

COUNTY LEADER



County Commissioners Association of Ohio quarterly magazine

Spring 2020



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County Leader, CCAO's quarterly e-magazine, provides an in-depth look at the news, programs and policies affecting Ohio's 88 counties.

The e-magazine also showcases our members, offers best county practices as well as ways to enhance the state-county partnership practices and shares the offerings of the association.

If you have questions or story submissions, contact Editor Andrew Johnson at ajohnson@ccao.org or 614-220-7986.



1) Adams, Lawrence and Scioto County Commissioners with CCAO Staff and Rep Brian Baldrige (former Adams County Commissioner) and his legislative staff.

2) Hamilton County staff delivering supplies .

A MESSAGE FROM 2020 CCAO PRESIDENT CARL DAVIS, MONROE COUNTY COMMISSIONER

As the spring flowers are blooming and the trees begin to come to life after a long winter, it is time to reflect back on recent events.

During the months of January and February, Executive Director Cheryl Subler and Legislative Counsel John Leutz, along with CORSA Managing Director John Brownlee and CEBCO Managing Director Mike Kindell and CORSA President Daniel Dean, CEBCO Vice President Michael Welch and I had many meetings working on our Memorandum of Understanding. We updated a tentative agreement to be presented to the three respective boards for their approval. One thing that all three boards agree on is that we are all stronger together. One entity cannot exist without the body.



CORSA and CCAO boards have both ratified the agreement. Unfortunately COVID-19 invaded Ohio and interrupted the process. CEBCO board members have the agreement for their consideration, and I am hopeful they will be signing on soon.

Ohio had good representation at the NACO Legislative Conference February 29 through March 4 in Washington D.C. There were many good educational sessions and time for visits with our legislative teams on Capital Hill. Attendee feedback was positive. If you have never attended the Legislative Conference, you should plan to attend in 2021.

The next upcoming event is The NACO Conference July 17-20 in Orlando Florida. Early Bird Registration ends on May 1. As of now the event is scheduled to go on as planned. For registration and cancellation policies, email nacomeetings@naco.org. There will be educational opportunities, committee meetings and election of NACO officers. We do always find time for some entertainment. I hope to see you all in Orlando.

I would be remiss if I didn't at least touch on the current challenges that we are all facing at this time. We all know that counties will see revenue losses. Predictions are that we may see reductions of sales tax receipts nearing 25-30%. Only time will tell what those numbers may be. One thing that we all know for certain is that we must continue to provide services. Budgets will be tight. We are working with our legislators in Washington and Columbus to secure funding to fill the holes caused by these lost revenues.

As we struggle in our respective counties to continue to conduct our meetings and provide services, likewise our CCAO staff has been working from home to continue their dedicated service to counties. We have had weekly, bi-weekly and as needed membership calls to keep our members informed on the latest developments. Our March Executive Committee and Board Meetings were conference calls. This is not ideal, but the necessary business of the organization is being conducted. We commend our staff. They are definitely "getting the job done".

In April I appointed a Code of Regulations Committee, Chaired by Licking County Commissioner Tim Bubb. They will be working for the next several months on updating the document to be presented to the board for approval.

Everyone seems to have the same hope. "I can't wait until things get back to normal." I'm convinced that "normal" will not resemble what we are accustomed to. I believe our lives have been changed forever. Please stay safe until we meet again.

LETTER FROM CCAO EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR CHERYL SUBLER

It's been less than two months since coronavirus changed our lives. The way we work, the way we socialize, the way we go about living many aspects of our everyday lives. In a relatively short amount of time, so much has changed.

During that time, the coronavirus pandemic has become a serious health and economic crisis. According to recent research, the public currently sees the coronavirus as a greater threat to the economy than to their health. Yet, to solve the economic crisis, we have to solve the health crisis; the two are intertwined.



Because of early, and strong, leadership by Governor DeWine coupled with the bold actions of Ohioans, the anticipated intensity of the virus in the Buckeye State has been reduced as everyone has worked to “flatten the curve.” Yet, the health battle will continue for some time. All 88 counties have active cases; hot spots are expected to emerge and the concern for community spread will likely increase. As a result, social distancing and preventative measures will be around for some time.

Yet the billion-dollar questions persist – will the virus mutate or come back stronger at a later date? When will a vaccine be available? Perhaps most often asked - when will life ever get back to “normal” again?

We've made great progress so far, but unfortunately, the answers to these questions are not yet known. This uncertainty can lead to feelings of discouragement. But more powerful than the fear or frustration of the unknown is our ability to unite as counties and as Ohioans to tackle the challenges in front of us.

This week the governor released his strategy for gradually re-opening Ohio's businesses and industries. The health of our economy is vital, and it is very important that Ohio move forward. One cannot overstate the personal and economic tragedies of the shutdown and we've got to re-open while still protecting Ohioans.

Ohio's economic prognosis is being compared to a Nike “swoosh,” with a deep initial drop and followed by a gradual upward climb. Ohio wisely took action early to “keep the monster down” and to flatten the curve. As a result, our expenses for addressing the health response are expected to be lower than some other states, yet we are anticipating higher economic losses for proactively following the governor's Stay at Home Order. For counties, the economic costs and lost revenue from the pandemic will have a deeper effect than the unbudgeted costs of responding to COVID.

Make no mistake, county commissioners, county executives and county council members will face incredibly difficult decisions in the weeks and months ahead in response to the fiscal consequences of the pandemic.

Essential advocacy efforts must continue in order to help counties with the loss revenue. This includes urging Congress to include in the fourth coronavirus relief package direct funding to offset local and state governments' revenue losses as well as more flexibility in using the CARES Act's Coronavirus Relief Fund.

No doubt, the challenges ahead of us are significant. But as Buckeyes, we are a can-do people. We take on challenges as they come and we help each other along the way until we get there. Counties are not alone in facing the coronavirus pandemic and its resulting economic challenges. Your association is ready to stand by your side throughout.



LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

CLOSING THE GAP: OHIO LOOKS TO EXPAND BROADBAND ACCESS

by Adam Schwiebert, Policy Analyst

Coming into 2020, the expansion of high-speed internet access was already a popular topic around the statehouse. Following the rapid onset of the coronavirus this spring, the need for accessible broadband has never been more apparent.



With unprecedented numbers of Ohio workers and students at home, never more has society relied so heavily on digital connectivity for our economic, educational, social and health care needs.

The need for greater connectivity is unlikely to diminish, even when the threat of coronavirus subsides. Ohioans live in a highly interconnected world, with access to global markets, educational opportunities and health care services increasingly moving toward online platforms. This technological transformation offers many benefits for businesses and individuals alike. But for too many Ohioans, a lack of high-speed internet access prevents them from reaping the benefits of this connectivity. While portions of the state push the digital age forward, others remain stranded behind.

CCAO members have long recognized the need for expanded broadband access and the beneficial impacts it can have on their counties. As outlined in the CCAO policy platform:

“Nearly one-third of households in rural Ohio counties lack access to broadband internet. Ohio needs to aggressively promote access, adoption and use of broadband throughout Ohio. “

Fortunately, the call for greater broadband connectivity has been heard by the DeWine administration. Late last year, InnovateOhio released the state’s first broadband strategy plan. The plan outlines the administration’s goals and early efforts toward expanding broadband access to unserved and underserved portions of the state. Goals include

expanding telehealth availability, digital literacy, and economic and entrepreneurial initiatives. Implementation strategies include the creation of a statewide broadband office to coordinate broadband expansion efforts across the state, the opening of which was just announced this past March.

Support for broadband is also found in the General Assembly. Ohio House Bill 13, sponsored by state Reps. Rick Carfagna (R-Genoa Township) and Michael O’Brien (D-Warren), is a promising piece of legislation that would establish a residential broadband grant program to provide state resources to help close broadband access gaps in unserved and underserved areas of the state. CCAO has testified in support of the legislation and developments seem positive.

Several months ago, the Ashtabula County Commissioners submitted written proponent testimony in support of House Bill 13, emphasizing the beneficial role that additional investment would have on their county. “We recognize the desperate need we have for broadband capability throughout our county to create hope of future growth and economic development as well as to preserve the productivity and competitiveness of our existing businesses,” wrote the commissioners in their testimony.

Progress at the federal level continues as well with the rollout of the \$20 billion Rural Digital Opportunity Fund. This 10-year program will utilize a reverse auction process for providers to expand rural broadband service across the country. Further rollout of the program is expected later this year.

While it is encouraging to see positive developments and constructive dialogue taking place regarding broadband expansion, this project will not be completed overnight. Significant challenges regarding broadband mapping, regulatory limitations and limited resources still exist. But as recent events demonstrate, broadband access has never been needed more than at the present, and CCAO will continue working with our statehouse partners to ensure that access is ultimately provided.

