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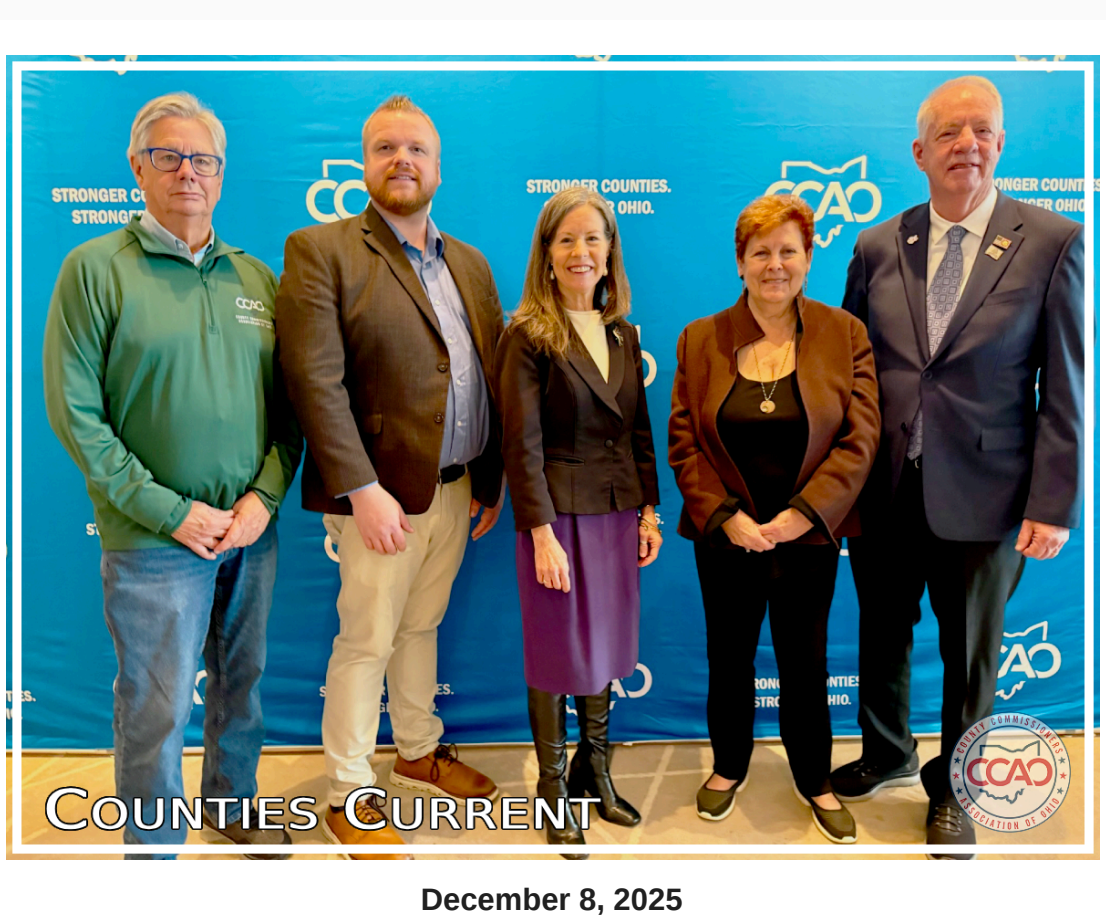

December 8, 2025

Congratulations to the 2026 CCAO Board of Directors Officers!

L-R: Lucas County Commissioner Pete Gerken (Secretary), Ashtabula County Commissioner Casey Kozlowski (1st Vice President), Hamilton County Commissioner Denise Driehaus (President), Summit County Executive Ilene Shapiro (2nd Vice President), and Logan County Commissioner Joe Antram (Treasurer).

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

2025 Winter Conference is in the books!

Last week, CCAO held its annual Winter Conference. The three-day event brought county leaders from across Ohio together to learn from experts and each other how to tackle the issues facing their communities today.

CCAO was honored to have Lt. Governor Jim Tressel, Representative Brian Stewart, Representative Jim Hoops, Representative Dan Troy, and Senator Shane Wilkin address members across various sessions.

Lt. Governor Jim Tressel spoke with county leaders at the Thursday Luncheon.

The conference began with sessions about the ongoing America 250 celebrations and how counties can manage capital spending and healthcare costs.

