SPBR CONFERENCE

September 1, 2026

2026 SPBR Conference

Table of Contents

AGENDA

8:55 AM – 9:15 AM — Welcome and Opening Remarks:
A Quick Discussion about SPBR and How It Really Works!

Terry L. Casey
Chairman, State Personnel Board of Review, State of Ohio

9:15 AM – 10:45 AM — Citizen & Work-Centered AI:
Designing and Using Artificial Intelligence with and for the Public

Vanitha Zacharias
Head of Technology Governance and Chief Artificial Intelligence Strategist, Office of Information Technology, Department of Administrative Services, State of Ohio

Rachel M. Reight, Esq.
Partner, Baasten, McKinley & Co.; Labor & Employment Attorney and OSBF Fellow (Class of 2025)

Richard A. Bales, Esq.
Professor/Arbitrator, Former Dean, Ohio Northern University Law School

Justin Brown, MBA, PMP, CSM
Research Administrator, SERB, State of Ohio (Moderator)

10:45 AM – 11:00 AM — Break

11:00 AM – 12:00 PM — Mastering the ORC 124.34 Order Form:
Step-by-Step Guidance, Best Practices, and Common Pitfalls to Avoid

Raymond M. Geis, Esq.
Administrative Law Judge, SERB/SPBR, State of Ohio

12:00 PM – 1:00 PM — Lunch, Networking, and Peer-to-Peer Discussions

1:00 PM – 2:00 PM — Classified vs. Unclassified Employment:
Understanding the Differences, Common Missteps, and Practical Applications

Rory P. Callahan, Esq.
Administrative Law Judge, SERB/SPBR, State of Ohio

Lane C. Hagar, Esq.
Staff Attorney/Administrative Law Judge, SERB, State of Ohio

2:00 PM – 2:30 PM — Partisan Political Activity and Public Service:
Navigating Ethics, Legal Boundaries, and Professional Responsibilities in a Polarized Environment (Do's and Don'ts for Public Employees and Leaders)

James R. Sprague, Esq.
Chief Administrative Law Judge, SERB/SPBR, State of Ohio

Robert E. Fekete, Esq.
General Counsel, SERB, State of Ohio

Carol Veach
Administrative Professional, SERB, State of Ohio

2:30 PM – 2:45 PM — Break: Cookies and More!

2:45 PM – 3:30 PM — From Conflict to Collaboration:
Bridging Workplace Perspectives Through Policy, Culture, and Economic Change

Kelly Winston, MSLS
Employee & Labor Relations Manager, Hamilton County

3:30 PM – 4:15 PM — Lightning Round - Quick Insights on Today's Most Debated Ohio Issues: Property Taxes, Fraud Prevention, Workforce Challenges, Data Centers, Health Care Costs, the State Budget, and More!

Terry L. Casey
Chairman, State Personnel Board of Review, State of Ohio

Cheryl Subler
Executive Director, County Commissioners Association of Ohio

ABOUT US

The State Personnel Board of Review (SPBR) is a quasi-judicial agency, with jurisdiction over classified civil service employees across the State of Ohio. This includes county, state, and university employees. SPBR conducts administrative hearings to resolve disputes arising from appeals and investigation requests filed with the Board.

The Board also provides oversight of municipal and township civil service commissions. For a full explanation of SPBR's powers and duties, please refer to Ohio Revised Code Chapter 124 and Revised Code Section 4167.13.

State Personnel
Board of Review

Civil Service History

Ohio's connection and involvement in Civil Service history is important and significant. When northeastern Ohio-born President James A. Garfield was assassinated in 1881 by a disgruntled office seeker, this tragedy spurred a need for personnel reform for government jobs. The old President Jackson's approach of "to the victors belong the spoils" needed to change. In 1882, U.S. Senator George H. Pendleton from Cincinnati, Ohio, presented a bill in Congress to eliminate the old system and to introduce, in its place, a non-partisan civil service at the federal level. Congress adopted the bill, which became known as the Pendleton Civil Service Act and served as a model and inspiration for use across America at the state and local levels.

In 1912, civil service was introduced on a statewide basis in Ohio. The delegates of the 4th Constitutional Convention agreed that the civil service system should be instituted "so far as practicable," and the Civil Service Act was subsequently written and passed in 1913. The Civil Service Act was amended in 1915 to provide for an appeal to the Civil Service Commission by those classified employees "who had been reduced in pay or position, laid off, suspended, discharged, or discriminated against by the appointing officer."

In 1959, House Bill 794 abolished the State Civil Service Commission and created the State Personnel Board of Review (SPBR) and Office of State Personnel (later renamed the Department of Administrative Services).

Ohio's State Constitution makes specific mention of Civil Service protection and its importance, plus the state legislature has written O.R.C. § 124 to outline the details for these important rights and responsibilities. SPBR and the trial courts follow these state laws and the various higher court rulings to better define legally these protections and processes.

SPBR BOARD MEMBERS

Terry L. Casey

Chairman

Terry Casey is a native of Coshocton and was first appointed to the State Personnel Board of Review (SPBR) by Governor John R. Kasich on January 14, 2011. He has served as Chairman for the past fifteen-plus years. He was re-appointed in April 2023 to a new six-year term through February 2029 by Governor Mike DeWine. During his leadership, SPBR has expanded its number of oral arguments before the full Board to ensure careful examination of legal issues. SPBR's recent statewide educational programs have attracted record turn-out of attendees and provided highly-rated speakers. Additionally, the SPBR website has been updated, including video access to past programs and informational background on various personnel, social media, HR, etc., issues.

A graduate of Ohio State University in 1972, Mr. Casey holds a Business Administration degree and studied journalism. Mr. Casey served as Administrative Assistant to Columbus Mayor Tom Moody and U.S. Representative Sam Devine. He also served 14 years on the Franklin County Board of Elections, including 12 years as its Chairman. During his election board service, Mr. Casey was involved with a variety of personnel issues, including the implementation of merit pay and employee evaluations. During this period, he was also active with election officials around Ohio and was appointed by Bob Taft as Chairman of the Board of Voting Machine Examiners.

Mr. Casey has an extensive background in media and research consulting, including work with Ohio House Speaker Jo Ann Davidson, various schools, libraries, judges, and local government officeholders. He served on the Columbus Metropolitan Library Board of Trustees from 1988-2002, including as its board president. During his tenure, the Columbus Metropolitan Library system gained ranking as the nation's number one library and hosted First Lady Barbara Bush at its main library re-dedication. Mr. Casey was named to the Ohio Library Trustee Hall of Fame and served on the Ohio Library Council board for six years, including as its Chair. Mr. Casey has been a regular television news panelist and consultant in Columbus and statewide.

Personally, he has been a student of history and an active photographer, traveling extensively on six continents and 26 countries in Europe, plus recent travels to India, Japan, Singapore, southeast Asia, southern Africa, the Amazon River, and the Middle East.

Married for over 50 years, his wife was previously a Registered Nurse with Dublin City Schools. His son has a Master's in Computer Technology from the University of Virginia, and his daughter-in-law is a University of Virginia Law School graduate. There are two Casey grandsons, ages thirteen and fifteen.

Ross W. McGregor

Vice Chairman

Ross McGregor is a life-long resident of Springfield. He was appointed to the State Personnel Board of Review by Governor John R. Kasich in 2016.

Mr. McGregor is a graduate of Urbana University with a degree in Business Administration. He has spent the last 30 years actively involved in his family's manufacturing business, Pentaflex, Inc, where he is currently serving as President. From 2005 through 2014, Mr. McGregor served in the Ohio House of Representatives representing Springfield and Clark County. While in the legislature he focused on issues related to transportation, rehabilitation and corrections, and administrative rule making. Mr. McGregor served as Chair and Vice Chair of the Joint Committee on Agency Rule Review (JCARR), and also served on the Controlling Board during his tenure in the legislature.

Mr. McGregor has a long history of service to his local community. He has served on the Clark State Community College Foundation Board, the Clark County Historical Society Board and the Springfield Museum of Art Board. He is actively involved with several community organizations including the Rotary Club and United Way.