FEATURE

VIRTUAL REALITY: HOW COMMISSIONERS MEETINGS WENT DIGITAL - AN INTERVIEW WITH REP. BOB CUPP

by Adam Schwiebert, Policy Analyst

As the COVID-19 pandemic reached Ohio this past March, the General Assembly and Governor Mike DeWine took quick action to help ensure public business could continue despite the stay-at-home health order. The legislature met in late March to pass House Bill 197, which among other COVID-19 response items, contained a provision to allow public bodies to meet via teleconference, video conference, or other similar electronic means during the declared health emergency.



Cupp

We recently interviewed state Rep. Bob Cupp, also a former Allen County Commissioner, who was a key leader in helping provide this virtual public meeting ability.

When the General Assembly met in late March to pass HB 197, unprecedented measures were used to maximize social distancing. What was it like to make laws under such unique circumstances?

Conduct of the House session for the vote on HB 197 was like no other that I have experienced. Members and the few essential staff were careful to keep at least six feet apart. Doors were propped open to avoid the need to touch their surfaces. Members were positioned in the House chamber to maintain a safe distance from each other, utilizing the balconies in addition to the floor and adjacent committee rooms to accomplish it. Members responded verbally to the roll call vote from where they stood inside the chamber. On one hand, it felt surreal - as if it couldn't really be happening that way. On the other hand, it demonstrated the resilience of democracy - finding innovative ways to do the necessary under unusual circumstances and in conformity with the constitution. It was a history-making day.

You were an early champion of providing public bodies the ability to meet via teleconference and video conference during the declared public emergency. How did you hear of this idea?

I received a call from my county prosecutor in Allen County, Juergen Waldick, following Governor DeWine's declaration of emergency, school closing order, and limiting the size of group meetings. He expressed concern over how county commissioners, township trustees, and other boards would be able to meet and fulfill their legal responsibilities and comply with the open meetings law under the conditions that were developing.

Quickly following that alert, I received an email from the regional planning director in Allen County, who was very concerned about state agency meetings which had been canceled, thereby jeopardizing grant applications and public meetings required to advance transportation projects for the upcoming construction season.

I recalled that private corporate boards were able to utilize conference calling or video format to conduct their business. And, for many years I had legislatively promoted interactive video opportunities in our schools and was familiar with its usefulness for group connectivity. So, I immediately requested the Legislative Service Commission to research any precedent in statutes for public agencies to do the same and to draft legislation to permit the conduct of public business virtually in a manner consistent with other requirements for notice and public participation.

What feedback have you heard from your local officials about how they utilize virtual meetings?

Nearly every local governmental unit from township trustees to school boards are quickly adapting to the virtual meeting necessity. Different formats are being used, such as Zoom, Facebook Live, local video television feed, etc. based on availability and what is most adaptable for the local entity. A side benefit is that more of the public can virtually "attend," these local meetings and be better informed.



Franklin County Commissioners regular session via videoconferencing

How can counties best partner with state government in combating the COVID-19 pandemic?

The full extent of the economic and social fallout

from the worst epidemic in a century is not yet known. However, honest communication among responsible officials about the needs – and gaining a realistic understanding of available resources to meet the needs – will best help resolve the complications generated from COVID-19. It is going to take everyone working together in good faith to repair our state and communities from the aftermath.

What do you think the pathway ahead looks like for the state and county governments as they look to mitigate COVID-19 and restart our economy?

In difficult times, it is important to work with all of the practical creativity we can. A balanced approach is likely to be the most successful. This means abiding by the safe practices most people have now necessarily become accustomed to. And, within that zone of prudent conduct, we can return to the modified activities of life as we await development of effective treatments and a protective vaccine.

GUEST COLUMN

PROMOTING CHILDREN’S RESILIENCE AND PREVENTING CHILD ABUSE DURING THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

by Groundwork Ohio

The coronavirus pandemic is changing all our lives. As necessary decisions have been made to respond to and protect Ohioans from the coronavirus, young children and their families are increasingly having to respond to the social and economic impacts of these decisions, which threaten their healthy development and well-being. We know, as a result of this pandemic, Ohio families are struggling to meet both their physical and emotional needs. At the same time, our children are suffering and lack their typical networks of support as they have less contact with trusted adults outside their home. Communities must be intentional during this time to meet the needs of Ohio youngest and most vulnerable citizens when responding to our new reality by promoting children’s resilience and preventing child abuse during this uncertain time.

As communities across the state joined together to elevate child abuse prevention strategies during April, in honor of National Child Abuse Prevention Month, we are reminded that violence against children affected a significant portion of young

Ohioans even before COVID-19, and that data on reported abuse grossly underestimates the magnitude of abuse occurring. The impact of the coronavirus and social distancing policy considering a review of large natural disasters, emergencies and economic downturns instructs us that a dramatic increase in child abuse is on the horizon.

Additionally, children living in poverty whose families face greater social and economic stress in times of crisis will be disparately impacted by violence.

We are already beginning to see the indicators of increased violence across the country and here in Ohio. Calls reporting domestic violence are increasing. Gun sales are increasing. And already in some communities across the nation, children’s hospitals are beginning to see surges in severe child abuse cases. During the month of March, as pandemic policies began to take form, the state of Ohio experienced a 48% reduction in referrals for child abuse and neglect.

Typically, referral calls would have averaged approximately 600 calls per day, but by the end of March this had been cut in half. This is certainly not because abuse and neglect are not occurring. Trusted adults making referrals including family, friends, systems and professionals such as teachers, early childhood providers, pediatricians, home visitors, among others, are part of the critical safety net for our most at-risk children. With so many of these connections cut off by social distancing policies, this vital safety net of relationships and reporting has been taken away from the children who rely on it the most.

Given what we know about brain science and early childhood development, building resilience among children and preventing child abuse during the pandemic must be a priority. The foundations of brain architecture are established early in life with 85% of brain development happening by the age of three and over 90% by the age of five. It is during this critical period of development, that young children develop the capacity to experience, express and regulate emotions, form close, secure interpersonal attachment relationships and explore their environment and learn.

Adverse childhood experiences including abuse, neglect and household dysfunction undermine this development. These traumatic experiences activate stress response systems. These responses to trauma, in the absence of protective relationships often experienced in cases of abuse and neglect, inhibit the brain's healthy development. The brain science tells us that even though they may not understand what is happening, babies, toddlers and young children are adversely affected by traumatic events and are having trauma responses to their environment during COVID-19. Without early intervention to prevent and mitigate the impacts of this trauma, these harmful early experiences can continue to negatively impact these children throughout their life.

In order to protect children from abuse and support healthy brain development, local communities must support strategies that build resilience in children and prevent child abuse during and following the pandemic. Local policymakers are critical to this effort. In addition to showing kindness

towards families, local policymakers can increase investments and implement policies that support and uplift families during this difficult time by doing the following:

- Protect current funding and increase investments that ensure at-risk families have shelter, food, and safety. Increase funding to child welfare systems and other critical child serving systems that will need help recovering capacity during and after the pandemic.
- Support the maintenance of connection to critical supports, programming and relationships by increasing access to critical health and education services through innovative service delivery options.
- Target vulnerable populations of families in consideration of race, poverty, geography and other social factors that result in disparate health and education outcomes.
- Learn from other local policies being implemented to model and scale prevention strategies.

To learn more and share critical strategies to prevent child abuse with the families, health providers, educators, community members and other policymakers in your county, please utilize [Promoting Children's Resilience and Preventing Child Abuse During the Coronavirus Pandemic](#) as a resource and visit www.GroundworkOhio.org/covid19 for the most up to date news and resources concerning young children and families during the pandemic.

Groundwork Ohio is a committed, nonpartisan advocacy organization that advances quality early learning and healthy development as the most transformative strategy to improve school outcomes, increase the life-long success of Ohio's children, and lay a strong foundation for economic prosperity in the state of Ohio.

To learn more about Groundwork Ohio visit www.GroundworkOhio.org and follow us on Twitter @GroundworkOhio and Facebook, www.facebook.com/GroundworkOhio.

FEATURE

COMMUNICATING IN TIMES OF THE CORONAVIRUS

by Andrew Johnson, Communications Coordinator

Simply put, when a crisis emerges, people need information. The COVID-19 pandemic forced counties to adjust their strategies in getting accurate and timely information to their residents.

We reached out to Eliza Wing, chief information officer for Cuyahoga County; Robin Dever, public information officer for Franklin County; Jimmy Flint, public relations coordinator for Seneca County; and Mike Boehmer, communications coordinator for Clermont County, to discuss their experience in communicating in times of a pandemic.