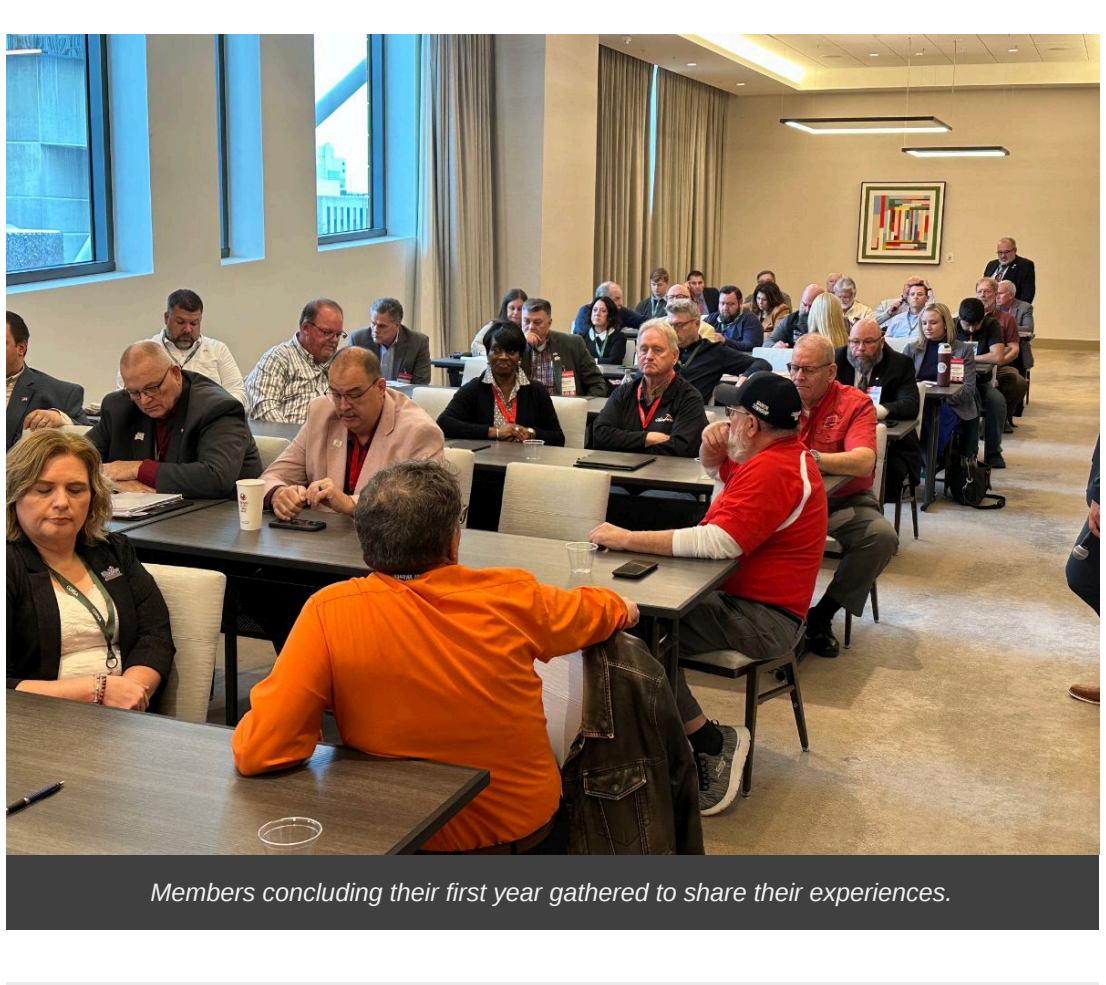
The second day featured sessions about emerging technological issues: cyber law requirements, data centers, artificial intelligence, and energy concerns.

The final day brought information about land use and planning, as well as how to manage potential workforce transitions.

Throughout the conference, sessions also keyed on various aspects of the ongoing property tax debate. Proponents of the abolishment amendment shared their perspectives and experts explained the ramifications of abolishment. Counties shared how they can become more efficient to reduce the need for taxation and levy-funded agencies shared how they budget around levy cycles.

Copies of presentations can be found on CCAO's website and more photos can be found on CCAO's Facebook.

Incoming CCAO President Denise Driehaus (Hamilton County) gives remarks at the Thursday Luncheon.


Members concluding their first year gathered to share their experiences.

