



JOSH MANDEL

STATE TREASURER OF OHIO

Ohio Treasurer Josh Mandel's office is picking up the tab.

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By Tim Botos

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Stark County government's checkbook soon will be open.

By later this summer, you'll be able to go online to view a searchable database of the \$225 million a year the county spends on everything from office supplies and employee salaries to road projects. Stark is the seventh county government in the state to sign on to Ohio Treasurer Josh Mandel's OhioCheckbook.com initiative.

"Six years ago, our county was rocked by theft and scandal," said Stark County Auditor Alan Harold, referring to a nearly \$3 million theft and ensuing conviction of a former county treasurer's employee. "This will be easier for citizens ... there's nothing to hide ... Stark County runs a very clean and efficient shop."

On Tuesday, Mandel joined Harold, County Treasurer Alex Zumbar and County Commissioners Janet Weir Creighton and Tom Bernabei — Richard Regula was absent due to vacation — to announce the program, a first for any public body in the county.

"I'm going to be talking about Stark County," Mandel said, adding that he hopes cities, school boards, libraries and other local tax districts will join in the future. "This leadership, I think will serve to inspire others ... to do the right thing."

Mandel said he launched the state government open checkbook on Dec. 2, to help shine light on spending. Since then, Ohio rocketed from 46th to first in a transparency rating of all 50 states by the U.S. Public Interest Research Group.

"Empower taxpayers to hold public officials accountable," Mandel said.

Ohio's version can be viewed at Ohiocheckbook.com

The version for Stark will cost nothing; Mandel's office is picking up the tab. Access will be available via the Stark County government website, as well as the Ohio checkbook site.

Harold, whose office is working out logistics with Mandel's for a planned August launch, said Stark data will likely be updated quarterly. Like the state data, it will be searchable in numerous ways, including by name, vendor and department, with big-picture results such as pie charts, down to individual check images.

After the state site debut, Mandel mailed letters to 18,062 government and school officials, representing nearly 4,000 governments in Ohio, urging them to join. He said ultimately government officials themselves can reap benefits by analyzing data from other locales to arrange potential group purchasing pacts.

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