Could you provide an overview of your communications strategy during this crisis?

WING: Our communications strategy is constant – to keep the residents of Cuyahoga County informed about our services and help them to understand how to access those services so that, together, we can live in a strong, connected community. A crisis serves to bring this mission into even sharper focus. Everything that we have done has been about expanding our platforms and increasing the content that we deliver on them.

FLINT: We have continued to publicize pre-meeting and post-meeting press releases about the commissioners’ meetings, which now occur digitally through Zoom, but we’ve also ramped up our communications strategy to include more social media activity and more interactions with traditional media sources.

I also work closely with the Seneca County General Health District to produce videos with Seneca County Health Commissioner Beth Schweitzer. These briefings serve as a way for the health commissioner and one other community leader to speak directly to the citizens to provide a credible and factual update on COVID-19 in our community.

BOEHMER: Clermont County has had to turn to Zoom video conferencing for most internal meetings, including a daily emergency management briefing and weekly department head meeting. Elected officials also video conference into Board of

County Commissioners meetings, which are now livestreamed.

In addition, we broadened our external communication beyond website, social media and emailed newsletter to include a mailing to reach seniors and others who may not be Internet-savvy. Our messaging has been heavily informational, with more inspirational and motivational messages added as the crisis continued to unfold.

With the onslaught of disinformation from various outlets, what are you doing to ensure county residents are getting the information they need?

WING: We make sure that the content that we produce is clearly identified as being from the CDC, The Ohio State Department of Health or our own Cuyahoga County Board of Health. On our social media feeds we take care not to magnify rumors and in fact have produced fact vs myth content.

In the beginning, our focus was on pushing out updates – the news was developing so quickly. We did this through news releases but also focused on our own channels including social media and our website. We also revamped our website so that when you go to cuyahogacounty.us you see the homepage has been turned into a COVID resource center.

DEVER: I know there are some COVID-19 scams out there, but most of the bad information I’ve seen has been unintentional—repeating rumors, etc. We try to get information out as quickly as we can, but we make sure to favor accuracy over speed, and we don’t get into things we don’t have direct knowledge of.

FLINT: One of the biggest keys to combating disinformation comes from the work we’ve done over the past two years to build a strong relationship with our friends in the local media.

BOEHMER: COVID-19 content flows from our Public Health Department and Emergency Management Agency. Weekday video conferences led by the Emergency Management Agency help keep accurate information flowing.

What are the major issues you've had in putting the plan in place or in getting information out to people? What did you do to rectify the situation?

WING: The day the first case was announced in Ohio (it happened to be in our county) we stood up our Emergency Operations Center which contains a Joint Information Center. We were able to be in the mix from the very beginning. County communications staff were embedded in the EOC for the first few weeks which was very helpful. Now, for the most part we are working virtually but are working very efficiently and collaboratively.

DEVER: There's never enough time in a crisis to do everything you want to do. It's important to prioritize and not let the perfect be the enemy of the good.

FLINT: Early on during this health crisis, I was worried that people internally and externally would be fatigued by the number of messages coming from the county. This problem was partially solved by creating the Seneca County COVID-19 Situation Reports. These reports include information from many governmental and non-governmental agencies.

One other way we hope to simplify our messaging and to reduce the number of messages is to work with all offices to send one press release about what plans we have moving forward

BOEHMER: It really helped to have daily internal briefings and share timely updates on our websites. Then, we shared links via social media. We also enlisted the help of the media by sharing timely press releases

Can you talk about successes you've had with the plan? Have you seen evidence people are hearing/reading what they should be?

WING: We have significant growth in our social media feeds. One of the first things that we did was to support our local Board of Health as we have more communications personnel and resources. So we managed their feeds as well as our own and we helped them launch and produce thrice weekly media briefings which have been very helpful and popular with local media. All local media stream our feed.

DEVER: We hadn't been on the Nextdoor platform before the pandemic, but we've started there and

have gotten tremendous engagement. A lot of our residents are looking for information there, and it's been a good new channel for us to get our message out. Our channels have grown during this period and we have been getting compliments.

FLINT: I believe our video series has been a massive success. We wanted to put our health expert, Health Commissioner Beth Schweitzer, out in front to pre-empt and combat some of the bad information you might expect to see running rampant on social media. We wanted an official source who is a subject-matter expert speaking directly to our people.

What have you learned through implementing this plan?

WING: The department is critical to helping our residents understand the crisis, what they can do, how they can stay healthy and what kinds of new programs we are introducing in order to keep people safe and fiscally healthy.

What advice would you give to counties who don't have a crisis communications plan at the ready?

WING: Take the time to create one. Understand that you need redundancy of roles – so that you have cross-trained people and they can step in where necessary if one or another of your team is affected by whatever the crisis is. Make sure you already are focused on the kinds of platforms you will need in a crisis and that you have a healthy habit of managing those platforms with appropriate content. You don't want to have to stand up something entirely new in a crisis.

BOEHMER: Take what you learned in this crisis and use those lessons while creating your new plan. Don't forget to include strategies for reaching people who may not be Internet-savvy.

FLINT: Think ahead. Be thoughtful. Listen to your experts. Great policy decisions often come from knowing all options.

When in doubt, do whatever you can to be transparent and accessible. Be concise and clear with your messaging and don't oversaturate your consumers with a large number of messages. Stick to what is vital and remember to be as available as possible to reporters. Make your decision and explain why you've done it.

GUEST COLUMN

INDIGENT DEFENSE UPDATE

by Tim Young, Ohio Public Defender

As a member of the criminal justice system, the Office of the Ohio Public Defender (OPD) takes its role in helping during the COVID-19 pandemic very seriously. For specific requirements regarding the following topics please go to: [OPD COVID-19 Memo](#)

Proposed Guidelines for Appointed Counsel Rates and Maximum Fees

The Ohio Public Defender Commission met on Thursday, March 19, 2020. At the meeting, the commission discussed the pandemic and its impact on the economy and county budgets. The commission reviewed the proposed guidelines for appointed counsel rates and considered the public comments that were submitted, but at this time, in light of the pandemic, it has decided not to take any action.

Financial Disclosure Forms

To assist in trying to reduce the person-to-person contact that comes with all possible indigent defendants completing and signing a financial disclosure form, the OPD is waiving the applicant’s signature requirement at this time allowing the information to be collected via video, telephonically or at a distance.

Interim Billing

In most cases, appointed counsel submit their bill for approval and payment following disposition. During this pandemic, when many cases are delayed for significant periods of time, the OPD is encouraging justice system parties to accept periodic or interim billing prior to disposition in a case. Guidance on periodic/interim billing is provided on page 10 of the OPD Standards & Guidelines on Reimbursement.

Arraignment Billing

Where courts are staffing arraignments with one (or several) appointed counsel to serve as counsel for all indigent persons being arraigned in a given day, the OPD will accept, for purposes of reimbursement, one bill for each court proceeding – rather than the normal course of one bill for each defendant represented.

Reimbursement Submission Extension

The OPD understands that certain operations

may be impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, and indigent defense reimbursement submissions may be delayed during this time. To provide support to our county partners, the OPD will grant extensions to the reimbursement submission deadline for the months of March and April. More specifically, R.C. 120.33, requires counties to submit to the OPD all reimbursement submissions within 90 days of the end of the month in which a case was disposed. For submissions that would otherwise be due in March or April, counties may notify the OPD in writing that an extension is necessary, and one will be granted for up to 60 days.

In-Court Billing

The OPD has received numerous questions about whether time spent appearing before a court via phone or video is appropriate for in-court billing. When an attorney appears before a court via phone or video, the OPD deems that to be substantively the same as appearing in-person, and the OPD would approve it that way for reimbursement purposes.

The Future

When this is over, what happens to indigent defense? Prior to the pandemic, OPD and the CCAO had jointly started meetings with justice system partners to talk about next steps. As you know the Governor and the Legislature made an unprecedented commitment to funding indigent defense during this budget. The next steps prior to the pandemic were to lobby for a fully funded system paid by the State but a system still run at the local level. And those next steps are still the goal. We know, now more than ever, Ohio’s counties need help. And one way to help is to continue to work with Ohio’s leaders and policymakers to relieve Ohio counties of this obligation. While the pandemic may delay it, it will not derail our shared goals of providing sound constitutional services everywhere in Ohio – that are fully funded by the State.

If you have any questions, or if there are ways in which the OPD can be of assistance during this time, please feel free to reach out. Thank you, stay safe, and be well.

