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Happy
COUNTIES CURRENT
CCAO
COUNTY COMMISSIONERS ASSOCIATION OF OHIO

December 22, 2025

Congratulations to John Leutz on his retirement after 25 years of service to counties! Last week, CCAO celebrated his quarter-century of service. Current and former commissioners attended, as did current and former CCAO staff and other local government leaders.

Ottawa County Commissioner Mark Stahl and Guernsey County Commission Dave Wilson were among commissioners in attendance.

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ASSOCIATION AND MEMBER NEWS

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Former Coshocton County Commissioner Thompson passes away

Last week, former Coshocton County Commissioner Kathy Thompson passed away at the age of 78.

Kathy was appointed to an open Coshocton County Commissioner seat in 1999 and went on to win two more terms, serving until 2007.

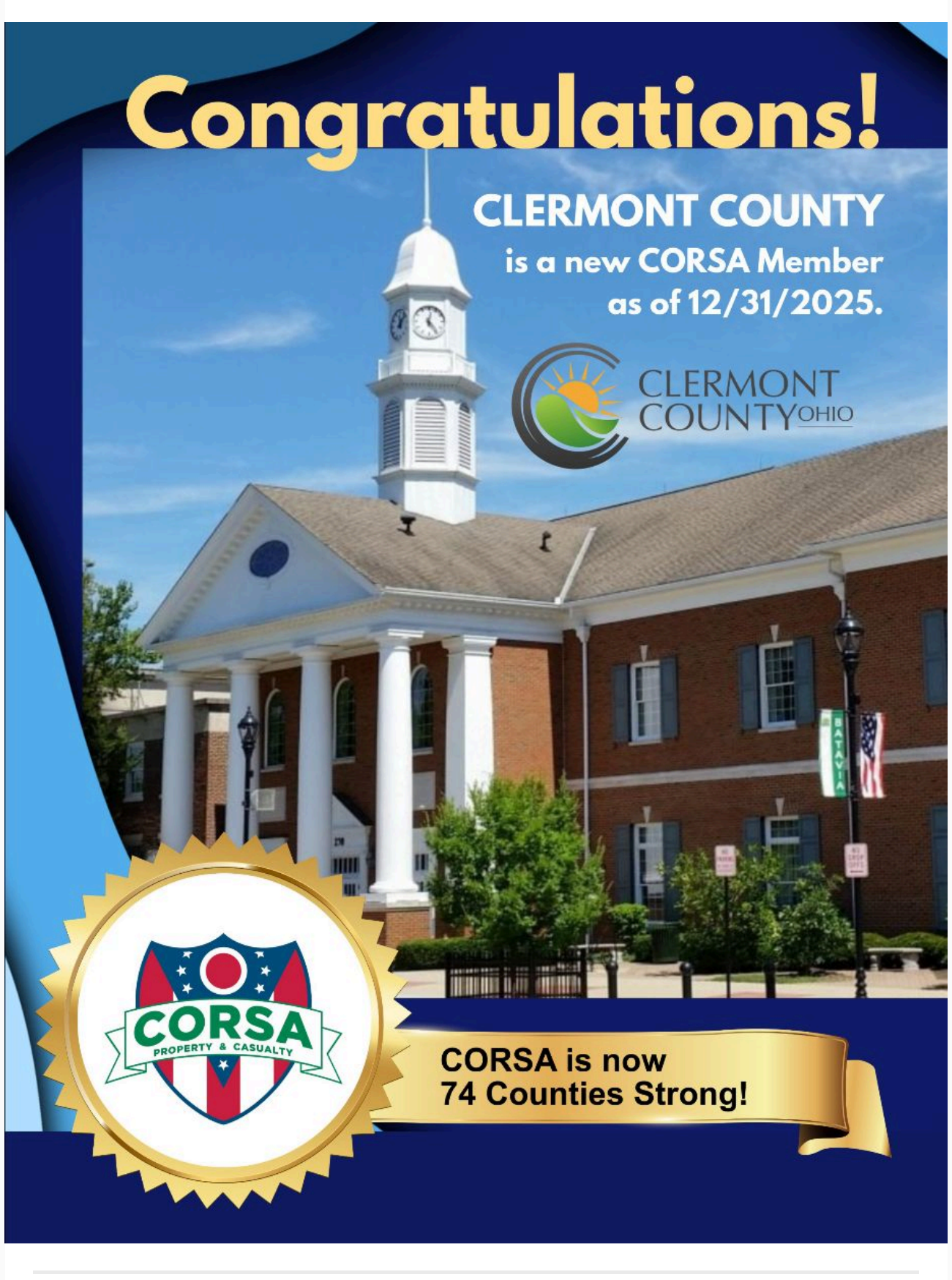
After her service as commissioner, she served as the executive director of the Coshocton Foundation for eight years. She also spent time on the Coshocton County Regional Airport Authority, the Coshocton County Family & Children First Council, and other community organizations.

