Cincinnati Business Courier

By Tatum Hunter

July 15, 2015

Ohio Treasurer Josh Mandel and Cincinnati city leaders announced a partnership today at City Hall to put the city's spending online at OhioCheckbook.com in an effort to increase government transparency.

The city of Cincinnati announced a partnership on Wednesday with the Ohio treasurer's office to put its spending online at OhioCheckbook.com.

The website, created last year by Ohio Treasurer Josh Mandel with the purpose of increasing government transparency, shows more than $408 billion in spending and 112 million transactions during the past seven years. This partnership makes Cincinnati the sixth city in Ohio to display its spending on the site.

Visitors to OhioCheckbook.com can search the database by keyword, department, category or vendor. The city will display its operating budget and checkbook level data on the site. The Cincinnati Retirement System will also display its pension information.

The service is paid for out of the state treasurer's budget and is free to Cincinnati taxpayers.

Before the creation of OhioCheckbook.com, the state was ranked "in the basement" in terms of government transparency, according to Mandel. Forty-sixth in the country, to be exact. After the website's launch, Ohio shot to first in the country.

Mandel said he hopes the partnership with Cincinnati will put "friendly pressure" on other Ohio cities, school districts and pension funds to sign on as well.

"My ultimate vision is to create an army of citizen watchdogs to hold politicians accountable," Mandel said.

While Mandel mentioned his belief in small government when discussing his motivation for investing in government transparency, he named public officials taking lavish trips with taxpayer money as one example of an accountability issue that this system can remedy.

"It's going to make them think twice before they stay at the Ritz Carlton," he said.

Mandel declined to comment on whether Cincinnati has any issues with irresponsible use of taxpayer money by public officials.

Local governments can also use the site to increase efficiency. They can look at what vendors other public entities are using to buy things like bulletproof vests for police officers or printer cartridges, seeing if they have any vendors in common and arranging to make bulk purchases.

Cincinnati city council member Amy Murray encouraged citizens to get involved and utilize the website.

"Hold us accountable," she said. "Look at the online checkbook. Let us know what you think."

Mandel and Cincinnati city manager Harry Black said this move along with the city's growing focus on big data to measure performance places Cincinnati at the forefront of local government transparency.

"I would challenge any other city in the country to match what we've accomplished here," Black said.

In an age of rapidly changing technology, Mandel stressed the need for local governments to keep up with the times.

"You can either be Blockbuster or you can be Netflix," he said.

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