FEDERAL UPDATE

FEDERAL CARES ACT PROVIDES \$2 TRILLION IN ECONOMIC RELIEF

by Jon Honeck, Senior Policy Analyst

On March 27, 2020, President Trump signed the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act into law. Its provisions take effect immediately. This is the third federal legislative response to the coronavirus. Congress passed the measure at lightning speed as states across the nation began to issue “stay at home” orders to slow the spread of the coronavirus. The CARES Act’s provisions add up to roughly \$2 trillion in spending and tax cuts, roughly 40 percent of the annual federal budget in a normal year, but these are not normal times. The bill passed with almost no opposition because of a bipartisan concern that without significant federal assistance the national economy could fall into a deep recession, or even a depression.



The CARES Act provides funding for six main categories of programs:

- \$250 billion for direct payments to individuals and families;
- \$377 billion for small business loans;
- \$260 billion for unemployment insurance benefits;
- \$500 billion for loans to distressed companies;
- \$150 billion for assistance to states and local governments;
- \$150 billion for assistance to health care providers.

The \$150 billion aid package for states and local governments is known as the Coronavirus Relief Fund. The law directs the U.S. Treasury to distribute these funds within 30 days of the Act’s passage. These funds are not intended to be used for general budgetary relief from falling tax revenues. Instead, eligible expenses must meet two criteria:

- They must be incurred due to the COVID-19 emergency between 3/1/2020 and 12/30/2020;

- They were not accounted for in the most recently-enacted budget of the state or local government.

States would receive funding amounts in proportion to their population. Ohio’s estimated share is \$4.5 billion, although part of this amount will be reserved for direct payments to local governments with a population over 500,000. In Ohio, the five largest counties and the City of Columbus meet this threshold. These entities had to apply for funding by April 17, even though final guidance on eligible expenses was not available. Because their populations overlap, Franklin County will have to share its allotment with the City of Columbus. Counties that do not meet the population threshold will have to receive assistance as sub-grantees of the state.

The CARES Act also makes major temporary changes to unemployment compensation. The federal government will pay for half of the cost of the regular unemployment benefits for employees laid off by public employers due to coronavirus through the end of 2020. The federal government also will pay for the full cost of enhanced benefits, including an additional \$600/week for recipients through July 31 and an additional 13 weeks of extended benefits for recipients who exhaust their 26 weeks of regular state benefits.

Individuals who are self-employed or with a limited work history who would not normally be eligible for unemployment insurance are also temporarily eligible for benefits at federal expense.

At the time of publication, Congress was preparing a fourth legislative package that may include additional relief for small business and for local governments. There was also consideration of amending the CARES Act to allow funds to be used for general fiscal relief. CCAO is working with the National Association of Counties to achieve the greatest degree of flexibility in the use of federal funds.

COUNTY NEWS

CLERMONT COUNTY MAKES HAND SANITIZER

by Mike Boehmer, Clermont County Communications Coordinator

Faced with shortages of hand sanitizer, anti-bacterial disinfectant wipes and sprays, Clermont County went ahead and made its own products.

Director of Facilities Management Wade Grabowski and Chris Turner, facilities coordinator, tapped local sources for ingredients, looked up mixtures on the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) website, and conferred with a chemist at Clermont County Water Resources.

“It’s a well thought out operation, very effective for customers,” said Grabowski, a county employee for 30-plus years.

Turner added: “Anything that’s asked of me, I will do it.”

To make hand sanitizer, County Facilities transfers pharmaceutical grade alcohol into 3-ounce bottles. (After getting feedback that the alcohol caused dry skin, Facilities added a second “brand” with two to three parts alcohol to one part aloe vera, as recommended on the CDC website.) The alcohol comes from several local places.

In addition, Clermont County – a suburban/rural county to the east of Cincinnati – has purchased a half-dozen four-liter shipments of hand sanitizer manufactured by Fitzgerald’s Pharmacy in Williamsburg.

To produce anti-bacterial disinfectant wipes, the county purchases baby wipes at Walmart, Meijer and Sam’s (never exceeding limits followed by all customers). Turner opens 100-wipe packets, turns them upside down to drain liquid, and funnels in 91-percent alcohol.

As a replacement for sprays, the county puts pH7Q from Trinity Supply in Cincinnati into 32-ounce refillable plastic squirt bottles.

On March 18, the county began opening a storage building 9-11 a.m. weekdays for product pickup. Virtually all governmental entities – everyone from water treatment workers to social workers to bus drivers – have taken advantage of the offer to protect



Lyle Bloom (left), director of Clermont County Water Resources, getting supplies from Director of Facilities Management Wade Grabowski (right) and Chris Turner, facilities coordinator

employees and customers from COVID-19. First responders who cannot find the products elsewhere also get them, working via the Clermont County Emergency Management Agency.

Visitors keep proper distancing by waiting by orange cones at the facility’s entrance.

“We were bombarded with requests the first day,” said Grabowski, showing a sheet on a clipboard with 30-plus departments.

Besides the sanitizer and disinfectant, Facilities distributes gloves, masks, tyvek suits and (when available) Lysol spray. They also provide 5-gallon bottles of IMS III New Calgon, used to sanitize restaurants, to first responders. The county mixes two gallons of water with two ounces of the liquid for use in a fogger in bathrooms and buses.

In addition to the innovations in Facilities, Clermont County was one of the first to sign a contract with Battelle for N95 mask sanitation, and offer the service to other jurisdictions in the county. And Wayne Prescott of Fleet Maintenance designed a clear plastic face shield for bus drivers.

“I’m proud of the ingenuity exhibited by the employees in Clermont County,” said David Painter, president of the Clermont County Board of County Commissioner. “They’re really thinking outside of the box to help the county during this challenging time.”

GUEST COLUMN

BUILDING A STRONGER OHIO, TOGETHER

by Robert Sprague, Ohio Treasurer

It doesn't matter where you live or what you do, the plans we had for 2020 have, in many ways, been pushed aside as we combat and eventually recover from the COVID-19 outbreak. For local governments, the services you provide are essential and we commend you for supporting Ohioans during this challenging time.



It goes without saying that the financial markets have been volatile while the economy reacts to the changes we've had to make to our daily lives. We're continuing to monitor this as it relates to STAR Ohio and other programs.

During a crisis like the COVID-19 outbreak, the \$3.8 trillion municipal bond market is particularly important as state and local governments seek to provide critical support for the infrastructure needed to care for Ohioans. In March, as Congress worked on COVID-19 relief legislation, I wrote to the Ohio delegation urging them to provide emergency support to the municipal bond markets. We were happy to see the final legislation provided the Federal Reserve the authority to invest in the municipal bond market.

While we continue to monitor the full impact of the federal legislation, I would encourage you to look at the Ohio Market Access Program (OMAP) offered by our office. OMAP is a credit enhancement program that leverages the state's excess liquidity and high short-term credit rating to help improve market access and lower borrowing rates for local governments. At a time when local governments are searching for alternative financing tools to support critical projects, OMAP is a proven and reliable tool that can help.

Since its 2014 launch, OMAP has supported more than 150 deals, ranging from \$390,000 to over \$100 million. There have been no defaults, and to date, OMAP has generated more than \$2.8 million

in savings for local governments. Any government subdivision in good fiscal standing, including cities, villages, school districts, counties, townships, and special districts, issuing short-term debt is eligible to participate.

Please visit our website at www.omap.ohio.gov for more information. You also can email our staff directly at OMAP@tos.ohio.gov.

As leaders in our communities, you're keenly aware of the impact COVID-19 is having on our business community. To that end, our office is committed to supporting businesses as they work through this difficult time. First and foremost, we would encourage all business owners to look into the Disaster Assistance program offered by the U.S. Small Business Administration. More information can be found at <http://sba.gov/disaster>.

The Treasury also facilitates loan interest rate reductions through four linked deposit programs – GrowNOW, ReEnergize Ohio, ECO-Link, and Ag-LINK. These programs make borrowing more affordable, improving financial stability and allowing businesses to retain workers, hire new employees, pay for renovations and equipment, and increase productivity. Our linked deposit programs serve business owners, farmers, and homeowners throughout Ohio.

Further details on these economic development programs can be found on the website at http://ohiotreasurer.gov/Economic_Development. I would encourage you to share this information with the businesses in your communities.

Again, I commend Ohio's local leaders, first responders, and health care workers for all you're doing to get us through this difficult time. The Treasurer's office will continue to seek out solutions to assist our communities in financing the tools needed to fight the COVID-19 pandemic and begin our recovery. We're all in this together, and Ohio is strong. Thank you for all you're doing for your communities, your families, and your state.

VOICE OF COUNTY LEADERSHIP
JANET WEIR CREIGHTON
STARK COUNTY COMMISSIONER



CCAO created The Voice of County Leadership series to help members tell their stories and hear the issues that matter to them. We opted to discuss Stark County’s response to COVID-19 difficulties.

Can you tell us a little bit about yourself?