You can read Kathy's full obituary here.

Welcome Clermont County – CORSA's 74th Member!

CORSA is proud to announce that Clermont County has officially joined our self-insured risk pool as our 74th member. This addition strengthens our collective commitment to providing comprehensive risk management, cost-effective coverage, and collaborative support for Ohio counties.

We're excited to welcome Clermont County as the newest member in CORSA and look forward to building a strong partnership that benefits both the county and our entire membership.



CCAO hiring Accounting Manager

CCAO is hiring an Accounting Manager to lead day-to-day accounting operations for CCAO, CEBCO, CORSA, the CCAO Service Corporation, and the CCAO Research and Education Foundation.

The manager will be tasked with supervising accounting staff, developing internal controls, and assisting with financial reporting, analysis, and audit preparation.

Applicants for the position must be Certified Public Accountants and have at least five years experience in progressive accounting, including three years of supervising staff. Knowledge of health and property/casualty insurance accounting is also ideal, as is experience with government accounting.

If you are interested in this position, please submit a resume and a letter of interest to CCAO Finance & Benefits Manager Thisbe Butcher at tbutcher@ccao.org.

A Special Thanks to our Pinnacle Partner

JobsOhio®
Ohio's Economic Development Corporation

STATE AND FEDERAL

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State agencies do not plan to close on December 24, 26

Last week, CCAO received several inquiries from counties regarding the potential applicability of the President's decision to close federal agencies on December 24 and 26 to Ohio.

As of this morning, CCAO understands that Ohio's state agencies do not plan to follow a similar closure schedule. If the situation changes, we will follow up with new information.

If you have further questions, please feel free to contact Managing Director of Policy Adam Schwiebert.

New election official training portal launched by Secretary of State

Secretary of State Frank LaRose recently announced the launch of a new statewide training platform offering improved, interactive instructional content designed to better educate Ohio's election officials.

The Ohio Election Readiness Training Institute features a modernized menu of course material focused on the legal requirements and standard operating procedures for administering elections. Each training module provides participants with interactive presentations that have been proven to increase knowledge and retention.

New members, directors and deputy directors of an Ohio county board of elections must complete six training credits within six months of appointment, plus an additional eight credits in their first full year. Incumbent or reappointed board members, directors and deputies must complete at least eight credits of continuing-education training each calendar year.

The Readiness Institute will operate year-round, providing election professionals, poll workers and candidates with continuous digital access to the most current instruction content, including material based on the Ohio Election Officials Manual, the Candidate Requirement Guide, the Campaign Finance Handbook and the Ohio Ballot Questions and Issues Handbook, among other publications produced by the Ohio Secretary of State's office.

EDUCATION AND GRANTS

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Law enforcement grants available through DPS

The Department of Public Safety is accepting applications for two law enforcement grant programs. The application deadline for both programs is January 8.

The first is the Violence Crime Reduction Grant, which offers a total of $3.4 million to local law enforcement agencies. Key priorities for the grants are addressing the needs of high-crime communities, assisting in multi-jurisdicitional efforts to reduce violence, and assisting in resolving cold case investigations.

Grant funds can be used for several purposes, including training and equipment. Funds can be used for overtime, but not to hire additional staff. There is no match requirement for these grants.

The second program is the Drug Law Enforcement Grant. Local law enforcement agencies (including drug task forces) can use these funds to gather and analyze intelligence, coordinate efforts across multiple jurisdictions, and improve community-based responses to drug addiction.

Grants under the Drug Law Enforcement program are limited to $250,000 and includes a match requirement of at least 25%.