Frederick W. Strahorn

Board Member

Frederick W. Strahorn, from Dayton, was appointed to the State Personnel Board of Review on June 4, 2021, by Governor Mike DeWine. Mr. Strahorn served in the Ohio House of Representatives from 2000 through 2008, and in the State Senate from 2009 through 2010. In 2012, he was again elected to the Ohio House, serving as Minority Leader of the Ohio House Democratic Caucus for the 131st Ohio General Assembly and the 132nd Ohio General Assembly. His memberships on House committees include: Public Utilities, Ways and Means, Finance and Appropriations, Primary and Secondary Education subcommittee, Economic Development and Environment, House Caucus Policy Chair and Joint Committee on Agency Rule and Review (JCARR). Prior to his election to the Ohio Legislature, Mr. Strahorn served as a legislative aide in the Ohio Senate.

Mr. Strahorn attended Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University and graduated from The Ohio State University with a B.A. in aviation management. He also attended Sinclair Community College for real estate coursework. Mr. Strahorn is a former member of the Wright State University Board of Trustees.

PRESENTERS

Richard A. Bales, Esq.

Professor/Arbitrator, Former Dean
Ohio Northern University Law School

Rick Bales is a faculty member at Ohio Northern University Law School, where he teaches a wide variety of labor/employment and ADR courses. He has published more than 100 scholarly articles and authored or co-authored 10 books on a variety of topics related to labor/employment/ADR. His current book project, to be published in fall 2026, is about arbitration in China.

Rick is also a labor arbitrator. He is a member of the National Academy of Arbitrators and the College of Labor and Employment Lawyers, and he serves on panels for the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service, American Arbitration Association, State Employee Relations Board (Ohio), Michigan Employee Relations Commission, Minnesota Bureau of Mediation Services, Houston Police Department, City of Columbus & Fraternal Order of Police, Lockheed Martin/IAM, and PERB for the U.S. Virgin Islands (for which he's still waiting on his first appointment!).

Justin Brown, MBA, PMP, CSM

Research Administrator
SERB, State of Ohio

Justin Brown is the Research Administrator for the State Employment Relations Board, where he leads SERB's Research and Training section and oversees the agency's statewide Clearinghouse database—an exclusive repository of Ohio public sector collective bargaining data dating back more than four decades. He also manages agency publications, directs web operations for SERB and SPBR, and serves as the primary liaison to DAS on technology initiatives.

Since joining SERB in 2011, Justin has supported the agency's mission by advancing data quality, expanding research capabilities, and managing a diverse portfolio of technology and operational projects. His work contributes to SERB's statutory role as Ohio's clearinghouse for information on wages, benefits, and public sector employment practices.

Before joining SERB, Justin spent four years in operations and IT leadership at a large uniform and linen facility in West Central Ohio.

A native of New Bremen, Ohio, Justin holds a Master's in Information Technology Management from Western Governors University, a Bachelor's in Management from Bluffton University, and an Associate degree in Computer Networking from Rhodes State College. He is also a certified Project Management Professional, Certified ScrumMaster, and A+ Certified Technician.

Rory P. Callahan, Esq.

Administrative Law Judge
SERB/SPBR, State of Ohio

Judge Callahan serves as an Administrative Law Judge (ALJ) hearing cases for both SERB and SPBR.

Prior to his work for SERB and SPBR, ALJ Callahan worked for over 20 years advising and representing individuals and employers in litigation in federal and state courts, before administrative agencies including SERB, SPBR, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, and the Ohio Civil Rights Commission, as well as in arbitrations.

ALJ Callahan received his B.A. cum laude in English from Kenyon College. He received his J.D. with honors from The Ohio State University College of Law.

Robert E. Fekete, Esq.

General Counsel
SERB, State of Ohio

Robert E. Fekete serves as the General Counsel for SERB, where he oversees the legal functions of the Board, including the Unfair Labor Practices and Representation sections, the Hearings section, and the Bureau of Mediation. His role involves advising the Board on legal issues, helping to develop and implement labor policies, educating board members, staff, and the public on labor laws and regulations, and ensuring the fair and consistent enforcement of these laws and regulations.

Before his current position, Robert was the Board's Staff Attorney and an Administrative Law Judge. He also previously held the position of Senior Assistant Attorney General in the Employment Law Section of the Ohio Attorney General's Office, representing the State of Ohio in a variety of employment, civil service, and labor matters, including labor arbitrations, unfair labor practice charges, and representation cases.

Robert's legal career includes experience in the New York City metropolitan area, where he worked at a large firm handling employment law, directors' and officers' liability, professional liability, and insurance coverage for both private companies and public entities.

An active member of the legal community, Robert is a current Board member and Past-President of the Central Ohio Labor and Employment Relations Association and is an editor of the Ohio State Bar Association Labor and Employment Law Newsletter.

Robert earned his Bachelor of Arts from Chaminade University and his law degree from Hofstra University. During law school, he interned at the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission in Washington, D.C., and at the Investor Protection and Securities Bureau in the Office of the New York Attorney General. He is also a veteran of the United States Navy, having served in naval intelligence.

Raymond M. Geis, Esq.

Administrative Law Judge
SERB/SPBR, State of Ohio

Judge Geis is an Administrative Law Judge (ALJ) hearing cases for both SERB and SPBR.

Judge Geis was first introduced to the field of labor relations and employment law as a high school history/government teacher while serving as his school district's local union president. To further his interest in labor/employment relations, he attended law school at night and earned his J.D. degree while teaching and clerking during the day. He also interned at the National Labor Relations Board, Region 8, Cleveland, and served as an associate editor on the school's law review.

Upon graduation, Judge Geis began his career as a labor relations manager for the State of Ohio. In his work at various state agencies, he successfully handled grievances, administered contracts, participated in collective bargaining negotiations, advocated at arbitration, and mediated Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) cases, among other duties. His varied experiences give him the perspective to understand diverse parties' interests and points of view.

Judge Geis received his B.A. in Social Studies and Secondary Education, Summa Cum Laude, from Walsh University. He earned his J.D., Cum Laude, from the University of Akron School of Law.

Lane C. Hagar, Esq.

Staff Attorney/Administrative Law Judge
SERB, State of Ohio

Lane C. Hagar serves as a Staff Attorney and Administrative Law Judge (ALJ) for the State Employment Relations Board (SERB).

Before joining SERB, Lane practiced as an Associate at a Columbus, Ohio law firm, where he represented clients in a wide range of labor and employment matters. His work included litigation in both federal and state courts, as well as advocacy before administrative agencies such as SERB, the National Labor Relations Board, and the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. He also represented clients in labor and employment arbitrations, gaining extensive experience across the spectrum of public- and private-sector labor issues.

Lane earned his Bachelor of Arts in History and Political Science, graduating magna cum laude from The Ohio State University. He received his Juris Doctor from The Ohio State University Moritz College of Law.

Rachel M. Reight, Esq.

Partner, Baasten, McKinley & Co.
Labor & Employment Attorney and OSBF Fellow (Class of 2025)

Rachel Reight is a managing partner at Baasten, McKinley & Co., L.P.A., where she focuses her practice on labor and employment law, with a particular emphasis on education law and the representation of public employees. She has extensive experience in administrative law, advocating for clients before the State Employment Relations Board, the Ohio State Board of Education, and the Ohio Bureau of Workers' Compensation/Industrial Commission. Additionally, she represents clients in children's services and police investigations, as well as labor and employment litigation in state and federal courts.

Ms. Reight is an Ohio State Bar Association Certified Specialist in Labor and Employment Law. She was an Ohio State Bar Foundation Fellow (2025) and a Leadership Ohio Fellow (2025). She is actively involved in the Ohio State Bar Association's Labor and Employment Law Section and served as President of the Ohio Public Employees Lawyer Association (OPELA) (2025- anticipated 2027). She has been recognized as a Rising Star by Ohio Super Lawyers in 2017 and 2018.