Since 2010, I have been elected to the board of Stark County Commissioners. I bring 35 years of elected experience where I have cultivated a diverse background in government and public affairs.

My journey began in Canton/Stark County, Ohio where I served as county recorder, county auditor, and as the first woman elected mayor of the city of Canton. My path of service took me to Washington, DC where I served as deputy assistant to President George W. Bush, and as director of Intergovernmental Affairs.

Currently, I am vice president of the board of Arts in Stark; a member of the Exchange Club of Canton-Stark County; president of Stark Housing Network; a member of the County Commissioners Association of Ohio; and vice president of the Mariners Island Condo Association. In 2000, I served as General Chairperson of the Pro Football HOF Festival. My volunteer service to the Pro Football Hall of Fame, altogether, covered 35 years.

I’m a founding member of Women’s Impact and was named the 1st Athena Award winner in Stark County. Women’s Impact brings established women leaders together with emerging women for mentoring.

What effect has the COVID-19 pandemic had on county operations?

In being consistent and supportive of the orders issued by the Governor DeWine and Director Acton, in Stark County, some county offices and elected officials have severely restricted or eliminated in person interaction with the public and are conducting the business of their offices over the phone, via email or through limited by appointment access to their offices. Some offices have created staggered reporting times and are also limiting those utilizing county vehicles to only a single employee in the vehicle.

Our courts have limited some court activities as well as expanded the use of technology in holding more hearings, etc. over audio or video conferencing.

The county office building remains open, but public traffic has been severely reduced, due to the changes in operations by the Courts and other offices.

The commissioner’s office, along with other offices have a significant number of employees working from home, as well as scheduling those employees who are still working on-site, in teams, working alternating schedules to try and limit exposure and increase social distancing in the work place.

Was there a crisis plan to put into place?

Most county departments had Continuity of Operations Plans (COOPS) in case of a physical disaster, but not a crisis plan for a pandemic situation. Some parts of the commissioner’s COOP were used as a starting point to make the needed adjustments to the operations of our office.

How are you and your fellow commissioners managing meetings?

In consideration of public distancing, most constituent meetings and other outside meetings are being handled over the phone. Since the state legislature made the changes necessary to the Ohio Revised Code, to allow public bodies to

conduct meetings electronically, the weekly Board Meetings of the Commissioners have been held via teleconference. In accordance with the ORC requirements, these meetings are announced and published. In addition, a public access line is available for the public to listen to the meeting. While utilizing the audio conference meetings, the normal Public Speaks portion of the meeting is not available in its previous form. However, written “public speaks” comments may be submitted to the Board via a dedicated email address and they will be made part of the public record of the meeting.

Regarding budget cuts, what factors led you to your decision to make those cuts?

Upon a review of county revenues conducted by our county director of Management & Budget, it was determined that more than 60% of the county’s 2020 Revenues (primarily sales tax, conveyance fees, interest income, Ohio local government fund, casino tax, etc.) stood to be severely impacted by the current pandemic.

Though it was still too early to calculate the actual extent and duration of the impact on county revenues, the board of commissioners felt it would be a prudent financial strategy for the board to take the initial step of reducing our current budget appropriation (by about 2.3%) and also some additional actions to minimize ongoing 2020 budget expenses. Some of those other actions included suspending consideration of our 2020 capital budget, hiring and wage freezes (except when required by a union contract) and requesting the cooperation of elected officials and department heads in minimizing any discretionary spending. It was felt by the board that the sooner we acted may lessen the severity of any additional potential future budget adjustments.

It is widely acknowledged the virus will cause a significant drop in Sales Tax dollars. What additional changes are you considering making to adjust for the loss of revenue?

Subsequent to the board’s previously mentioned 2020 budget actions, our county budget commission has recently reduced the 2020 Certificate of Resources for our sales tax by \$7 million, a 23% drop in 2020 Sales Tax Revenue or almost 10% of our total 2020 Operational Budget Revenue. With

the combination of the previously mentioned 2020 budget adjustments, along with prudent financial management over the past years, Stark County has a sufficient unencumbered carryover balance to allow us to “weather the storm” for a few months, without any additional budget changes.

Over the next 45-60 days, we will get a better feel for three important questions; 1) how significant will the impact on our budget revenues actually be? 2) how long with the current conditions continue? 3) how quickly or slowly will revenues begin to recover? We will take this time to develop multiple contingency plans for our budget, depending on where we see things going at that time. In an unprecedented event like this, all options must be on the table and under consideration.

With the amount of disinformation and misinformation in the public, what are you doing to ensure county residents have accurate information to stay safe?

The commissioners provide weekly updates regarding the county on a local radio station. In addition, the commissioners are regularly invited to partake in various roundtable chats and community meetings, most of which are now held via teleconference. In addition, our local newspaper has been very diligent through both its news coverage and website in keeping Stark County residents up to date on the impacts and changes on County operations.

In addition, the home page of the county’s website now has a banner and link for COVID-19 Information. This link directs residents to a variety of properly vetted local, state and federal sources of information.

Anything to add?

I would like to say a special “thanks” to the first responders, doctors, nurses, and all of the employees that support the front-line medical efforts. And of course, thank you to the County family of employees that pulled together to keep the engine of local government running.

Together, we will get through this stronger and wiser. Use common sense, be calm and be cautious.

GUEST COLUMN

HOW COVID-19 AFFECTS THE SOLID WASTE INDUSTRY

by Steven Tharp, Jr., President, Solid Waste Districts of Ohio, Operations Coordinator, Stark-Tuscarawas-Wayne Recycling District

COVID-19, a virus which has gripped our nation and globe, has been designated a global pandemic. How we operate, how we live and how we move all changed in the matter of an instant. Before COVID-19, the Solid Waste Industry was the 5th most dangerous profession in the US. Add a global pandemic into the mix with transmission of this virus, and you have a recipe for a potential unsafe work environment.

Prior to COVID-19, recycling markets had their challenges. Recycling commodities were low, and everyone was feeling the pinch. Solid Waste Districts, who collect and manage recyclable materials across the State of Ohio have been particularly affected. Higher collection costs and a devalued market are just the tip of the recycling pile.

Thankfully, the solid waste industry has responded in this time of crisis and is leading the charge. As a “critical infrastructure,” a designation given to us by the State of Ohio “stay at home” order and the federal government, organizations like the Ohio EPA and the Solid Waste Districts of Ohio have worked together to share best practices, policies and ways of operation in this global fight against what President Trump has called “the invisible enemy.” Solid Waste Districts have reached out via social media to educate the public on COVID-19 and recycling. Solid Waste Districts across Ohio have encouraged social distancing and other precautionary measures.

In the Stark-Tuscarawas-Wayne Recycling District, we have changed everything about our operation to ensure that the public, our drivers and administrative staff are safe. We have suspended our residential household hazardous waste program until further notice. In other districts, like Cuyahoga County, bulk item collection has been suspended for some residents and are encouraged to place all recyclables in their appropriate containers. Excess items can be placed out the following week. A service like bulk item collection is something we can easily take for granted. In times like this, we appreciate it even

more. In Hamilton County, yard waste sites are being closed and grass clippings are being encouraged to be composted for soil amendment. In Medina County, residents must have a minimum of 3-bags for the disposal of municipal solid waste, yard waste, and source separated recyclables.

As we continue to adapt and make changes to better serve the public, we ask for your patience. We have learned that we are all connected and in this together. Our mission is providing our constituents with an easy, safe and responsible way to divert recyclables from the landfill. Our mission is to encourage our constituents to operate within the guidelines set out by the governor and Ohio Department of Health in this time of challenge.

As we work through this, I encourage you to support your solid waste districts as they serve your residents.

Thank you to all the boards of county commissioners and policy committees that help us each day to better serve the recycling communities of Ohio. Together we can make a difference.



GUEST COLUMN

STEPPING UP: PROGRESS BUT NEW CHALLENGES WITH THE CORONAVIRUS

by Evelyn Lundberg Stratton, Retired Justice and Project Director for Stepping Up

It has now been five years since Stepping Up went statewide. Stepping Up is the national program that focuses on jails and persons with mental illness in an attempt to change the system from jails being the de facto mental health hospital. In Ohio, we tackled it both at the state and local level. The Stepping Up team has visited 48 member counties and is now working on second visits, and the Steering Committee has grown to 45 members (see Steering Committee list.)