Residential Development Revolving Loan Program to accept applications beginning December 29

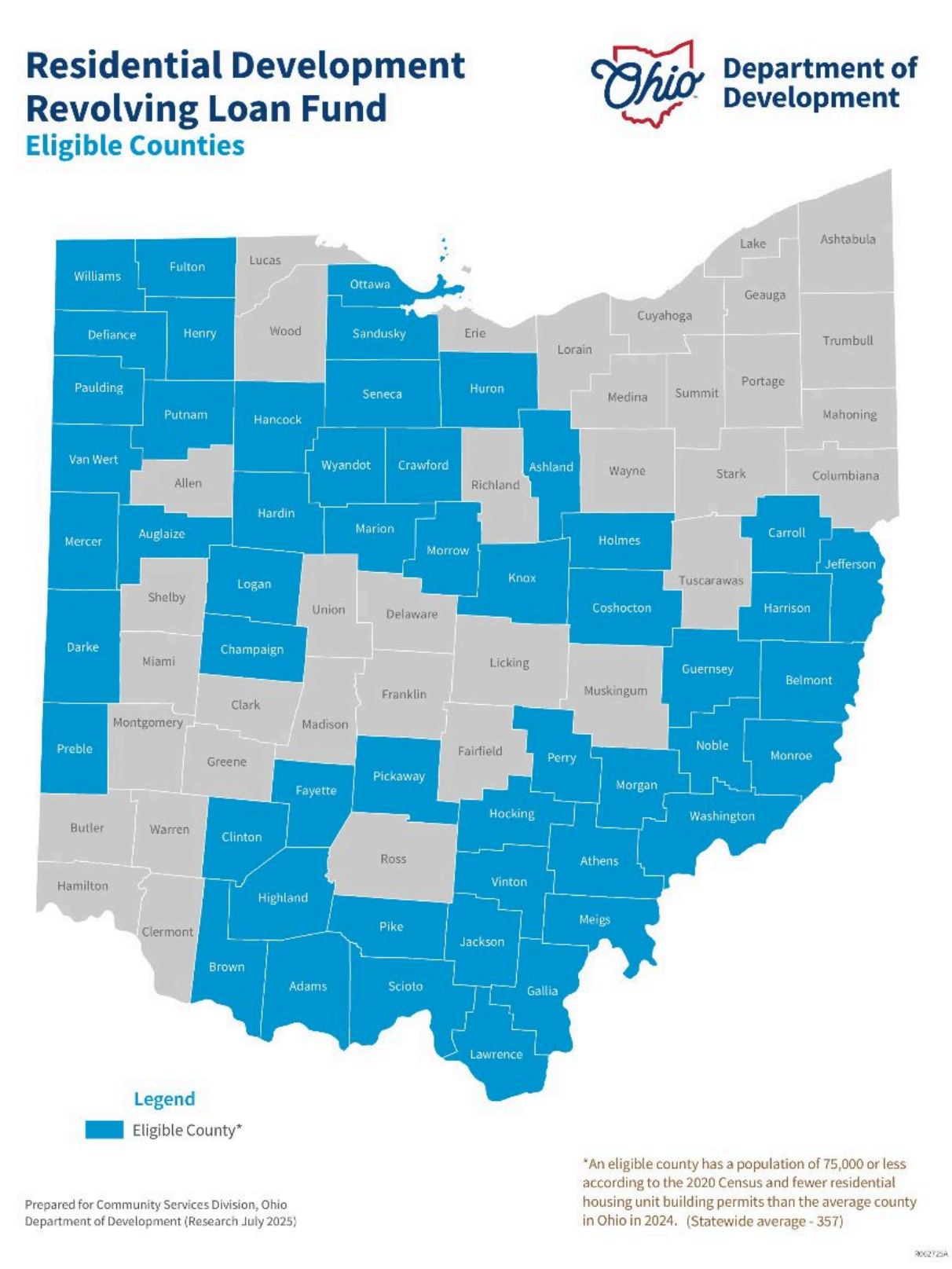
Next week, the Department of Development will begin accepting applications for the Residential Development Revolving Loan Program, which will provide loans to local governments to fund eligible infrastructure costs for the construction of new, single-family residential dwellings in rural areas of Ohio.

Approximately $100 million in funds is available for the program. Applications will be accepted on a rolling basis until the appropriation is depleted.

Loans are available to only certain local governments. To be eligible, a government must either be the county itself or a township or municipality at least partially located in one of the highlighted counties on the map below. Eligible counties were determined by a population threshold (75,000 or less) and based on the number of housing unit permits granted last year.

