



JOSH MANDEL

STATE TREASURER OF OHIO

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By Mike Sever
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Ohio Treasurer Josh Mandel was in Ravenna Tuesday to thank Portage County officials for joining the growing list of local governments on his Ohio Checkbook website.

While agreements still have to be signed, commissioners and Auditor Janet Esposito agreed having Portage's expenses online will benefit taxpayers.

Esposito was the first to stand up and support the program when Mandel spoke about it at the local Republican Party's annual Lincoln Day dinner in March.

On April 7, commissioners agreed to partner with the treasurer's office "assuming there will be no cost" to the county.

So far the county and Streetsboro have agreed to join the program.

"Portage County is helping lead the way toward transparency in Ohio," Mandel said.

Maureen T. Frederick, president of the county board of commissioners, said she is "very proud to have Portage County amongst the leaders."

Mandel said 286 local governments out of 3,962 across Ohio have agreed to join since he announced the local government version of the OhioCheckbook.com program at the start of the year. Another 378 governments have expressed interest but not yet committed, he said.

Mandel posted records of more than \$408 billion in state spending starting in December 2014. Since then there have been more than 312,000 searches on the site.

Once the local portion is up and running, Ohioans will be able to search billions of dollars of state and local spending.

Mandel said his initiative "is all about empowering taxpayers to hold politicians accountable." He said the transparency of state and local spending is "one of the best antidotes to apathy and corruption."

Commissioner Kathleen Chandler said "informing the public about how public money is spent is important." She said the county has always had its records available, "but it is very difficult to access for the average private citizen."

Commissioner Vicki Kline said the program "will help people understand county spending."



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Esposito said information on OhioCheckbook.com will be similar to what her office already posts on the county website.

Mandel said the state site has cutting-edge features such as "Google-style" search capabilities to allow users to sort by keyword, department, category or vendor; interactive charts; and functionality to compare state spending year-to-year or among agencies.

Mandel said he hopes to encourage local governments to use the system to find ways to collaborate, such as joint purchases of materials or services.

Other places that have put their financial information online have found it decreases the number of public records requests, because people can search the files for themselves.

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