Stepping up has long coordinated its projects with the 10 Committees of the Attorney General Task Force on Criminal Justice and Mental Illness which then Attorney General DeWine and I co-chaired. That Task Force, now with 450 members, still continues its work under Attorney General Yost with 11 active committees. (See Task Force [flier](#) that shows how to join.) In addition, I serve on the Governor DeWine's Recovery Ohio Council, which has made 75 recommendations for reforming the mental health and addiction system in Ohio. (See <https://recoveryohio.gov/wps/portal/gov/recovery/resources/all-resources/initial-report>)

All of these groups collaborate together to be sure we are helping each other and are not duplicating our efforts. Ohio leads the nation in our ability to work together despite being state or local, or of different political parties, as these issues know no boundaries. But counties are the front line of defense and Stepping Up is county focused. When we visit, we share resources, but we also listen to your concerns and take them back to the state level Steering Committee. Our biweekly newsletter brings you prompt notice of state, federal and foundation grants, free webinars and trainings and other resources.

Even if your county has not yet joined, you have benefited from these efforts. For example, because of our joint work:

- Counties jails are now suspending rather than terminating Medicaid so that those released can immediately be restored to their benefits.



■ Stepping Up Registered County

- The state allocated \$5 million in the previous biennium budget and \$5 million during the current budget cycle to reimburse counties for psychotropic drugs used in jails. For the current budget cycle reimbursement is permitted for the Medicaid formulary and long term injectables.
- The Steering Committee agreed on universal definitions of mental illness and recidivism, an important step for collecting data uniformly. (See, <https://mha.ohio.gov/Schools-and-Communities/Criminal-Justice/Stepping-Up>)
- Collective efforts led to the passage of a Universal Release form for medical information that all entities must now accept instead of requiring their own multiple versions.

These are just some of the many benefits all counties now have. If you have not joined, please consider doing so and you will receive a visit from the Stepping Up team over a lunch we will pay for. The team will present the many ways we can assist

your county in reversing the mental health revolving door to your jail and we work to make stronger connections within your county. (See [Stepping Up and Taking Action](#)).

The coronavirus crisis has created even greater challenges, so our work continues in full force. But there are also opportunities that will arise from the ashes. Telemedicine, a 15-year quest of mine, is now receiving much greater use and acceptance.

Low level offenders and pretrial detainees are being released in record numbers. While that presents immediate challenges because of a lack of resources to assist them, in the long run we hope it creates a culture of acceptance and understanding among judges that release to the community reduces

costs and improves the chance for successful rehabilitation.

Major changes, both state and federal, in Medicaid, health regulations and treatment and access requirements mean that more services will now be accessible and covered. We want to take advantage of any of these changes to bring permanent reform to our efforts to treat those with mental illness compassionately in the community and free our jails of being their de facto mental hospital without resources to do so.

If you want to join or are interested in a second visit, please contact Melissa Knopp, project manager, at knoppm@steppingupohio.com. We value your partnership in this effort that is making a difference.

THE

STEPPINGUP

INITIATIVE



THE OHIO PROJECT

STEERING COMMITTEE

Core Working Team

Evelyn Lundberg Stratton, JD.....Project Director, Stepping Up Ohio
 Thom Craig, MPA.....Director, Mental Health Program, Peg's Foundation
 Melissa Knopp, JD.....Project Manager, Stepping Up Ohio
 Lois Hochstetler, MSW, LISW-S.....Assistant Director of Community Treatment Services, Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services
 Kathy Yokum, OCPC, LPCC-S.....Criminal Justice Administrator, Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services
 Ruth Simera, MD, LSW.....Executive Director, Coordinating Centers of Excellence, Department of Psychiatry, Northeast Ohio Medical University
 Sally Luken, MA.....President, Luken Solutions

State Partners

Andy Wilson, JD.....Senior Advisor on Criminal Justice Policy, Office of Governor Mike DeWine
 Alisha Nelson, MBA.....Director, RecoveryOhio
 Dave Yost, JD.....Ohio Attorney General
 Michael Sheline.....Section Chief, Crime Victims Office of Ohio Attorney General
 Kari B. Hertel, JD.....Business Counsel, Office of Ohio Attorney General
 Theresa Gavarone, JD.....Senate, District 2
 Phil Plummer.....House, District 40
 Tom Stickrath, JD.....Director, Ohio Department of Public Safety
 Paul Pfeifer, JD.....Executive Director, Ohio Judicial Conference; Ohio Supreme Court Justice, Retired
 Lori Criss, MSW.....Director, Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services
 Chris Nicastro, LPCC-S.....Chief, Bureau of Criminal Justice, Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services
 Annette Chambers-Smith.....Director, Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction
 Stuart Hudson.....Assistant Director, Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction
 Amy Acton, MD, MPH.....Director, Ohio Department of Health
 Mark Hurst, MD.....Medical Director, Ohio Department of Health
 Maureen Corcoran.....Director, Ohio Department of Medicaid
 Kara Miller.....Chief, Care Management and Quality Improvement Section, Ohio Department of Medicaid
 Debbie Ashenhurst.....Director, Ohio Department of Veterans Services
 Daniel Eakins.....Employment, Education and Policy Administrator, Ohio Department of Veterans Services
 Lisa Shaaf, PhD.....Director of Policy and Research, Office of Criminal Justice Services
 Sean Thomas.....Executive Director, Ohio Housing Finance Agency
 Tim Young, JD.....Ohio Public Defender, Office of the Ohio Public Defender
 Elizabeth Miller, JD.....Assistant Director, Office of the Ohio Public Defender

Association Partners

Cheryl Subler.....Executive Director, County Commissioners Association of Ohio
 Robert Cornwell.....Executive Director, Buckeye State Sheriffs' Association
 Stephen Levorchick.....Sheriff, Ottawa County, Buckeye State Sheriffs' Association
 Chief Jeffrey Mitchell, MPA.....Ohio Association of Chiefs of Police

GUEST COLUMN

PREPARED FOR THE PANDEMIC

by The Ohio Auditor of State's Public Affairs Team

We all make decisions in our daily lives that help ensure we are prepared in case of an emergency. These preparations are often just common sense. We have insurance, we have flashlight batteries or a generator in case we lose power in a storm, and we practice fire drills at home and in our schools. We prepare so when the time for action arrives, we're ready to respond. If there's anything this global pandemic has taught us, it's that it pays to be prepared.

Fortunately, for the Auditor of State's office, we were prepared. When the COVID-19 pandemic caused Gov. Mike DeWine to issue a stay-at-home order, it sent Ohio's government agencies into unknown territory. We had to find a way to continue providing services to Ohioans while also prioritizing the health and safety of our employees. Many agencies had to build out infrastructure quickly to accommodate a remote workforce, requiring state employees to remain in the office while they did so.

Our office was prepared to transfer staff to a remote work status quickly. We already had a well-developed Remote Work Location (RWL) policy in place before the virus hit. With this structure in place, our team was ready to react to the orders by the state, and the transition among our 800 employees was fairly seamless.

"We provide an important service to Ohio taxpayers," Auditor of State Keith Faber said. "It was important to me that, as much as possible, we continue with business as usual while still keeping our staff safe."

Auditors have been able to work remotely for years. Before the advancement of technology, the auditing process was very paper intensive. Now, auditors have access to client financial records while working off-site in many instances. With improved technology, our office was able to evolve to doing most work online. Eventually the office implemented a work from home policy in 2011. A performance audit of the Auditor's office recommended the policy as a way to improve moral and staff retention. An added benefit was the savings related to a decrease in mileage reimbursement. In 2011, staff traveled a

total of 3,467,104 miles. By 2019, the RWL policy had helped reduce that number to 2,661,086 miles, resulting in a savings of roughly \$419,000 tax payer dollars a year. RWL has been a part of the Auditor of State's office culture for years and that is why our staff were particularly prepared for this crisis.

"From the perspective of our staff being able to perform their job from home, I like to say 'that's Tuesday around here,'" Director of Information Technology David Potts said. "Our staff has been doing it (RWL) for a long time and they have the tools to perform their job from anywhere."

Many people have speculated that, because of the national quarantine, many levels of government will be forced to implement work from home policies as we look toward the future. The virus has already forced agencies to create RWL infrastructure and many will now likely embrace the idea of remote work locations. Managers and executives are often concerned that productivity will suffer when staff work from home. Over the years, the Auditor's office has found that if managers put proper productivity measurements in place, RWL does not negatively affect productivity. In our office, staff are expected to hit certain markers of performance to keep them on track. Counties or other local governments who have been encouraged to work remotely should consider implementing measurements of productivity to ensure the continued high level of service to Ohioans. But ultimately, work from home policies force organizations to change the way they manage their people. It requires management to build a different type of relationship with employees, one that includes trusting that the employee will make the office's work their top priority, no matter where they spend their workday.