Recipients must use the loans to develop infrastructure needed for the construction of a residential development project. Infrastructure for this purpose includes water, sewer, transportation, electric, or gas.

More information about the program, as well as guidelines and information about application scoring, can be found on the program's webpage.



*An eligible county has a population of 75,000 or less according to the 2020 Census and fewer residential housing unit building permits than the average county in Ohio in 2024. (Statewide average - 357)

Prepared for Community Services Division, Ohio Department of Development (Research July 2025)

Grant management association to host webinar for local governments

On January 15, the National Grants Management Association will be hosting a webinar titled, "Growing with Grants: Preparing to Win and Manage Federal Awards."

The free webinar is intended for local government officials and will share important tips to grow grant management teams. Key takeaways will be:

- Developing a proposal strategy
- Understanding the grants lifecycle
- Creating a checklist for success
- Discussing the basics of compliance
- Exploring the use of internal staff versus consultants

While the webinar will focus on federal awards, the tips and strategies that will be covered could be useful to counties in winning and managing state and private grants as well.

Registration is free and can be completed here (account creation required).

County land use planning grants accepting applications through February

The Department of Agriculture has announced a new $1 million grant for county governments to develop, update, or implement Land Use Plans or Farmland Preservation Plans.

As the state continues to see growth in numerous industries, food and agriculture remains Ohio's top industry – contributing $124 billion to the economy each year. This grant helps align farmland preservation with economic vitality, encourages collaboration between farmers and local governments, and supports efforts to preserve farmland.

To be eligible, county governments must demonstrate collaboration with:

- All townships, villages, and municipalities within the county that contain active farmland;
- The county Soil and Water Conservation District and/or Regional Planning Commission; and
- Optional partners such as land trusts, agricultural nonprofits, or educational institutions that provide technical assistance.

Applications and more information can be found at the program's webpage. Applications must be submitted no later than February 27, 2026.

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

Lucas County commissioner says temporary pause on data centers may be necessary

WTOL, December 19, 2025

Lucas County Commissioner Pete Gerken says the county may need to briefly "step back" before racing ahead on large-scale data center development, proposing a 90-to-120-day pause to give local leaders time to better understand the long-term impact these facilities could have across the entire county.

Gerken emphasized his proposal is not a rejection of data centers, nor an endorsement. Instead, he describes it as a moment for county leadership to bring clarity, consistency, and accurate information into a debate that has grown increasingly polarized.

"It's not against data centers, or for data centers," said Gerken. "We have a rare opportunity here. Some see it as a threat. Some see it as an opportunity."

In an interview with WTOL 11, Gerken likened today's data center interest to the manufacturing boom that helped shape Lucas County decades ago, citing historic investments such as Jeep, Libbey-Owens-Ford, and other major industrial employers that once defined the region's economic backbone.

"These are major corporations that want to come and locate their stuff here," he said, adding that kind of interest "hasn't happened since the manufacturing craze of the last century."

Unlike smokestack industries of the past, modern data centers are typically low-emission facilities but come with different concerns — including land use, water consumption, energy demand, noise, lighting, and proximity to residential neighborhoods.

Northeast District

Lorain County commissioners vote to establish Public Defender Commission Board

Morning Journal, December 19, 2025

Lorain County commissioners voted in favor Dec. 19 of establishing a Public Defender Commission Board.

The commissioners will appoint three members, and Lorain County Common Pleas Court Judge D. Chris Cook will appoint two of the members in January.

"I gathered as much data as I could," said Commission Vice President Dave Moore.

In August, Moore brought the idea to the commission board after he discovered the county was paying about $4 million in legal defense fees.

The county was charged $3.8 million in 2024, but only $800,000 of that was taken out of the General Fund.

Currently, 26 counties have public defender offices that defend indigent defendants, opposed to others like Lorain County, where the courts appoint private attorneys to represent those accused of crimes.

Moore contends that under the current system, there is a lack of oversight.

He has said the county is "managing a fragmented system with low transparency."

Central District

Four-year, $5.3 million Richland County Courthouse renovations nearly complete

Richland Source, December 18, 2025

It began as a request from Richland County Common Pleas Court judges Phil Naumoff and Brent Robinson for a fourth courtroom in 2021.