2026 CCAO Board of Directors takes shape

As part of the 2025 Winter Conference, the CCAO membership voted to elect its 2026 Executive Committee and a portion of the 2026 Board of Directors. The slate elected last week includes:

2026 Officers
President - Denise Driehaus, Hamilton County Commissioner
1st Vice President - Casey Kozlowski, Ashtabula County Commissioner
2nd Vice President - Ilene Shapiro, Summit County Executive
Treasurer - Joe Antram, Logan County Commissioner
Secretary - Pete Gerken, Lucas County Commissioner

Two-Year Terms (2026 & 2027)
Tony Anderson, Fayette County Commissioner
Melissa Bell, Muskingum County Commissioner
Jeff Fix, Fairfield County Commissioner
Steve Hambley, Medina County Commissioner
Shannon Jones, Warren County Commissioner
Gary Merrell, Delaware County Commissioner
Chris Ronayne, Cuyahoga County Executive
Donnie Willis, Jackson County Commissioner

These members will be joined by past presidents who have elected to serve and by Board of Directors members who are entering the second year of a two-year term. These include:

Past Presidents:
Mike Halleck, Columbiana County Commissioner
Lenny Eliason, Athens County Commissioner
Julie Ehemann, Shelby County Commissioner
Tim Bubb, Licking County Commissioner
Glenn Miller, Henry County Commissioner
David Painter, Clermont County Commissioner

Two-Year Terms (2025 & 2026)
Sabrina Christian-Bennett, Portage County Commissioner
Dick Gould, Greene County Commissioner
Steven Hess, Champaign County Commissioner
John O'Grady, Franklin County Commissioner
Amy Norris, Harrison County Commissioner
Carolyn Rice, Montgomery County Commissioner

Finally, these members will be joined by 10 appointments made by President Driehaus and approved by the Board at the January meeting. There are nine presidential appointments to be made and one vacancy to fill (Secretary Gerken's 2025-2026 two-year term was vacated upon his election to the Executive Committee).

Additionally, President Driehaus will appoint two members of the board to serve on the Executive Committee. Under revised bylaws adopted by CCAO members last week, if one of the two appointments is not Immediate Past President David Painter, then Commissioner Painter will serve as a non-voting ex officio member of the Executive Committee.

CEBCO Announces Leadership Change and Interim Appointment

The County Employee Benefits Consortium of Ohio (CEBCO) announced earlier this month that its Managing Director for Health and Wellness, Kevin Hinkle, will step down from the role on December 5. CEBCO extends its appreciation for his service and contributions to supporting the health and well-being of county employees across Ohio.

Former Managing Director Mike Kindell, who retired earlier this year after more than a decade of impactful leadership, will return to serve as Interim Managing Director while CEBCO conducts a search for the next permanent director.

CEBCO remains committed to ensuring a smooth transition and continuing its strong work on behalf of Ohio's counties.

