



JOSH MANDEL

STATE TREASURER OF OHIO

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Transparency and openness aren't just the buzzwords used by journalists and politicians. They should be the hallmarks for everyone who holds public office.

And, with the advent of the information age, transparency in government is not only something people desire from their elected officials, but it's also easier than it's ever been to meet the demand.

But currently, there are only a handful of local government entities that make their financial information available digitally. They include, in Ross County, the City of Chillicothe, Huntington Local Schools, Huntington Township and Jefferson Township.

Some school districts, such as Adena, Chillicothe, and Paint Valley, make their five-year forecasts available online, and Paint Valley has monthly budget information as well. Those are significant steps toward full transparency.

Still, the vast majority of area school districts, townships, villages and other boards and commissions entrusted with public money offer no way for the public to track in real-time their expenditures, despite a vast array of technological tools that could allow people to do so.

That's where state Treasurer Josh Mandel's office can help them increase awareness and transparency. OhioCheckbook.com is a way for local governments to post their information online, free of charge, and allow the public to see how they spend the money.

Mandel created the site in December 2014, spending more than \$800,000 to launch the site with the state's books first. The cost will go up as more entities place their information there, but it's money well spent for the public's right to know.

The City of Chillicothe used a different system to put its books online, but all the other Ross County governments with live financial information used Mandel's tool. Ross County likely will be up and running on the site by the end of the summer, according to Auditor Tom Spetnagel Jr. Mandel's office is very willing to help any entity wanting to take advantage of the opportunity.

It's simple. There is no reasonable explanation for any local government to avoid placing its financial information online. It's the public's money, and they have the right to know how it is spent.

There many have been plenty of barriers to putting the information online before, but Mandel's efforts have eliminated the excuses. We encourage all townships, school districts, counties, villages and any entity that receives public money to explore their options and make their finances available digitally as soon as possible.

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