



JOSH MANDEL

STATE TREASURER OF OHIO

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By Alan Johnson
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Ohio cities, counties, villages, townships, school boards — even the local sewer district — are being encouraged to put their financial records online, for free, for taxpayers to see.

Ohio Treasurer Josh Mandel, who pushed Ohiocheckbook.com, the state's online checkbook, today urged thousands of local officials to get onboard a statewide database his office is developing with the help of a Silicon Valley firm. Participation will be voluntary.

"I believe very strongly the people of Ohio deserve to know how their money is being spent," Mandel said at a press conference where he was flanked by government officials from around the state. He said online access will "take citizens who feel powerless and make them powerful."

He sent letters today to 18,062 officials with 3,962 local government entities advising them of the checkbook plan.

Auditor Dave Yost added his support, saying it will allow citizens to "follow the money." He said it may be the "most important transparency initiative since the original public records law."

"This is our chance to show trust to the people," Yost added.

Mandel's office working with OpenGov, a Redwood City, CA., firm, to handle the online database. He said a contract is currently being negotiated and did not have an estimated cost.

The city of Findlay, in Hancock County, is one of the first to sign up, Mayor Lydia Mihalik said. "We knew right away this was where we wanted to be. They've made it really ease to share information with the people."

Dan Unger, the president of Northwest Local Schools in Hamilton County, said he expects his district will be the first in the state to go online.

"A thousand set of eyes will promote good spending behavior," he said.

The database Mandel envisions would be available on the state site as well as a local government website.

The cost to the state will depend on the number of government entities that participate, Mandel said. He expects the total cost will be paid by his office out of the \$6 million he said he office has made in cutbacks.

So far, the state has spent \$814,000 on the Ohio checkbook project.

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