"One aspect that has made the RWL policy and work approach so successful is the quality of the managers and staff that work for the Auditor of State. We're blessed with dedicated people that are professionals in the manner in which they do their job. We have also implemented monitoring controls to ensure that the taxpayers of Ohio are getting

what they are paying for from our office. We have real-time monitoring through an instant messaging system, required communication daily by managers with staff, budgeted hours on every client project we complete, and bi-weekly payroll reporting and approval of RWL time,” Chief Deputy Auditor Bob Hinkle said.

As time has gone on, it has become clear that this pandemic will change many of the ways we conduct business. Sometimes it takes a crisis to motivate

us to make some long overdue improvements. Many of us have taken this time to make personal improvements, such as getting in better shape, reading more, or spending more time with our families. Just like our personal lives, this virus may help our governments make some much needed improvements too. Implementing RWL policies is just one way we can make sure some good comes out of this crisis. That way, the next time something as unprecedented as a global pandemic happens again – we’re prepared.

CEBCO NEWS

CEBCO UPDATE

Mike Kindell, Managing Director of Health and Wellness

We hope that your county or organization, employees and families continue to stay safe and healthy during this pandemic.



CEBCO has received multiple questions regarding benefit coverage and eligibility, as counties consider the options that are available to them regarding budget and personnel issues. As previously announced, CEBCO will cover all testing and related services, as well as, treatment for COVID-19 with no member cost share. Diagnosis codes that identify these claims were recently updated, so there may be initial claims that did not process correctly. If there are any questions, please contact our medical carrier, Anthem Blue Cross and Blue Shield.

For all of CEBCO’s county health plans, PPO and HSA, all Anthem LiveHealth Online virtual medical and behavioral health visits will be covered with no member cost share for dates of service from March 17, 2020 through June 14, 2020. This no member cost share coverage also includes all telephonic-only visits with Anthem in-network providers for medical and mental health benefits.

Due to Ohio’s Stay-at Home Order, CEBCO’s eligibility requirements for county employees will be modified, through June 30, 2020. CEBCO will allow our member counties to continue health coverage for eligible employees even if the number of hours worked per week falls below full-time status. This would also

include employees no longer actively at work. The health coverage must be offered on a uniform, non-discriminatory basis to all eligible employees. The employee monthly premium contribution cannot be increased above their normal monthly contribution.

While continuing to provide support to our members, Sr. Benefit Specialist Wendy Dillingham has found time to sew masks that can be used during the social distancing phase of the pandemic. Benefit Specialist Justin Grant is working on his pre-licensing exams and sewing masks, as well.

Richland County informed the CEBCO Wellness Team about [SuperBetter](#), a science based mental health app which brings the psychological strengths and mindset of gameplay to real life. It has been validated in randomized controlled and clinical trials to build resilience and improve mental health. The exercises and tasks take very little time and we encourage anyone to join.

In June, 2018, CEBCO introduced our Diabetic Prevention Program (DPP), through Anthem and supported by Solera. Through March of this year, 863 CEBCO members have enrolled in the program and 187 have completed the program by achieving at least a 5% weight loss. The program is designed to reduce the risk for development of type 2 diabetes.

Finally, I would like to recognize Melissa Bodey, senior benefit specialist, who is celebrating 15 years with CEBCO. Thank you for your dedication to the association and working to help build stronger counties for a stronger Ohio.

CORSA NEWS

KEEPING OUR MEMBERS STRONG...TOGETHER

by Ali Redmond, CORSA Member Services Manager

CORSA understands that our members are concerned about the risks associated with, and impact of, COVID-2019. As developments regarding COVID-19's effect unfold, Elected officials are facing unprecedented challenges as it relates to county governments day-to-day operations, employee safety and health, and insurance programs. CORSA is centered around risk management strategies. We are with our members every step of the way, offering recommendations for continuing business operations, safeguarding employees and necessary actions to reduce legal exposure.



We have seen an increase usage in two of our services during this unprecedented time – CORSA U and the HR Helpline.

CORSA University (Employee and Supervisor Training)

CORSA provides our members with state-of-the-art Risk Management, Human Resources and Loss Prevention training at no cost to our members. Available 24/7, from any Internet connected computer with speakers, CORSA University empowers you to centralize your training administration and reporting from any browser, at any location. This value-added service has become very popular as a resource for employees to take courses while working from home during this pandemic. CORSA's goal is to provide innovative risk management/loss prevention solutions for our members' training needs. This includes courses pertaining to COVID-19, which have been added to the CORSA U curriculum.

HR Helpline

The HR Helpline is an instrumental risk management resource available to assist members with their human resource needs prior to a claim being submitted. The HR Helpline is staffed by attorneys from the law offices of Mazanec, Raskin & Ryder and Isaac Wiles. Questions are rising concerning layoffs,

furloughs and FMLA during the COVID-19 pandemic, which could impact the county financially if not handled appropriately. The HR Helpline should in no way be considered as a replacement for the services that are provided by the county prosecutor, but as an additional resource for our members.

“The CORSA HR Helpline is my most valuable resource as a HR professional. I greatly appreciate the access and quick response from Jeff Stankunas at Isaac Wiles whenever I have had the need to seek advice/guidance related to a HR topic. Jeff is always willing to take the time to thoroughly discuss the topic at hand and provides the guidance needed to deal with situations as they arise.”

Pam Davis, Human Resources Generalist – Muskingum County

As we continue to navigate these uncharted waters and see how the effects of COVID-19 are going to play into the future, please remember, CCAO/CORSA/CEBCO will be here to support our members with up-to-date resources and services.

“CORSA has been our touch stone during the pandemic. Your support, both professionally and personally has not wavered once while we navigate this unprecedented time. Whether working from home or at the office, the CORSA staff have been in constant contact with us, helping us in every way possible. The guidance and encouragement you provide as well as the real time information has been invaluable. The teamwork between CORSA and CCAO through John Brownlee and Cheryl Subler's leadership has provided Ohio counties a seamless support system of which the value of cannot be measured. And I for one, am most appreciative.”
Cathy Jones, Risk Manager – Mahoning County

Please refer to the CORSA website www.corsa.org for contact information and services.

Lastly, I would like to recognize CORSA's Ken Hilty for 10 years of service with the association. Our staff and members are very thankful for your expertise and dedication to CORSA.

CCAO SERVICE CORP NEWS

CCAO SERVICE CORP, COVID-19 AND THE NEW NORMAL

by John Leutz, CCAO Legislative Counsel

Our CCAO Energy Program has saved our participants more than \$75 million in energy costs over the last 10 years.



We are continuing to focus on our CCAO Solar program that will provide solar power generated in Ohio to those who participate. Even though the COVID-19 pandemic has delayed our progress by six to eight weeks, it is still full steam, or should I say sun, ahead. With some extra effort, the original program target date of June 2022 should be achievable.

The program continues to show extraordinary benefits to participant counties by laying in a portion of their electricity pricing for the long term. Multiple counties have been purchasing Renewable Energy Credits (REC's) for many years and this is a way to participate in a long-term hedge, while also purchasing renewable energy that is produced right here in the State of Ohio.

Over the next couple of weeks, Palmer Energy will be contacting our counties to set up meetings to finalize county participation in the program. While we recognize that counties will be adjusting to the new normal, we need to make this solar project a priority to lock in what is already an excellent opportunity, and with the current energy market conditions may become an even better opportunity, for our counties and their government electric aggregation program constituents. If your county is ready to discuss the program now, please contact me at jleutz@ccao.org or Kirk Mizerek of Palmer Energy at 419-349-5990.

CCAO's Deferred Compensation Plan is a great supplement to your PERS retirement. Our deferred compensation program is clearly the best alternative available to your county employees.

The plan has over 2300 county employee members and is managing over \$740 million in assets for them. Our plan is dedicated to county employees,

and we have local representatives available to consult with our members at any time about any of their questions at no additional cost. We also offer loans and Roth funds at the county which provide opportunities not necessarily available through other deferred compensation plans.

A big plus is that we offer professional money management at a lower cost than most plans. Our retirement plan advisors are registered investment adviser representatives and can act in a fiduciary capacity providing specific recommendations to participants on investment allocations, distribution options, and savings rates. This sets our plan apart from other providers who may use financial advisors or agents of their firm to sell other products that otherwise have not been vetted by the plan fiduciary or are not in the best interest of their participants.

Your retirement plan advisors are available for phone or online virtual appointments. If you aren't sure who your representative is, view the map on your CCAO Deferred Compensation Plan [website](#) and reach out to them using the contact information provided.

CCAO continues to sponsor two workers' compensation programs with the goal of improving workplace safety and saving counties money. To date, the Group Rating Program has saved member counties more than \$38.8 million in workers' comp premiums. 12 counties participate in the Group Rating Program for 2020.

