



JOSH MANDEL

STATE TREASURER OF OHIO

Lawmakers should ensure that spending database becomes permanent resource

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Editorial

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Ohio's Online Checkbook initiative, launched a year ago by state Treasurer Josh Mandel, has gained national accolades for increasing government transparency. But currently there is no guarantee that OhioCheckbook.com, which puts government spending online where anyone can access it, will be continued when Mandel no longer is the treasurer.

This valuable tool deserves to be put into Ohio code to ensure it will be maintained for the future. House Bill 46, which has passed the House and recently had sponsor testimony before the Senate Finance Committee, would do so. The bill is co-sponsored by Rep. Jonathan Dever, R-Cincinnati, and Rep. Mike Dovilla, R-Berea.

So far, more than 100 publicly funded entities — including state offices, commissions and public universities — have put their checkbook-level data online through the treasurer's site, which is searchable by category, vendor and expenditure level, among other things. More than 100 others, including counties, villages and pension funds, have committed to join soon. Mandel has called on all Ohio cities, counties, townships, schools, library districts and other special districts to join in making their information easily accessible to the public.

The effort has attracted acclaim from government-transparency advocates. In March, the U.S. Public Interest Research Group rated Ohio first among all states on its annual ranking of states by transparency in government spending. Ohio achieved a perfect score of 100, the highest score ever awarded by the group, a year after being ranked nearly last at 46.

The Online Checkbook also is strongly backed by a wide array of groups and associations, including the Ohio Municipal League, the Ohio Society of CPAs, the Buckeye Association of School Administrators, the Ohio Newspaper Association, Common Cause and the Buckeye Institute. This clearly is a nonpartisan effort in the best interests of all. Among the counties that have signed on to add their data to the site in the near future are Democratic-controlled Franklin County and Republican stronghold Delaware County.

Some government bodies already had put financial information online. OhioCheckbook.com has enhanced those efforts, offering greater visibility and adding the ability for people to easily compare how their county compares with others in terms of spending.

"Our taxpayers deserve to know what their money is being spent on and where their money is being spent," said Dovilla at the finance committee hearing on Tuesday. "Our taxpayers deserve to know we are committed to advancing efficient, effective state government that respects them."

Mandel is to be commended for this ambitious project that has united transparency advocates and public officials of all stripes. He has matured in office over the past several years and taken on a number of worthy issues aimed at financial literacy and

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government transparency. The checkbook initiative deserves to be codified, and surely will be seen as a highlight of his tenure as treasurer.

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