CORSA seeks Risk Control Coordinator

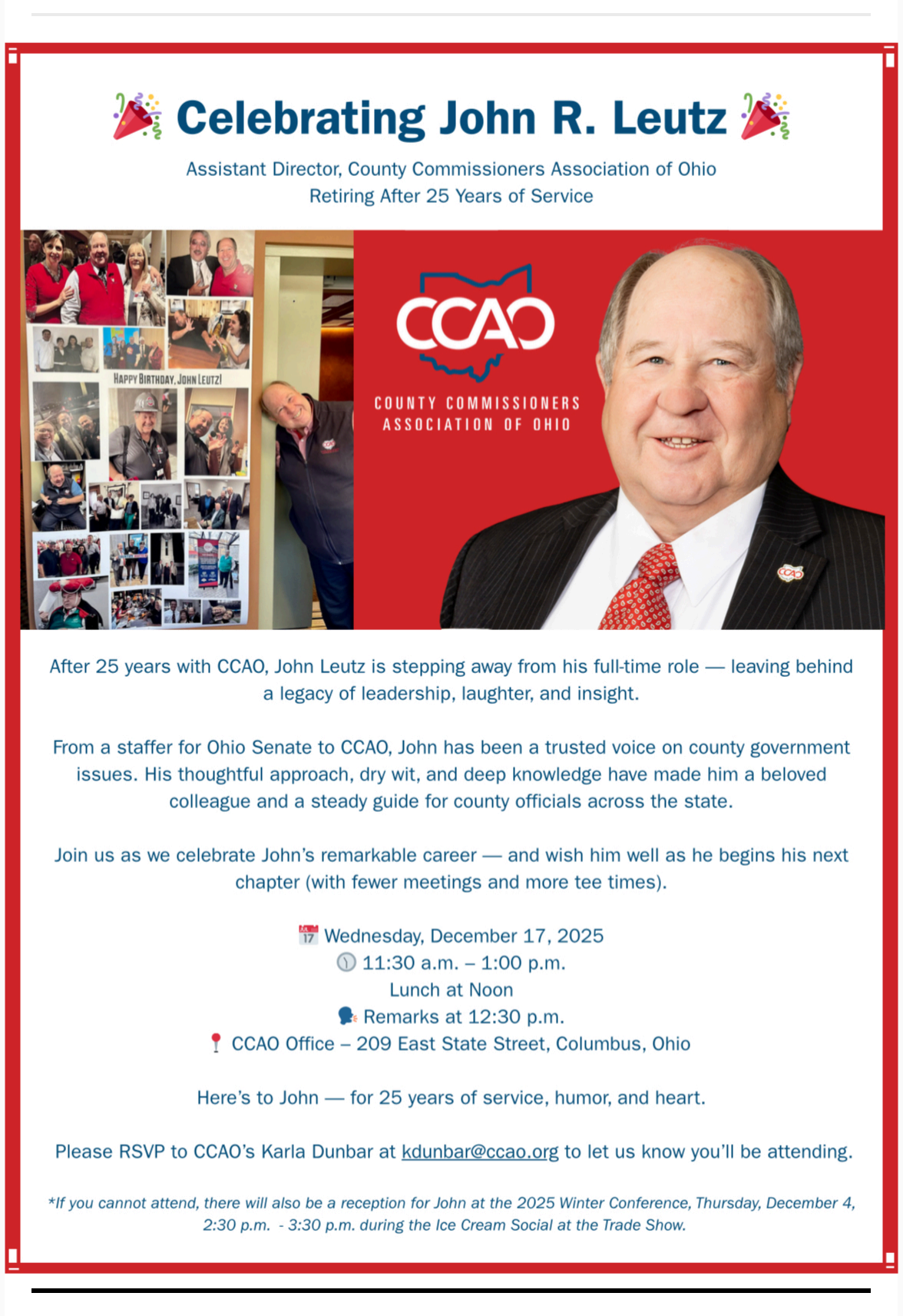
County Risk Sharing Authority (CORSA) has an opening for a Risk Control Coordinator position.

Job responsibilities include the ability to work with minimal supervision to assist member counties, elected officials and department heads with assessing and mitigating risks of loss and the ability to identify loss trends and make recommendations for programs that address local and state-wide loss trends.

Job qualifications:

- Bachelor's Degree in Insurance and Risk Management, Business, or related field or equivalent professional experience;
- A valid Ohio Driver's License and the ability to meet insurance requirements;
- Knowledge of and ability to use computers and computer applications relevant to the position;
- Excellent written and verbal communication skills.

Individuals interested in applying should contact Frank Hatfield, CORSA Assistant Director (fhatfield@ccao.org). Those interested in applying should contact Frank for a full job description and if still interested after a review of the full job description should submit a resume and salary expectation.


HAPPY BIRTHDAY, JOHN LEUTZ!
CCAO
COUNTY COMMISSIONERS ASSOCIATION OF OHIO

🎉 **Celebrating John R. Leutz** 🎉

Assistant Director, County Commissioners Association of Ohio
Retiring After 25 Years of Service

After 25 years with CCAO, John Leutz is stepping away from his full-time role — leaving behind a legacy of leadership, laughter, and insight.

From a staffer for Ohio Senate to CCAO, John has been a trusted voice on county government issues. His thoughtful approach, dry wit, and deep knowledge have made him a beloved colleague and a steady guide for county officials across the state.

Join us as we celebrate John's remarkable career — and wish him well as he begins his next chapter (with fewer meetings and more tee times).

📅 Wednesday, December 17, 2025
🕚 11:30 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.
Lunch at Noon
🗣️ Remarks at 12:30 p.m.
📍 CCAO Office – 209 East State Street, Columbus, Ohio

Here's to John — for 25 years of service, humor, and heart.