A dedicated educator and advocate, Ms. Reight frequently speaks at workshops for public educators, school employees, and county developmental disabilities board employees across Northeast Ohio. She also volunteers as a Judicial Panelist for high school and undergraduate mock trial competitions, supporting programs hosted by the Ohio Center for Law-Related Education, the Cleveland Metropolitan Bar Association, Kent State University, and the American Mock Trial Association.

Ms. Reight earned her B.A. from The Ohio State University and her J.D. from the University of Toledo College of Law.

James R. Sprague, Esq.

Chief Administrative Law Judge
SERB/SPBR, State of Ohio

Chief Administrative Law Judge (ALJ) Sprague hears cases and supervises the Hearing Section for both SERB and SPBR. He has more than 33 years of ALJ experience.

Prior to his work with SERB, Chief ALJ Sprague served as a Law Clerk for Justice J. Craig Wright of the Supreme Court of Ohio and then served as an Administrative Law Judge for the State Personnel Board of Review (SPBR) before becoming that agency's Executive Director. He has also served in a volunteer capacity for several City of Dublin boards and commissions, including serving for two years as Chairman of the Dublin Planning and Zoning Commission. He served as a member of the United States Coast Guard Auxiliary. He served as Flotilla staff officer (Finance and Materials) for Flotilla 18-7 and as Assistant District Staff Officer (Legal Parliamentarian) for the 8th district eastern region.

Chief ALJ Sprague received his B.A. with Distinction and Honors in Political Science and International Relations from the University of Delaware. He received his M. A. in Political Science from Ohio State University. He received his J.D., Cum Laude (Order of the Curia), from Capital University Law School, where he served as Editor-in-Chief of the Capital University Law Review.

Cheryl Subler

Executive Director
County Commissioners Association of Ohio

Cheryl serves as Executive Director for the County Commissioners Association of Ohio, and before that, Ms. Subler served many years as the Association's managing director of policy, coordinating the association's policy team and lobbying efforts as well as specializing in personnel and labor relations, human resources, elections administration, environmental matters, and general local government issues. Prior to that, she worked for the Ohio Township Association and was a House legislative aide and a Senate page. She is a former president of the Ohio Lobbying Association and a member of the Greater Ohio Board of Trustees. She currently serves on the Capitol Square Foundation Board.

Carol Veach

Administrative Professional
SERB, State of Ohio

Carol Veach is the Administrative Assistant with the Bureau of Mediation at the State Employment Relations Board (SERB), where she supports the administration of Ohio's statutory framework for public sector labor–management relations. In this capacity, Carol oversees the coordination of mediation services in disputes involving public employers and employee organizations, ensuring that processes align with established legal and procedural requirements.

Carol serves as a primary point of contact for public employers, labor representatives, and partner agencies, providing authoritative guidance on mediation procedures and administrative protocols. Their work includes developing and delivering presentations on mediation practices and labor relations topics, contributing to the professional education of practitioners and stakeholders across the state. Their professional background reflects a sustained commitment to effective dispute resolution, stakeholder engagement, and the advancement of fair and constructive labor–management relations in the public sector.

Kelly Winston, MSLS

Employee & Labor Relations Manager
Hamilton County

Kelly Winston is an accomplished Employee and Labor Relations executive with more than 25 years of experience in labor relations, human resources, operations management, workplace investigations, conflict resolution, and organizational leadership. As the Employee and Labor Relations Manager for Hamilton County, Kelly provides strategic guidance on complex employment matters, negotiates collective bargaining agreements, manages employee relations issues, and partners with executive leadership to create positive and legally compliant workplaces serving more than 1,100 employees.

What distinguishes Kelly is her rare ability to understand both sides of the bargaining table. Before joining management, she spent more than a decade as a Union Representative with the United Food and Commercial Workers Union (UFCW), representing over 3,500 retail and warehouse employees and negotiating more than 18 collective bargaining contracts. This dual perspective enables her to bridge differences, build trust, and create practical solutions that benefit employees, unions, and employers alike.

Kelly's career also includes leadership roles in the manufacturing industry, where she managed operations supporting major automobile manufacturers and delivered OSHA training for hundreds of employees, as well as experience in the legal field, where she managed complex litigation and contributed to a landmark 5 million dollar intentional tort settlement.

Kelly holds a Master's Degree in Labor Studies from the University of Massachusetts-Amherst, a Master of Science in Business Administration from Central Michigan University, and a Bachelor of Science in Business Administration from Urbana University.

Vanitha Zacharias

Head of Technology Governance and Chief Artificial Intelligence Strategist, Office of Information Technology
Department of Administrative Services, State of Ohio

In her role, Vanitha Zacharias oversees the technology governance function for the State of Ohio. She also leads the state's AI strategy and chairs the State of Ohio AI Council. As part of her public service, she brings extensive experience gained through her career in software development, technology architecture, and strategy. She believes in the transformative potential of AI and focuses her efforts on its ethical application for the benefit of society. Vanitha holds a master's degree in business administration from The Ohio State University.

Welcome and Opening Remarks: A Quick Discussion about SPBR and How It Really Works!

Terry L. Casey
Chairman
State Personnel Board of Review, State of Ohio

SPBR Conference

2026

1

Welcome

Terry L. Casey
Chairman
State Personnel Board of Review
State of Ohio

Appointed by the Governor in January 2011, now serving his sixteenth year as Chairman.

2

Thank you for coming!

- Record, fast response for 2026 conference
- Very diverse audience here
- Video taped for future, shared reference
- Priority for filling out conference evaluation, giving future ideas, suggestions
- Housekeeping details
- Value of interactions, sharing, getting questions answered

Don't Be Shy!

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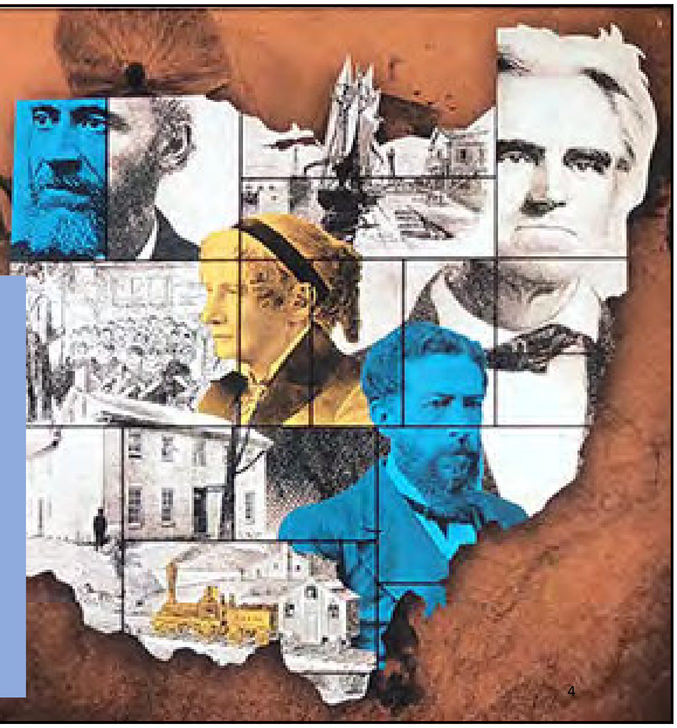
OHIO CONSTITUTION

Article XV, Section 10

"Appointments and promotions in the civil service of the state, the several counties, and cities, shall be made according to merit and fitness."



