



JOSH MANDEL

STATE TREASURER OF OHIO

Highest U.S. PIRG Score Received Again as OhioCheckbook.com Continues to Lead the Pack and Set a New National Standard for Government Transparency

Press Release - Ohio Treasurer's Office

COLUMBUS – The U.S. Public Interest Research Group (U.S. PIRG) released their annual "Following the Money 2016" report today and Treasurer Josh Mandel earned Ohio the number one transparency ranking in the country for the second consecutive year in a row. Due to the launch of OhioCheckbook.com, Ohio again received the highest perfect score of 100 points this year – marking the second time in two years Ohio received the highest possible score in the history of the U.S. PIRG transparency rankings.

"Ohio is once again the national leader in state spending transparency. But more than just holding the highest spot, Ohio's commitment to improving their web portal has encouraged other states to join this race to the top. This year, we have an unprecedented number of states meeting Ohio in the upper echelons of our criteria," said Michelle Surka, program associate with U.S. PIRG and co-author of Following the Money. "The Treasurer's office has also been a leader in encouraging municipal and local transparency, continuing to expand the scope of what state spending transparency means and how it can help ordinary citizens analyze how their tax dollars are spent, from the state house in Columbus to the most local special districts."

"I believe the people of Ohio have a right to know how their money is being spent," said Treasurer Mandel. "By setting a new national standard for government transparency, we are empowering taxpayers across Ohio to hold public officials accountable."

This report is the U.S. PIRG's seventh annual evaluation of state transparency websites. Read the U.S. PIRG press release, the full report, and a list of the 50 state rankings at: USPIRG.org. Highlights of the U.S. PIRG Report's references to Ohio's transparency site include:

Pg. 8 – "Vendors seeking to do business with the state of Ohio have reported using OhioCheckbook.com as a business analytics tool, which has allowed them to determine when they can offer a state agency a product at a better value than the agency was currently receiving. In addition, an elected official from Hamilton County said that he used the site to compare the prices paid for road salt in neighboring villages to ensure that the county was getting a competitive rate."

Pg. 15 – "The Search Bar on Ohio's Transparency Website Improves Accessibility by Offering Suggestions When a Visitor Begins Typing."

Pg. 21 – "States have started to prioritize user-friendliness and accessibility in their transparency portals. Ohio's site still leads the pack, with intuitive "Google-style" search bars, options to instantly share interesting findings, and easily navigable "compare" features that allow users to contextualize the data they are reviewing."

Pg. 28 – "One important next step would be to support transparency efforts at the municipal and county level and make those data available through the state's transparency website. Ohio is a leader in this regard, already incorporating many localities into the central transparency site."

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OhioCheckbook.com was launched on December 2, 2014, marking the first time in Ohio history when citizens could actually see every expenditure in state government. Since its launch, OhioCheckbook.com has received overwhelming support from newspapers and groups across the state and, as of April 12, 2016 there have been more than 500,000 total searches on the site.

OhioCheckbook.com displays more than \$512 billion in spending over the past eight years, including more than 139 million transactions. The website includes cutting-edge features such as:

- “Google-style” contextual search capabilities, to allow users to sort by keyword, department, category or vendor;
- Fully dynamic interactive charts to drill down on state spending;
- Functionality to compare state spending year-over-year or among agencies; and,
- Capability to share charts or checks with social media networks, and direct contact for agency fiscal offices.

On April 7, 2015 Treasurer Mandel sent a letter to 18,062 local government and school officials representing 3,962 local governments throughout the state calling on them to place their checkbook level data on OhioCheckbook.com and extending an invitation to partner with his office at no cost to local governments. These local governments include cities, counties, townships, schools, library districts and other special districts.

To date, more than 640 local governments and school districts have committed to partnering with OhioCheckbook.com. Combined, these entities display on OhioCheckbook.com over 12.5 million individual transactions representing more than \$33.9 billion in local government and school district spending.

A large coalition of statewide and local government organizations have expressed support for OhioCheckbook.com and local government transparency, including:

- Ohio Municipal League
- Ohio Township Association
- Ohio Association of School Business Officials
- Buckeye Association of School Administrators
- County Commissioner Association of Ohio
- County Auditor Association of Ohio
- Ohio Newspaper Association
- Ohio Society of CPAs
- Buckeye Institute
- Common Cause Ohio

For more information or to view how your money is being spent, please visit OhioCheckbook.com.

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