Please RSVP to CCAO's Karla Dunbar at kdunbar@ccao.org to let us know you'll be attending.

**If you cannot attend, there will also be a reception for John at the 2025 Winter Conference, Thursday, December 4, 2:30 p.m. - 3:30 p.m. during the Ice Cream Social at the Trade Show.*

A Special Thanks to our Pinnacle Partner

STATE AND FEDERAL

Back to Top

Attorney General finds dentists can work as coroner investigators, not as deputy coroners

Last week, Attorney General Dave Yost released Attorney General Opinion 2025-024, which addresses the authority of county coroners to hire a dentist licensed in Ohio to serve as an investigator and whether such an individual can serve as a deputy coroner. Attorney General Yost found that the answer to the first question is "yes" and to the second is "no."

Under R.C. 313.05, county coroners are authorized to hire several different subordinate positions, including deputy coroners and investigators. R.C. 313.05(A)(1) specifies that a deputy coroner must be a licensed physician, while R.C. 313.05(A)(3) does not identify any credential requirements for investigators.

Since the Revised Code does not set any limits on who may serve as a coroner investigator, the Attorney General found that a dentist may serve in that role.

However, the Revised Code requires that any deputy coroner be a licensed physician. To be a licensed physician in Ohio, one must receive licensure from the state medical board, governed by R.C. Chapter 4731. Dentists are licensed by the state dental board and are governed by R.C. Chapter 4715.

Since dentists do not receive their licenses from the state medical board, Attorney General Yost found that dentists cannot serve as deputy coroners.

REVIEW: Auditor of State bulletin on payment re-direct schemes

Last year, Auditor of State (AOS) Keith Faber released a bulletin to provide guidance to governments regarding payment re-direct schemes and business email compromise schemes. As cyber scams continue to increase in frequency, counties need to be vigilant to safeguard taxpayer funds.

NOTE: Failure to follow the guidance may result in an AOS finding if a loss occurs , and the employee is considered liable as a result of negligence or performing duties without reasonable care.

The bulletin gives four real examples of successful or attempted scams on local governments:

- **Spear phishing:** More than $700,000 was stolen from a recreation district because of a payment re-direct scheme. Emails were received by the district, from an email account slightly different than the original vendor email account, which contained erroneous payment instructions to the "vendor." The district followed the instructions and transferred $713,094 to the fraudulent account, without independently verifying the identity of the requester or the new banking account.
- **Spear phishing:** A city fell victim to a "spear phishing" scheme resulting in theft of nearly $219,000 when the finance department received emails from someone pretending to be an existing vendor. The email persuaded the employee to change the bank account routing information the city had for the vendor. Vendor verification protocols were not followed, which could have prevented this fraud.
- **Investment account change request:** A college fell victim to a spear phishing attack that included convincing branding and logos of a financial institution causing the college to change account information on a $6 million account. Realizing a day later due to Daily Cash Monitoring protection that the money was not in its account the college was able to recover the funds through the activation of the Financial Fraud Kill Chain.
- **Fraudulent check and Electronic Funds Transfer/ACH scheme:** A city reported three instances of fraudulent checks submitted for payment to their bank and two instances of attempted ACH fraud. Though none of these instances were successful and the city did not experience a loss, this is another example of attempted fraud.

The rest of the bulletin discusses ways to identify and prevent these scams.

Counties are tasked with safeguarding millions in taxpayer dollars, so it is vital that county fiscal staff familiarize themselves with the bulletin.

If you have any questions regarding the information in the bulletin, send an email to the AOS Special Investigations Unit at PaymentSchemeQuestions@ohioauditor.gov.

EDUCATION AND GRANTS

Back to Top

OEPA Environmental Education grants accepting applications

Ohio EPA is accepting grant applications to the Ohio Environmental Education Fund (OEEF) for projects educating preschool through university students and teachers, the general public, and the regulated community. OEEF offers mini-grants between $500 and $5,000 and general grants of up to $50,000. Many entities are eligible to apply, including counties and soil and water conservation districts.