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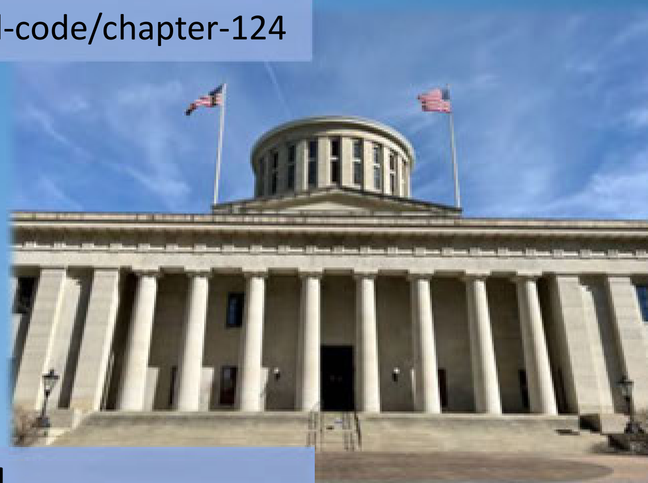
Ohio Revised Code 124

https://codes.ohio.gov/ohio-revised-code/chapter-124



Ohio Administrative Code 124

https://codes.ohio.gov/ohio-administrative-code/124

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5

SPBR Appeal Process Secrets

- Pre-filing key: have facts and specifics properly focused
- Doing the 124 order correctly, burden on the employer
- Pre-hearing questionnaire
- Pre-hearing secret, value: what are the important issues, questions & facts?
- Mediation/settlement/hearing: being focused, realistic?

6

6

SPBR Appeal Process Secrets

- Hearing by ALJ: more informal, but seriously conducted, being time-efficient & prepared?
- R&R Order, objections/response opportunities
- Board review/decision, potential oral arguments, court options?
- Finally, do details matter? It's "due process," and that is very important!

7

7

Especially in this current, highly polarized world of social media, quick judgments and conflicting values/opinions. And, in Ohio, with such vast size and diversity among its urban, suburban, and rural communities and interests.

8

8

Citizen & Work-Centered AI: Designing and Using Artificial Intelligence with and for the Public

Vanitha Zacharias
Head of Technology Governance and Chief Artificial Intelligence Strategist, Office of Information Technology
Department of Administrative Services, State of Ohio

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Research Administrator
SERB, State of Ohio

STATE PERSONNEL BOARD OF REVIEW
OHIO

CITIZEN & WORK-CENTERED AI: DESIGNING AND USING ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE WITH AND FOR THE PUBLIC

Vanitha Zacharias
Head of Technology Governance and Chief Artificial Intelligence Strategist, Office of Information Technology, DAS, State of Ohio

Rachel M. Reight, Esq.
Partner, Baasten, McKinley & Co.; Labor & Employment Attorney

Richard A. Bales, Esq.
Professor/Arbitrator, Former Dean, Ohio Northern University Law School

Justin Brown, MBA, PMP, CSM
Research Administrator, SERB, State of Ohio (Moderator)

1

TODAY'S SESSION

- A.I. FUNDAMENTALS
- PRACTICAL GOVERNMENT APPLICATIONS
- WORKFORCE READINESS
- GOVERNANCE & ETHICS
- AUDIENCE DISCUSSION
- ACTIONABLE NEXT STEPS

2

2

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

PARTICIPANTS WILL:

- UNDERSTAND TODAY'S A.I. LANDSCAPE
- EXPLORE PRACTICAL GOVERNMENT USE CASES
- RECOGNIZE GOVERNANCE AND ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS
- IDENTIFY WORKFORCE IMPLICATIONS
- LEAVE WITH PRACTICAL IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

3

3

POLL #1

How familiar are you with A.I. tools today?

- Never used A.I.
- Experimented with A.I.
- Use occasionally
- Use regularly
- Responsible for A.I. strategy

4

4

5

FIVE TYPES OF A.I. IN GOVERNMENT

TYPE	Examples
Assistive A.I.	ChatGPT, Copilot
Generative A.I.	Images, Video, Audio
Embedded A.I.	HR, Finance, CRM
Predictive A.I.	Forecasting
Citizen A.I.	Chatbots, Virtual Assistants

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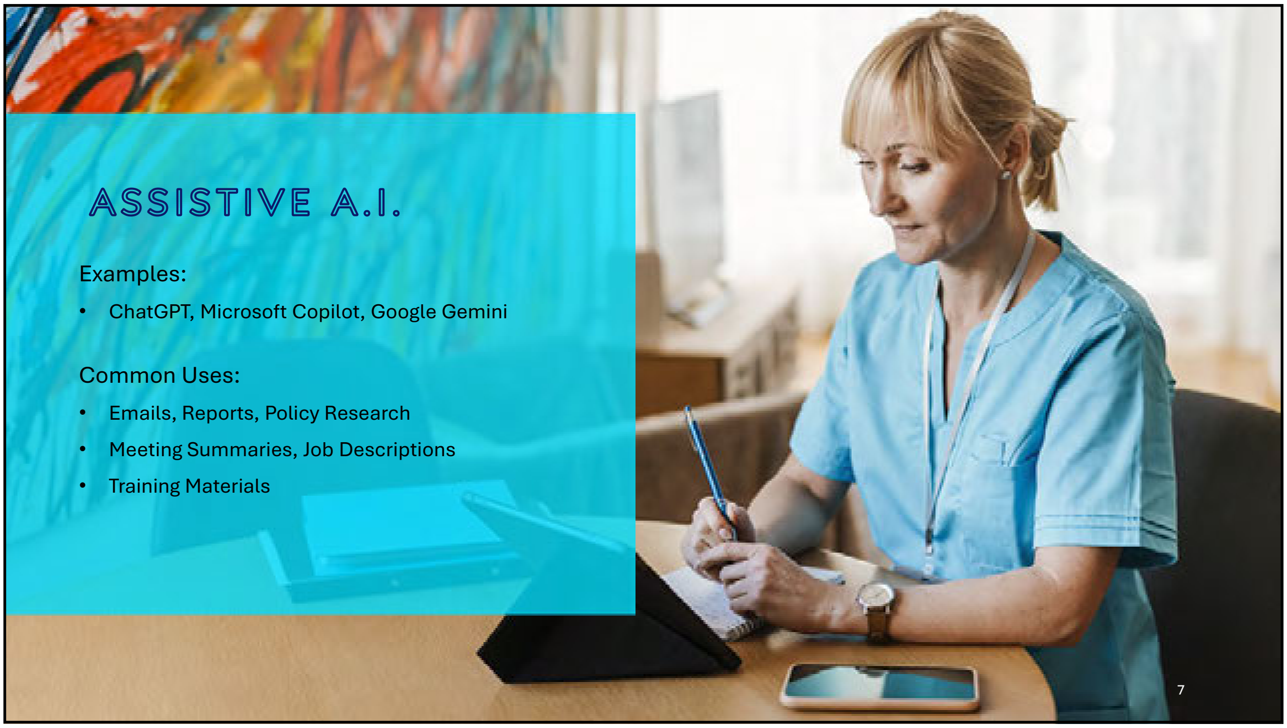
ASSISTIVE A.I.
Examples:
• ChatGPT, Microsoft Copilot, Google Gemini
Common Uses:
• Emails, Reports, Policy Research
• Meeting Summaries, Job Descriptions
• Training Materials
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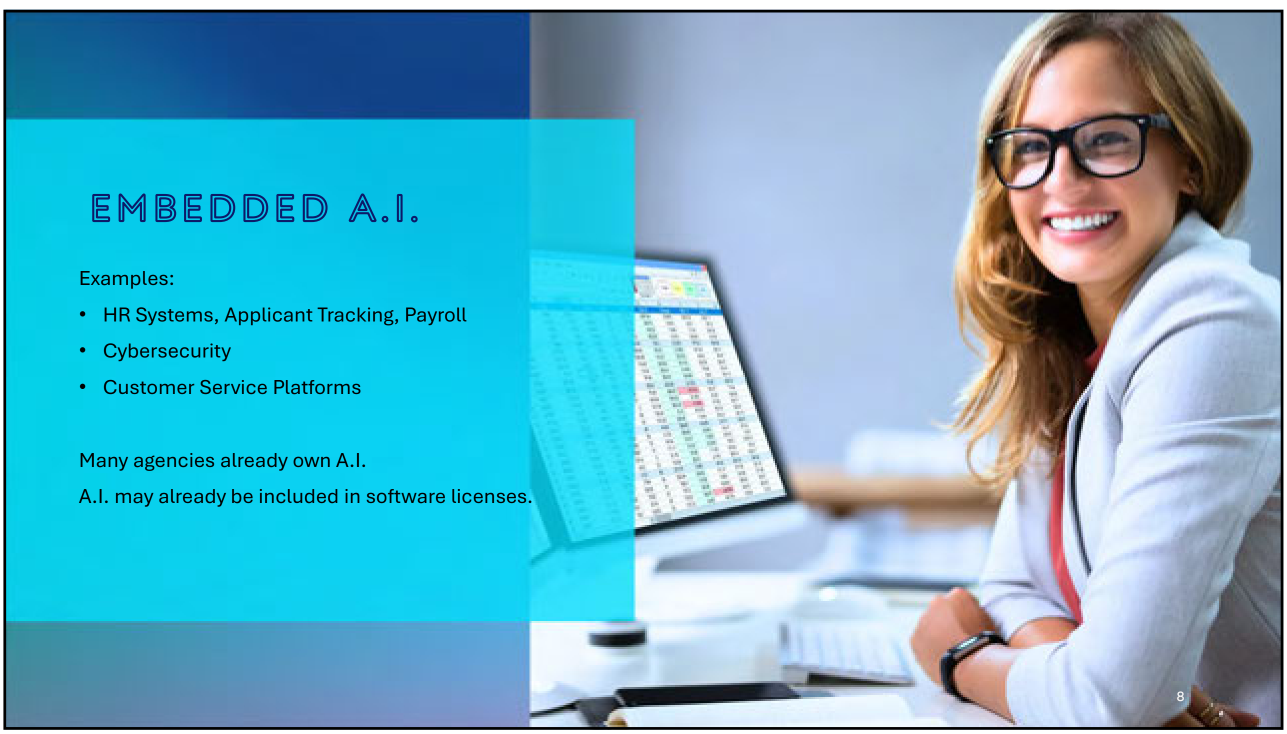