Four years later, that construction trigger has resulted in a $5.3 million major renovation of many areas of the nearly 50-year-old Richland County Courthouse — 90 percent of which was funded through the county's share of American Rescue Plan Act dollars.

Richland County commissioners on Thursday said they plan a public event in January to show off the new renovations, including new Land Bank offices on the lowest level and new public bathrooms throughout the five-story building.

The date will be announced once fire inspections are complete. Board members pointed out no money was borrowed for any of the work, an effort that included capital dollars from the county general fund.

It will include a video produced by DRM Productions of Mansfield showing on a loop that documents the work as it was done, according to Commissioner Tony Vero.

"We thought it would be a very nice idea when we open up everything to the public, to show a video loop, as opposed to just (photos) showing the construction. There will be a narration and it will show the progress that has taken place," Vero said.

The judges' request set off a flurry of activity in which one project has led to another. Creating a fourth courtroom meant moving the Clerk of Courts into new offices, which required the removal of the old jail cells on "L2," a project that began in February 2022.

The new Clerk of Courts offices opened in November 2024, a renovation that included meeting space for the county prosecutor's county grand jury sessions.

Southwest District

Warren County Commissioners commit to additional residential property tax relief

Warren County Post, December 16, 2025

During the Warren County Board of County Commissioners meeting on Tuesday December 16, 2026, Warren County Commissioners approved the 2026 annual operating budget.

"The passing of this budget reaffirms the Board's commitment to fiscal discipline, long-term planning and the high-quality services residents expect," notes the press release that was sent out after the meeting on Tuesday.

Even in an inflationary environment, the 2026 general fund budget, which totals $93,561,644, shows a 0.26% *decrease* from 2025, which is said to reflect the Board's continued commitment to cost control and fiscal restraint.

The anticipated revenues for 2026 are projected at $107,560,613. This allows the county to maintain strong reserves, avoid debt, and deliver high-quality services without expanding the size of government. At the same time, it provides another opportunity for residential property tax relief.

"Warren County's financial strength is the result of consistent, disciplined decision-making," said Commissioner Tom Grossmann, President of the Warren County Board of County Commissioners. "We have focused on planning ahead and making sure today's decisions do not create future burdens for taxpayers."

The general fund will once again carry zero debt service in 2026. Over the past five years, the Board has built a strong financial foundation by establishing a $47 million infrastructure bank for anticipated capital needs, maintaining a fully funded $13.5 million rainy day fund, and ensuring enough carryover to support the 2026 budget priorities.

"By avoiding debt, saving for the future, and managing taxpayer dollars responsibly we are in a position to provide additional residential property tax relief as we did in 2024," said Commissioner Shannon Jones, Vice President of the Warren County Board of County Commissioners. "We are eager to move forward with this relief early in 2026."

Southeast District

County Job and Family Services in 'precarious' position, making cuts

Athens County Independent, December 17, 2025

Athens County Commissioners voted Tuesday to eliminate seven positions at Athens County Job and Family Services, the latest step officials have taken to address the agency's financial situation.

Any JFS employee whose position is eliminated will be able to move into an open position, Athens County Commissioner Chris Chmiel told the Independent.

Athens County JFS Director Jean Demosky told the Independent in an email that the agency "started carefully monitoring expenditures in 2024 and took significant steps like initiating a hiring freeze among other savings strategies at the start of 2025."

The situation appears dire: In addition to the temporary 10% pay cut and now, the elimination of seven positions, the agency is considering selling its Nelsonville building that opened only 17 months ago.

"The agency is clearly in a precarious position and there seems to be no quick end in sight," Communications Workers of America #4320 President Jay Walther said in a Nov. 5 email to Demosky.

However, despite cuts and a general feeling of uncertainty within the agency, Demosky, Walther, and multiple Athens County Commissioners, who supervise the agency, all said they did not know exactly how bad the problem is.

"We still don't know why — we still don't know what happened to the money," a JFS employee, who requested anonymity due to fear of retribution, told the Independent in a Dec. 16 interview. "We don't know anything. We know absolutely nothing."

DATES TO REMEMBER

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

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DECEMBER 25
Christmas - Holiday

JANUARY 1
New Year's Day - Holiday

JANUARY 19
Martin Luther King, Jr. Day - Holiday

JANUARY 23
CCAO Board of Director's Meeting

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