The newer Group Retro Program is also performing well, with 53 counties participating for 2020. Group Retro's performance-based rebates have returned over \$15 million in premium to participating counties with an additional \$15 million projected through the final evaluation of the current groups. Counties also gain the benefits of safety training, quarterly webinars, and program support as part of their Group Retro membership.

Counties interested in joining one of CCAO's workers comp group programs can contact [Beth Miller](#) or our partners at Comp Management.

COUNSELOR'S CORNER

COVID-19: WHAT'S NEXT?

Marc A. Fishel, Partner, at Fishel Downey Albrecht & Riepenhoff LLP

Counties have made major adjustments in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and the new, but hopefully temporary, realities in the workplace.



As Ohio moves towards easing the stay at home order and other pandemic related restrictions, counties must think about how they can get their workforce back to normal, or at least the “new normal.” Of course, changes are not going to occur at once. Getting back will take time and counties would be wise to have a plan that can address these changes and adjust accordingly, understanding there will need to be flexibility depending on the circumstances. This article contains some areas to consider as we move forward to a return of all employees in the workplace.

The primary concern as employees return to the workplace will be their safety. As always, it is incumbent on the employer to establish the safest workplace under the circumstances. Of course, this standard does not mean an employer can ever be expected to provide a workplace safe from all hazards. The question counties must answer is what types of protections are reasonable under the circumstances. Although not legally binding, counties should consult OSHA’s guidance on these issues which can be found at <https://www.osha.gov/Publications/OSHA3990.pdf>.

First, at this point, employers still have the right to check employees’ temperatures before starting work. EEOC guidance concerning this issue has not changed. This process needs to be done in a manner that protects employee privacy and recognizes social distancing best practices. For added protection, employers can require employees to wash their hands as they enter the workplace.

Second, although the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) limits the types of health related inquiries

an employer can ask, under the current pandemic, employers can ask employees if they have certain symptoms that are associated with COVID-19. These inquiries should be limited to questions that will allow the employer to assess whether an employee should not be working and cannot go beyond these limited inquiries.

Third, employers can require employees to wear masks and gloves in the workplace. This is not a mandatory requirement but is within the employer’s discretion. If these practices are implemented, an employer needs to be flexible and allow exceptions for employees who cannot wear a mask or gloves due to a medical condition unrelated to COVID-19. If employees wear this protective equipment, employers should educate them on best practices for these items.

Fourth, certain practices that were acceptable in the past should be discouraged if not prohibited. For example, employers can prohibit employees from bringing food to work to share with others. Similarly, employers can close or limit access to break areas or other places employees may congregate.

Another way to help minimize exposure is to require employees to complete a questionnaire to determine if additional precautions need to be taken. Examples of questions include:

1. In the past 14 days, have you, or anyone you live with, come in contact with someone who has been diagnosed with COVID-19 or is suspected to have COVID-19?
2. In the past 14 days, have you, or anyone you live with, left the State of Ohio?
3. Are you or anyone in your household showing any flu-like symptoms in the past 72 hours? (Fever, coughing, shortness of breath, sore throat)

After completing this form, if there is a circumstance that causes any of your answers to questions 1 - 3 to change from “no” to “yes,” you must stay home and notify your supervisor as soon as possible.

We ask for your full support with this updated guidance. We all have a shared responsibility to minimize the risk of exposure and protect our individual and collective health.

Of course, employers can follow-up with employees who answer yes to any of these questions. All information provided by employees in response to these questions should be kept confidential. Another consideration for counties is how to handle employee leave issues. For example, appointing authorities need to decide if there are some vacation requests that need to be denied or revoked, either for operational reasons or concerns of where an employee may be going on vacation. Normally, what an employee does while on vacation is of no concern to the employer but under the pandemic, employers are entitled to know where an employee will be going on vacation so proper precautions can be taken upon the employee's return to work.

Counties should also review their policies on carryover of vacation leave. Under O.R.C. section 325.19(C) vacation leave must be taken by the employee during the year in which it accrued and prior to the next recurrence of the anniversary date of the employee's employment, provided that the appointing authority may, in special and meritorious cases, permit such employee to accumulate and carry over the employee's vacation leave to the following year. Under the statute, no vacation leave can be carried over for more than three years. Similar language appears in many collective bargaining agreements as well. Normally, any leave in excess of three years' accrual is forfeited. Appointing authorities should consider how they will treat employees who have reached their maximum vacation accrual. The leave can be paid out, employees can be given extended time to use the vacation leave or it can be forfeited as it is under current law.

Compensatory time may present similar issues. While there is no legal requirement to pay out compensatory time except upon separation, many employers and collective bargaining agreements have provisions requiring unused compensatory time to be paid on a fixed schedule. Employers should consider whether the period for using compensatory time should be extended.



Counties need to be prepared to address employees who may be unwilling to work due to continued concerns relating to COVID-19. Generally, these employees likely will fall in one of three categories; Those with an underlying health condition making them more susceptible to COVID-19, those over 65 years old who are more susceptible to COVID-19 and those who do not want to work due to a general concern about contracting COVID-19.

With regard to the first category, an appointing authority can require an employee to provide medical documentation supporting their request to be excused from work. These employees should be permitted to use accrued sick leave and vacation leave with the time counting towards FMLA leave.

At this point, employees in the second category should also be allowed to use accrued sick and vacation leave. It is unclear whether this leave will qualify as FMLA leave because the absence from work is based on age and not a serious health condition.

In cases where an employee is requesting not to work due to an underlying health issue or age, employers should consider assigning telework if appropriate. Also, counties cannot prohibit an employee from working simply because they have an underlying health condition or are a certain age. These decisions initially should be up to the employee.

Employers are not required to allow employees to stay home simply based on a general concern about

being in the workplace during the pandemic. In these situations, employers can permit these employees to use vacation leave but are not required to do so. Employers have the right to treat the employee as absent without approved leave and take appropriate disciplinary action. These situations should be considered on a case by case basis in consultation with legal counsel.

Counties should consider whether alternative work schedules could be helpful, at least in the short term. For example, employees can be in the office for part of their work week and telework for the rest of the week. This approach can minimize employee contact with each other and members of the public. Staggered work schedules and work hours could also make sense for some employers.

Even as government opens back up, many county appointing authorities may choose to continue or modify teleworking. The pandemic has provided opportunities to see how viable teleworking is. It is likely, however, that many employers who are offering telework have been somewhat lenient with how employees have been working due to the unusual pandemic related circumstances and the stay at home order. As the economy opens back up, employers should pay closer attention to what is and is not working with respect to teleworking and adjust accordingly.

When feasible, employers with unions should begin a dialogue with bargaining unit representatives on the myriad issues that have occurred and those that are likely to arise.

For example, it makes sense to share economic information with union leadership so there are no surprises if layoffs and other cuts need to be implemented. Employers should explore with unions whether there are alternatives or additional cost-savings measures that can be implemented.

It is likely many other issues will develop as we return to a more traditional workplace. Employers need to be transparent with their employees and maintain the necessary flexibility to see what works and other changes that may be needed. As always, counties should be consulting with legal counsel and HR professionals as options are reviewed and decisions made.

Fishel Downey Albrecht & Riepenhoff LLP (FDAR) is a mid-sized Columbus, Ohio, based law firm with a statewide practice. FDAR's purpose is to provide high-quality, affordable legal services. Our focus is meeting our clients' needs with respect to litigation, employment and labor, government liability, business disputes and contracts. Our continuous growth is reflected in our ability to remain on the cutting edge of our areas of practice.

Marc A. Fishel is a Partner with Fishel Downey Albrecht & Riepenhoff LLP. He received his J.D. from Ohio State University and a Bachelor of Arts degree in political science from Cleveland State University. Marc regularly represents public employers throughout the State of Ohio in all matters relating to labor relations.

Marc has extensive experience in areas of representation including collective bargaining matters, disciplinary matters (arbitration and civil service), contract negotiations, mediation, and conflict resolution procedures. He also represents employers in state and federal courts in employment related litigation. Marc is a former member of the Board of Directors of the Ohio Public Employers Labor Relations Association and has served as an adjunct professor of employment law at Wittenberg University.

Marc also represents private companies and public jurisdictions in other matters including regulatory compliance, contract matters and day-to-day operations issues.

Marc is a frequent speaker and lecturer on numerous issues relating to employment law and served as the editor of "Employment in Ohio – A guide to employment laws, regulation and practices," published by Matthew Bender. He has been named to the U.S. News listing of Best Lawyers® 2011-2020 and to the Super Lawyers® listing 2011-2020, recognized for his outstanding work in the areas of Labor and Employment Law and Litigation.

Marc serves as the City of Bexley Law Director representing the city in various aspects of municipal law. Marc is also a member of the Supreme Court's Commission on Dispute Resolution.

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