EMBEDDED A.I.
Examples:
• HR Systems, Applicant Tracking, Payroll
• Cybersecurity
• Customer Service Platforms
Many agencies already own A.I.
A.I. may already be included in software licenses.
8

8

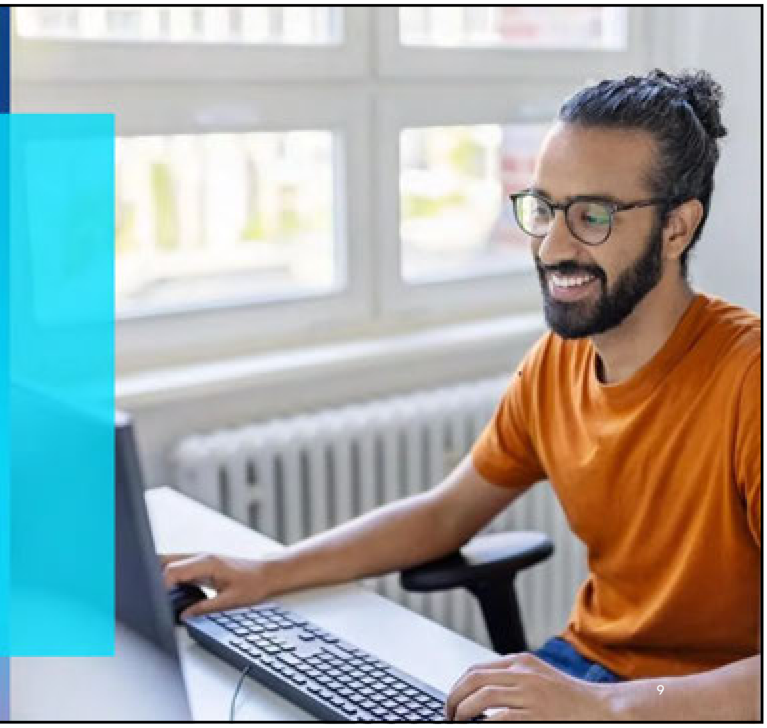
PREDICTIVE & CITIZEN A.I.

Predictive Examples:

- Workforce Planning
- Budget Forecasting
- Resource Allocation

Citizen A.I. Examples

- Chatbots
- Translation
- Virtual Assistants
- Self-Service



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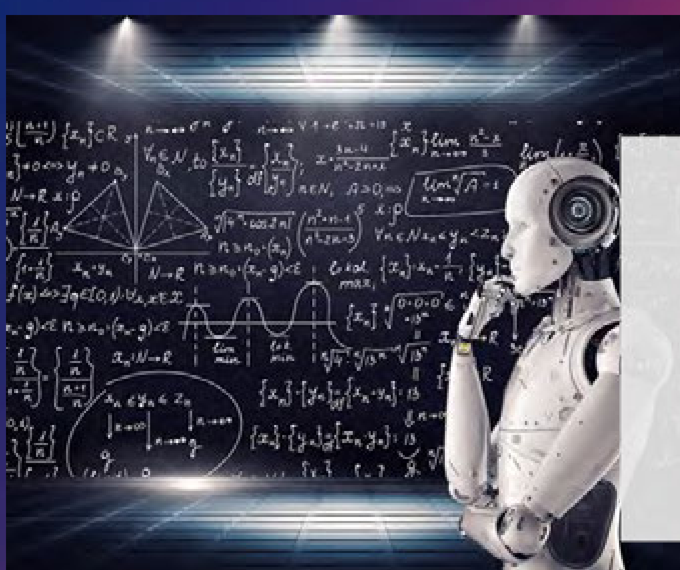

AUDIENCE REFLECTION

Which type of A.I. is most relevant in your organization today?

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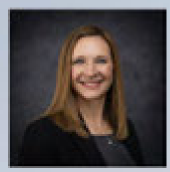
MEET THE PANEL

VANITHA ZACHARIAS
Head of Technology Governance & Chief A. I. Strategist
OIT, DAS, State of Ohio



RACHEL REIGHT
Partner
Baasten, McKinley & Co.
Labor & Employment Attorney

RICHARD BALES
Professor/Arbitrator
Former Dean
Ohio Northern University Law School

JUSTIN BROWN
Research Administrator
SERB, State of Ohio
(Moderator)

11

11

12

WHY SHOULD PUBLIC-SECTOR LEADERS PAY ATTENTION TO A.I. NOW?