Funding priorities for the 2026 state fiscal year include:

- Encouraging Ohio students to explore environmental-related careers;
- Encouraging habitat and ecological restoration efforts;
- Reducing emissions to improve air quality, including through energy conservation and alternative energy sources;
- Encourage planning and emergency preparedness for extreme environmental events (environmental releases, extreme weather, etc.);
- Using innovative practices to improve water quality, reduce nutrient loading, and prevent harmful algal blooms;
- Reducing lead exposure in drinking water;
- Reducing exposure to per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS), also known as "forever chemicals;" and
- Connections between the environment and human health, including but not limited to, air quality and respiratory conditions, tick prevalence and Lyme disease, scrap tires, and mosquitoes.

Prospective applicants must submit an electronic Letter of Intent to apply within OEEF's grant management system in the eBusiness Center no later than January 9 to start the application process. Completed applications must be submitted no later than January 16. Prospective applicants are encouraged to speak with an OEEF Coordinator about project ideas before applying.

Grants for ISPs to complete extension for set-back homes

BroadbandOhio is accepting applications for the Ohio Broadband Line Extension program, which is intended to offset costs associated with line extension construction projects for running fiber to unserved homes that are set back from main roads. The grants are available for projects beyond the first 200 feet and are capped at $9.50 per foot.

The grants will be accepted and rewarded on a rolling basis until the $3 million in funding is exhausted. Projects must be operational by December 31, 2026.

The grants are only available to internet service providers, but CCAO encourages counties to help raise awareness of the program with ISPs in their areas.

More information can be found on the program's webpage.

Lake Erie Protection Grants open for applications

The Ohio Lake Erie Commission is now accepting applications for the 2026 Lake Erie Protection Fund (LEPF) grants. LEPF grants help finance research and on-the-ground projects aimed at protecting, preserving, and restoring Lake Erie and its watershed, fulfilling the intent of the Lake Erie Protection and Restoration Plan. This includes reducing harmful algal blooms, controlling nutrient runoff, restoring and improving wetlands, and more.

Grants are limited to $50,000 per award and are open to local governments, among others. Grants in prior rounds have been used to support assessments to convert a former golf course to wetlands, design plans for nature-based solutions to shoreline erosion, and other shoreline protection projects.

The deadline to apply is January 9, 2026.

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

Hancock ADAMHS plans for budget cuts in 2027

Advertiser-Tribune, December 6, 2025

Jim Darrach, chair of the Hancock County Board of Alcohol, Drug Addiction and Mental Health Services, said the board plans to advertise nationally for the position of executive director. He said the next director will need to continue with the important work Precia Stuby has done in this role, but he also is interested in hearing a new perspective.

Darrach noted that the needs are immense, including suicide prevention and outreach to schools to address children's struggles.

"The focus of the board now is on sustaining services with an eye toward ongoing quality improvement," Darrach wrote in an email. "Each year, over 4,000 Hancock County residents receive primary treatment services funded in part by the board. Hundreds more receive prevention, early intervention and recovery support services. This is a testament to the hard work of the board, our contract agencies and the ongoing support from our community. I cannot think of a better legacy for Precia to leave behind."

ADAMHS is searching for a new director while also navigating financial challenges. At last week's meeting, the board approved a budget reduction plan including cuts of $300,000 to $500,000 for the 2027 fiscal year.

"Boards across the state are facing similar and in some case much worse financial strains than we are," Darrach said.

"Base funding from the Ohio Department of Behavioral Health has remained unchanged since 2012, and levy millage has not increased in 20 years," states a FAQ document on the budget reduction plan. "Meanwhile, operational costs continue to rise, creating a widening gap between available resources and service demands. This resulted in the board using reserves to maintain services and meet increasing service demands, while navigating the opiate epidemic and the pandemic."

Northeast District

Trumbull County Jail administrator brings concerns of maintenance issues to commissioners

WKBN, December 2, 2025

Heating issues and problematic plumbing at the Trumbull County Jail were the topic of a lengthy discussion at the commissioner's weekly workshop meeting on Tuesday as the jail's administrator asked commissioners to prioritize a plan to fix these longstanding problems.

Maj. David Bobby is bringing his worries about the Trumbull County Jail's maintenance issues to county commissioners.

"Many of these concerns are not new, they have persisted for decades, and they continue to place unnecessary strain on our operations, our staff and the individuals housed in our facility," Maj. Bobby said.

One of the big issues is the jail's aging boilers. It has two to heat the facility, only one of which is working. Bobby said that during the holiday weekend, it malfunctioned several times. Maintenance staff got it working again, but it's not a permanent fix to the problem as winter approaches.

