official. We will be having a staff meeting with the clerk,” said Rimedio-Righetti.

Central District

Richland County commissioners OK $365K for 6 sheriff's cruisers

Richland Source, May 14, 2025

Law enforcement cruisers do not come cheap.

County commissioners on Tuesday authorized the Richland County Sheriff’s Office to purchase six cruisers from StateWide Ford for a total of $365,212.

The cruisers will be paid for with money from the county reinvestment fund. Commissioner Tony Vero said the three-member board previously approved the purchase during department budget discussions last year.

“We are at that time (to purchase the cruisers),” Vero said Tuesday.

In a letter related to his 2025 budget request, Richland County Sheriff Steve Sheldon said the cruiser purchase was needed to “maintain an effective rotation” of the department’s fleet.

“The new cruisers would be replacing cruisers ready to be rotated out of our fleet,” he previously wrote to commissioners.

Southwest District

Commission notified of Weaver’s permitting process

Daily Advocate, May 12, 2025

On Thursday, Darke County Commissioners received a notification for a Major Concentrated Animal Feeding Facility (MCAFF). The notification asks if the county commissioners need additional information. The county has 30-days to respond to the Ohio Department of Agriculture.

The notification for Weaver Brother’s Dew Fresh Egg Farm in Versailles. The company is planning to relocate a manure handling facility that sits next to the farm. According to Commissioner Matt Aultman, his understanding of the project would move the manure handling facility off the road into a wooded area. There would not be any livestock in that area. This notification is the beginning stages of the permitting process.

Aultman said, “Part of the CAFO (Concentrated Animal Feeding Operation) process for anything that’s brought up dealing with large livestock operations, they send us notification, and we have to sign off as part of the permitting process. We’re just getting to the point – they don’t have all the details finalized yet, but to keep the application process moving forward we have to act on it within 30 days of receipt.

With no commissioners speaking up to make a motion, Commissioner Aultman said he would make the motion just to get the motion started. Commissioner Marshall Combs asked if the commissioners were accepting this notification as a receipt. Aultman responded, “This is a response to move the recommendation forward of accepting the addition of this property.” He further explained, “What will happen here, like most, is we will give our response that no additional information is needed; the township will do the same. Or they will do whatever they choose to do. The Ohio Department of Agriculture will do an environmental review, and they’ll do a community review, they’ll do a load review, and they’ll do a facilities review. This is just one part of the permitting process for a CAFO.” Combs then seconded the motion. The motion was approved.

Southeast District

Gallia County Commission hears updates on major county projects

WVNews, May 19, 2025

The Gallia County Commission met in regular session Thursday, discussing and voting on multiple resolutions, and hearing updates from county officials.

Commission President Leslie Henry, Vice President Jay Stapleton, and Commissioner Jeremy Kroll attended the meeting. Also present were County Administrator Brian Rutherford, Commission Clerk Amanda Phillips, Grant Administrator Karen Sprague, Special Projects Manager Tom White, and Commission Assistant Janie Peck.

Rutherford told the commissioners that he reached out to the EPA regarding the storage of the sulfur dioxide emissions monitoring equipment in Cheshire. The EPA indicated that they share the commission's concerns regarding the condition of the facility, and are eager to explore new lease terms.

The EPA representative would like to extend the use of the monitoring facility beyond the current term ending date in June, and proposed a month to month lease agreement. The commission will study the matter and reach out to the EPA.

Rutherford gave notice that he would be resigning his position, effective May 29. The commissioners lamented his departure, and thanked him for the diligence with which he performed his duties for the county.

DATES TO REMEMBER

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

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MAY 26
Memorial Day - Holiday

MAY 30
Montgomery County Regional Legislative Briefing

JUNE 6
Central District Meeting
Registration for the 2025 CCAO Summer Symposium Opens

JUNE 19
Juneteenth - Holiday

JUNE 27
CEBCO Board of Directors Meeting

AUGUST 24 - 26
2025 CCAO Summer Symposium

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