LEADERSHIP, INNOVATION, DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

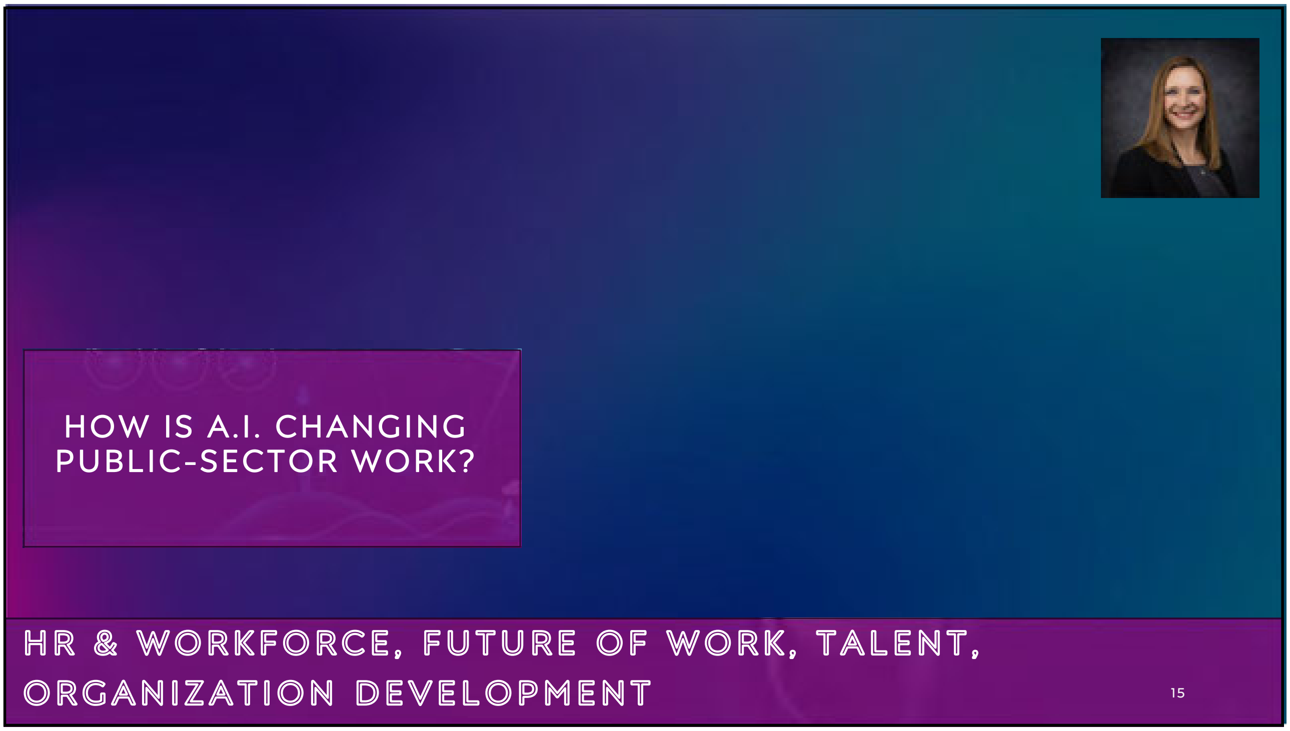
13

13

HR & WORKFORCE, FUTURE OF WORK, TALENT, ORGANIZATION DEVELOPMENT

14

14


HOW IS A.I. CHANGING PUBLIC-SECTOR WORK?
HR & WORKFORCE, FUTURE OF WORK, TALENT, ORGANIZATION DEVELOPMENT
15

15


AI
RESPONSIBLE
AI
ETHICAL
TECHNOLOGY & A.I. GOVERNANCE, RISK, ETHICS, RESPONSIBLE A.I.
16

16

WHAT SEPARATES SUCCESSFUL A.I. ADOPTION?

TECHNOLOGY & A.I. GOVERNANCE, RISK, ETHICS, RESPONSIBLE A.I.

17

17

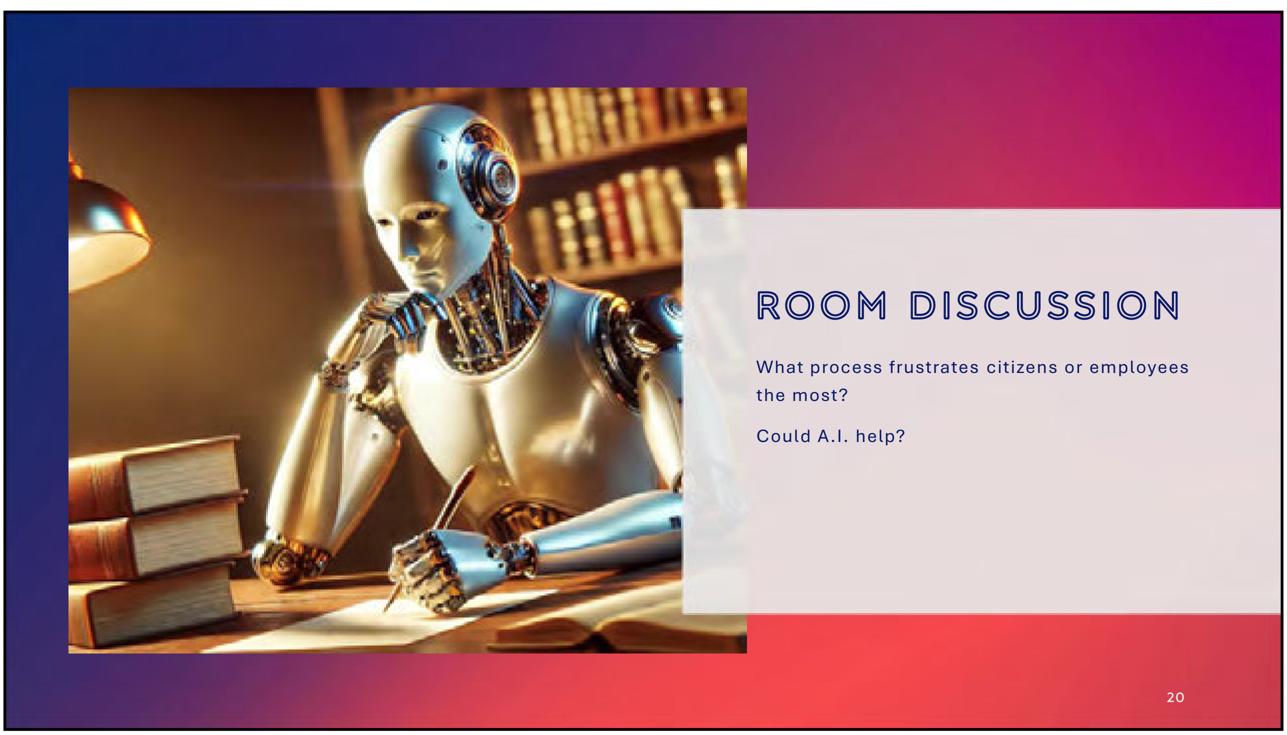
CITIZEN-CENTERED A.I.

