



JOSH MANDEL

STATE TREASURER OF OHIO

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By Steven Collins
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CIRCLEVILLE — Ohio Treasurer Josh Mandel stopped in Circleville to announce a new initiative to post all local government financial data online.

Mandel said Pickaway County and Darby Township are among the first local governments to agree to place their spending online. "I believe the people of Pickaway County have a right to know how their tax money is being spent and I applaud local leaders here for agreeing to post their finances on OhioCheckbook.com," Mandel said. "My vision is to create an army of citizen watchdogs that are empowered to hold public officials accountable.

"My goal is to call on the other cities, townships, villages and schools throughout the county to follow suit and do the right thing to get the information online," he said.

Last week, Mandel sent a letter to more than 18,000 local government and school officials in the nearly 4,000 local governments in Ohio.

Every single city councilman, school official and township trustee has received a copy," Mandel said.

Mandel applauded Pickaway County Commissioner Brian Stewart for taking the lead in getting the county's finances online.

"In this process of getting local checkbooks online, there are going to be leaders and followers and we applaud Commissioner Stewart in taking the lead," Mandel said. "We're looking to partner with Brian and others around the state who recognize that this information belongs to the people and not the government."

Stewart, who is the president of the Pickaway County Commissioners, said the county has been working to be more responsive to record requests.

"This is consistent with what we're trying to do locally with all our offices," he said. "We're trying to improve our response to those public record requests, which we've already done. Sometimes in local government, we don't have the resources to do some of the things we want to do like this."

Stewart said that when he first learned of the initiative, he wanted Pickaway County to be a part of it.

"A lot of times in local government, we get mandates from the top down that say 'thou shalt do this,' but there's no money to do it," he said. "In this case, Treasurer Mandel is empowering us to do something we'd like to do but couldn't do on our own.

"We're going to get with the local officials we need to get it done and I will offer my assistance to help get it done," he said. "We have a lot of good public officials here in Pickaway County that understand and don't have to be talked into why being transparent with the public is a good thing."

Mandel said there would be no costs to the local governments to put their finances online.

"We recognize the fact that local governments are cash strapped," he said. "All they have to do is email us a file or upload it and we'll take it from there. We're approaching all the local governments in a friendly manner.

"I'm trying to take citizens who yesterday might have felt powerless and make them feel powerful and empower them to hold the public officials feet to the fire when it comes to government spending," he said.

According to Mandel, before the state's checkbook was online last year, Ohio ranked 46th in the nation in fiscal transparency.

After he started the program, Ohio jumped to the top of the list.

"We've had over 160,000 searches in less than five months and it's setting a new national standard for government



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transparency," he said.

Mandel said he hopes by the end of June that the local government financial data will be on OhioCheckbook.com.

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