



# JOSH MANDEL

## STATE TREASURER OF OHIO

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By Jessie Balmert  
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COLUMBUS - Anne Gerhardt had prepared a speech about how having her own savings account would help the 18-year-old woman with Down Syndrome achieve more independence. But she folded the white piece of paper in half and went off script, speaking from her heart.

"I'm just really glad that I'm working on the STABLE account. I want to save money from my job," Gerhardt said.

Turning to the press in the room, Ohio Treasurer Josh Mandel opened up the floor to anyone with questions.

"And free autographs," Gerhardt offered for her fans.

People chuckled, but Gerhardt and her family have become like celebrities in an effort to bring savings accounts to people with disabilities. Her father, Chip Gerhardt, a Cincinnati lobbyist, helped pass the ABLE Act, for Achieving a Better Life Experience Act, through Congress. Then, a group of state lawmakers, including Rep. Jonathan Dever, R-Madeira; Rep. Margy Condit, R-Liberty Township; and Sen. Shannon Jones, R-Clearcreek Township, created rules for the accounts in Ohio and allocated money to set up the program. It passed with unanimous bipartisan support.

The law allows people with disabilities to set up savings accounts &mdash; with no tax on the earnings, similar to 529 college savings accounts &mdash; to cover housing, transportation and other expenses. Before the change, people with disabilities could not have more than \$2,000 in assets and earn more than about \$680 per month to qualify for Medicaid and Social Security disability benefits

Each year, relatives can pay up to \$14,000 into the account for people with physical or mental disabilities. To be eligible, individuals must be diagnosed before they are 26 years old. Lawmakers later added an income tax deduction for certain contributions, much like college savings accounts. That will take effect after Gov. John Kasich signs the change.

Ohio is the first state to offer these accounts. Since June 1, 160 people have signed up for the benefit. Mandel, whose office was given \$2 million to administer the program, announced Monday that Ohio would offer the accounts to people in other states. About 20 states have reached out to Mandel's office about the program. Both in-state and out-of-state users pay a small monthly fee, \$2.50 and \$5 respectively, to keep the accounts open.

And Anne's fame continues. She is featured in a public service announcement for the accounts with Ohio State University football coach Urban Meyer and Mandel. The spot will run across Ohio to educate people about the option.

Those who want to create a STABLE account may go to [www.stableaccount.com](http://www.stableaccount.com) or call 1-800-439-1653.

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