18

18


EMPLOYEE-CENTERED A.I.
19

19


ROOM DISCUSSION
What process frustrates citizens or employees the most?
Could A.I. help?
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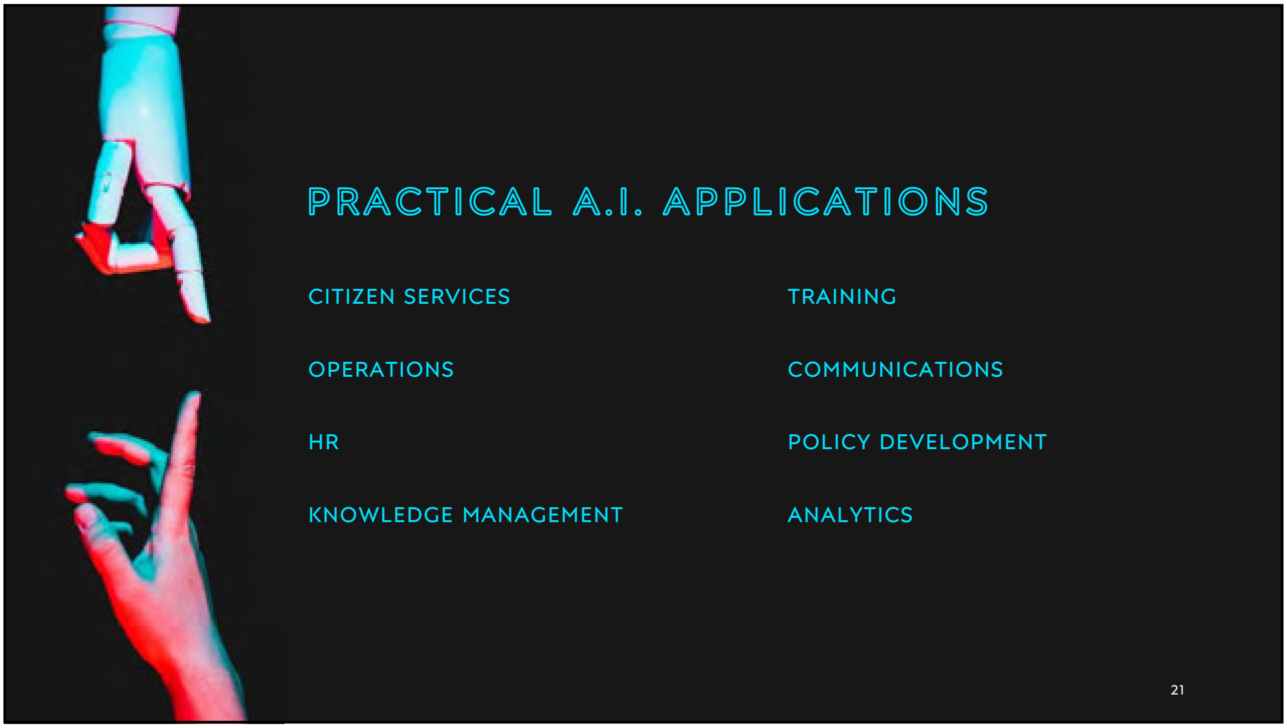
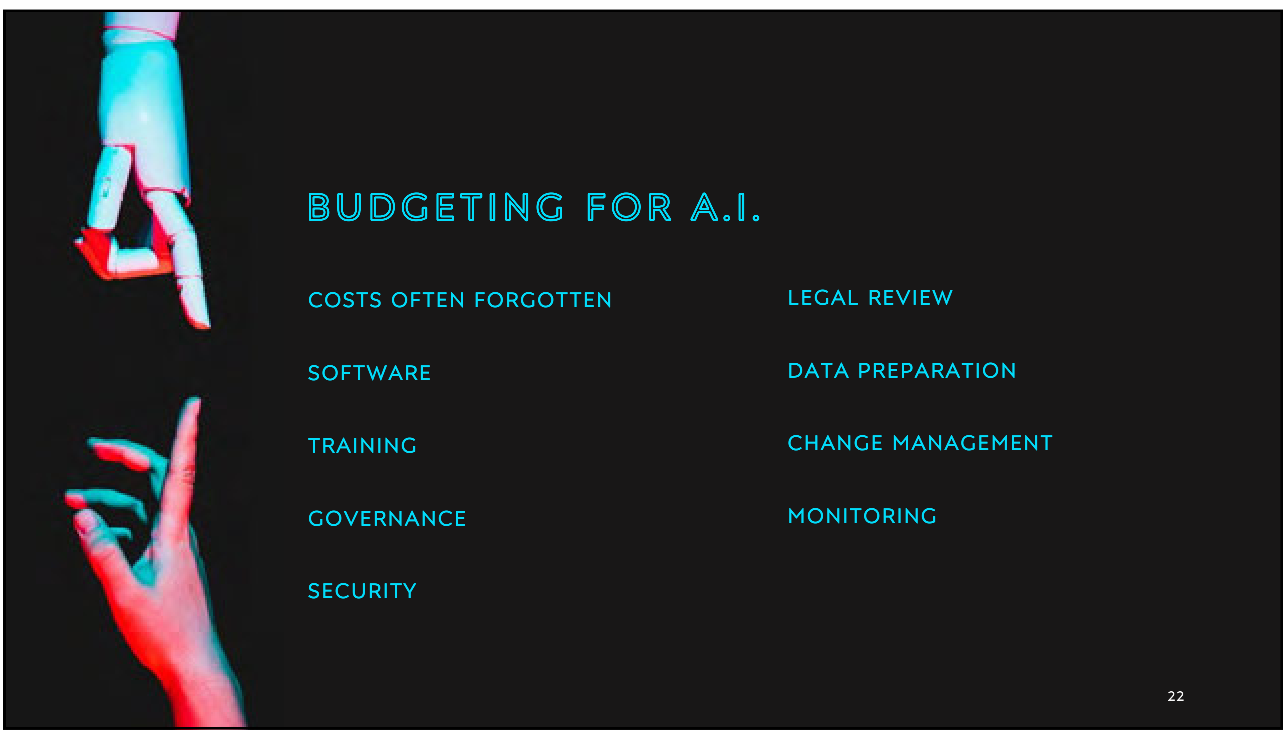

PRACTICAL A.I. APPLICATIONS
CITIZEN SERVICES
OPERATIONS
HR
KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT
TRAINING
COMMUNICATIONS
POLICY DEVELOPMENT
ANALYTICS
21

21


BUDGETING FOR A.I.
COSTS OFTEN FORGOTTEN
SOFTWARE
TRAINING
GOVERNANCE
SECURITY
LEGAL REVIEW
DATA PREPARATION
CHANGE MANAGEMENT
MONITORING
22

22

POLL #2

Where would you prioritize A.I. investment?