"The question is not whether it will fail but when it will fail," Bobby said.

In addition to the boilers, Maj. Bobby also told commissioners about other issues at the jail, which include leaks when it rains and plumbing problems.

"The jail's maintenance issues are not temporary inconveniences; they are systematic systemic failures that will continue to worsen if not addressed comprehensively," he said.

Central District

Four bids opened for Richland County dog shelter AC project

Columbus Dispatch, November 26, 2025

The Richland County Dog Warden & Adoption Center is planning ahead for warmer weather next summer.

The Richland County Board of Commissioners opened four bids Tuesday morning submitted by parties interested in installing HVAC air handling units at the shelter.

Bids were received from Calvary Mechanical ($306,000), CRS Metalworx ($285,000), Standard Plumbing and Heating ($286,880) and Universal Enterprises ($328,795).

CRS Metalworx was the apparent low bidder followed by Standard Plumbing and Heating, which submitted a bid $1,880 higher.

Craig Christie, senior project engineer at Karpinski Engineering, originally estimated the projected to cost between $320,000 to $335,000 back in April. Christie's estimate as of Tuesday stands at $318,211.

Three of the four bids opened Tuesday are lower than the engineer's estimate. Christie told commissioners the bids will be evaluated and discussed at a future date.

Per Ohio Revised Code Section 153.12, commissioners must award the project and have a signed contract within 60 days of Tuesday's bid opening, according to Richland County Commissioner Tony Vero.

Christie submitted a proposal in April on behalf of his firm to design and monitor the installation of three HVAC air handling units. The proposal also included the subcontract and services of Mansfield-based Maurer Architectural Design (MAD) Studio, LLC.

The Board approved the engineering services agreement with Karpinski, which came with a flat-fee of $34,000 — paid for out of the county's capital funds, Vero said in April.

Southwest District

Hamilton County commissioners approve property tax rollback, debate percentage

Fox19, December 2, 2025

The Hamilton County Board of Commissioners approved a property tax rollback for residents Tuesday, but one commissioner said it doesn't go far enough considering what residents were told in the past.

When county voters approved a half-cent sales tax increase in 1996 to fund the construction of the Great American Ballpark in 2003 and then the Paul Brown Stadium in 2000, the money was placed in a fund.

Part of the money raised was meant to provide a 30% tax rollback for property owners.

"We still, to this day, have a lot of people...it's a confusing topic," County Administrator Jeff Alutto said.

Alutto said a 30% rollback credit does not mean a 30% savings in property tax bills.

"When they hear the word 30% it's 30% of the annual sales tax revenue," he explained.

The sales tax fund established in 1998 provides funding for the debt and maintenance of both stadiums, the Riverfront development, to fund property tax rebates and to make PILOT payments to Cincinnati Public Schools.

Commissioner Stephanie Summerow Dumas said she's in favor of giving property owners a tax break but not at the expense of other county programs.

"To try to make sure we have something left in our reserve, in our budget if we have to give put assistance to other entities so I'm going to be in favor of the 4.5%," Dumas said.

Commissioner Denise Driehaus also voted in favor of the proposal.

Southeast District

Jefferson County courthouse to undergo historical upgrades for America 250

WTOV9, December 4, 2025

Jefferson County commissioners are planning several upgrades to the county courthouse in preparation for the America 250 celebration next year.

The improvements will include a new display in the lobby that highlights the county's rich history and honors local war heroes.

"It's going to be really neat," Jefferson County Commissioner Tony Morelli said. "There's a lot of history in Jefferson County that people don't know about, and this fits in very well."

The display will feature a constantly changing look at the county's war heroes, organized by decade.

"When you walk in the courthouse, you don't see the counter that's been here for a long, long time. You're going to see something new. We've gotten a lot of positive feedback," Morelli said.

In addition to the historical display, the commission is exploring options to improve signage throughout the building.

"It's lighter, a double-sided sign,' Jefferson County facility Supervisor Patrick Boyles said. "These can be changed to whatever you want. This is the 5,000, so four floors, multiple signs, and they're professionally done."

DATES TO REMEMBER

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

Back to Top

DECEMBER 17
John Leutz Retirement Party at CCAO Office

DECEMBER 25
Christmas - Holiday

JANUARY 1
New Year's Day - Holiday

JANUARY 19
Martin Luther King, Jr. Day - Holiday

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