- Citizen Services
- HR
- Operations
- Training
- Analytics
- Public Safety

23

23

WORKFORCE READINESS

FUTURE SKILLS

A.I. LITERACY

CRITICAL THINKING

DATA INTERPRETATION

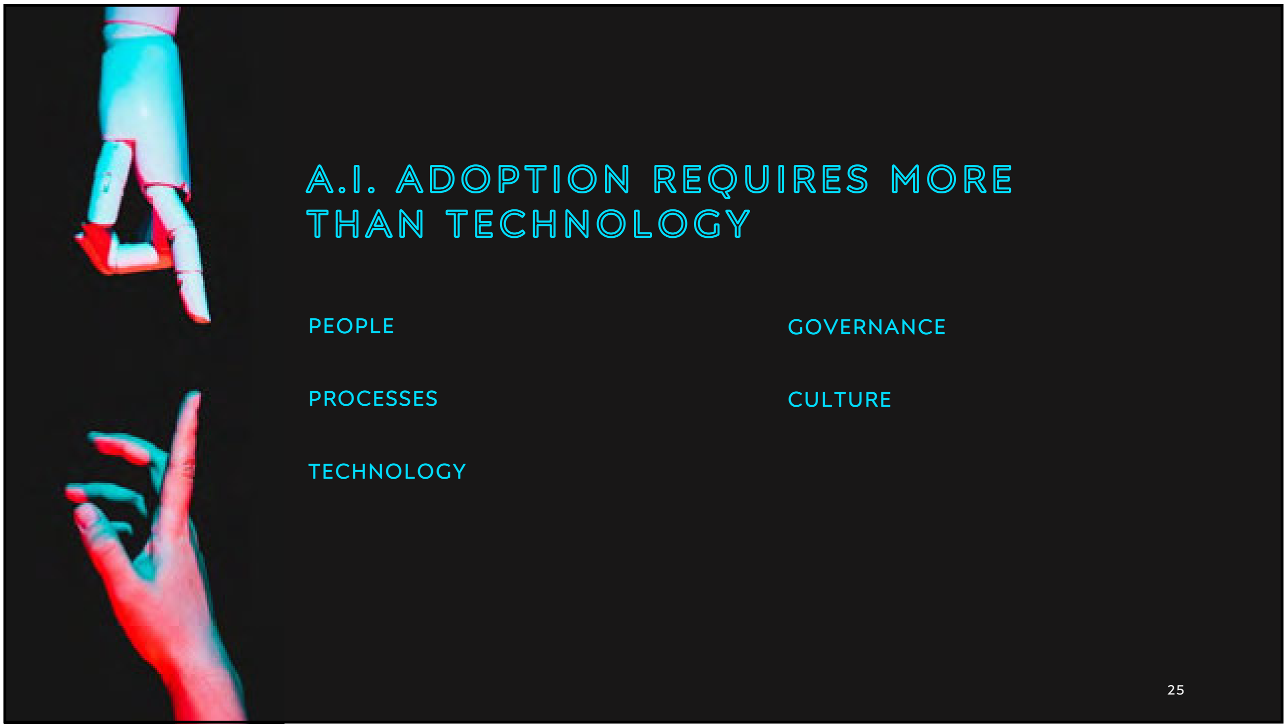
HUMAN JUDGEMENT

COMMUNICATION

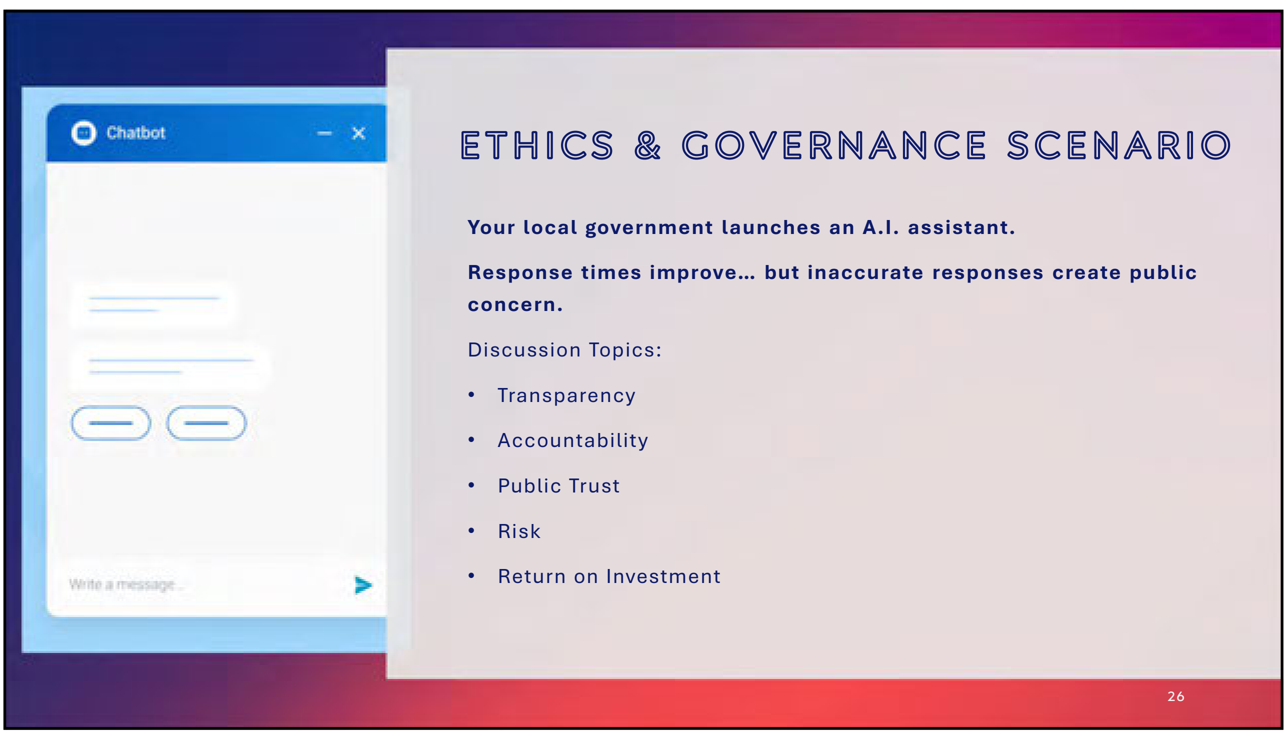
ADAPTABILITY

24

24


A.I. ADOPTION REQUIRES MORE THAN TECHNOLOGY
PEOPLE
GOVERNANCE
PROCESSES
CULTURE
TECHNOLOGY
25

25


Chatbot
ETHICS & GOVERNANCE SCENARIO
Your local government launches an A.I. assistant.
Response times improve… but inaccurate responses create public concern.
Discussion Topics:
• Transparency
• Accountability
• Public Trust
• Risk
• Return on Investment
26

26

27

MEASURING SUCCESS

Citizen Outcomes

Employee Outcomes

Organizational Outcomes

Examples:

- ✓ Faster response
- ✓ Reduced workload
- ✓ Better decisions
- ✓ Higher satisfaction
- ✓ Improved accessibility

28

POLL #3

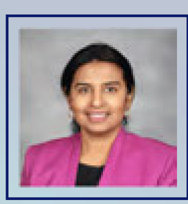
What concerns you most about A.I.?

- Privacy
- Bias
- Security
- Accuracy
- Public Trust
- Workforce Impacts

29

29

ASK THE EXPERTS!
AUDIENCE QUESTIONS



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30

30

FINAL TAKEAWAYS

Start with the problem – not the technology.

A.I. should augment people.

Governance builds trust.

Responsible A.I. requires investment in:

- People
- Processes
- Technology
- Culture
- Leadership

31

31

CLOSING REFLECTION

What opportunity will you explore?

What risk will you address?

What conversation will you start?

Thank You!

32

32

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Artificial Intelligence Pre-implementation Checklist

A. Define the Use Case

☐ What specific problem is the system intended to address?

☐ Is artificial intelligence necessary, or could a less intrusive tool accomplish the objective?

☐ Will the system merely assist a person, recommend an outcome, or make an automated decision?

☐ Who is the accountable official or system owner?

☐ What individuals may be affected?

B. Classify the Risk

Treat the system as higher risk when it affects:

☐ Hiring, promotion, evaluation, compensation, discipline, or termination;

☐ Student grading, placement, discipline, special education, or access to services;

☐ Eligibility for benefits or public programs;

☐ Medical, disability, or accommodation determinations;

☐ Employee surveillance, productivity, attendance, or scheduling;

☐ Public safety or law enforcement;

☐ Confidential, privileged, or personally identifiable information; or

☐ A legally protected right or significant opportunity.

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C. Review Legal and Contractual Requirements

☐ Antidiscrimination laws;

☐ Disability accommodation and accessibility requirements;

☐ Due process and civil service requirements;

☐ Collective bargaining agreements and bargaining obligations;

☐ Public records and records retention;

☐ Privacy and data security;

☐ FERPA and student records requirements;

☐ Fair Credit Reporting Act requirements, when applicable;

☐ Copyright, licensing, and intellectual property;

☐ Professional licensing and ethical rules;

☐ Court rules and certification requirements; and

☐ Grant, contract, procurement, and insurance requirements.

D. Evaluate Data

☐ What data will be collected or inferred?

☐ Is each data element necessary?

☐ Was the data lawfully obtained?

☐ Is the data accurate, current, and representative?

☐ Does the system rely on proxies that may correlate with protected characteristics?

☐ Can inaccurate information be corrected?

☐ How long will the data, prompts, and outputs be retained?

E. Evaluate the Vendor

☐ Has the vendor disclosed how the system functions?

☐ Can the vendor explain the basis for an output or recommendation?

☐ Does the vendor use customer information to train its models?

☐ Has the product been independently tested?

☐ Will the vendor provide bias, accessibility, error rate, and validation information?

☐ Does the contract permit audits?

☐ Does the contract allocate responsibility for unlawful or inaccurate results?

☐ Can records be exported for public records, discovery, grievances, or audits?

☐ What happens to the data when the contract ends?

F. Test the System

☐ Conduct a controlled pilot before full implementation.

☐ Compare system results with reliable human reviewed results.

☐ Test for false positives and false negatives.

☐ Test results across relevant demographic and disability groups.

☐ Test assistive technology and accessibility.

☐ Document limitations and situations in which the system should not be used.

☐ Establish criteria for suspending or discontinuing the system.

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G. Establish Meaningful Human Review

☐ Identify the human decision maker.

☐ Provide the reviewer with sufficient training.

☐ Ensure the reviewer can reject or modify the recommendation.

☐ Require the reviewer to examine the underlying information.

☐ Prohibit automatic adoption of the system's recommendation.

☐ Document the independent basis for the final decision.

H. Provide Notice and Review Procedures

☐ Determine whether affected individuals will receive notice that artificial intelligence is being used.

☐ Explain the general role of the system.

☐ Provide a method to correct inaccurate information.

☐ Provide an accommodation or alternative process.

☐ Establish a meaningful procedure for human reconsideration.

☐ Identify a contact person for questions and complaints.

I. Monitor After Implementation

☐ Revalidate the system periodically.

☐ Review complaints, overrides, and adverse outcomes.

☐ Monitor changes made by the vendor.

☐ Audit for disparate impact and accessibility problems.

☐ Confirm that data retention and deletion practices are followed.

☐ Review whether the system continues to serve the original purpose.

☐ Document corrective action.

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Artificial Intelligence in the Workplace

Model Policy

I. Model Employee Artificial Intelligence Use Policy

A. Purpose

The Employer recognizes that artificial intelligence tools may improve efficiency, assist with research and drafting, support data analysis, and enhance the delivery of public services. Artificial intelligence tools also present risks involving accuracy, confidentiality, discrimination, accessibility, cybersecurity, intellectual property, public records, employee monitoring, and overreliance on automated recommendations.

This policy establishes standards for the responsible, secure, transparent, and lawful use of artificial intelligence in the workplace.

B. Scope

This policy applies to all employees, officials, contractors, interns, volunteers, and other individuals who use artificial intelligence tools while performing work for the Employer or using Employer systems, information, or accounts.

This policy applies to:

1. Generative artificial intelligence tools that produce text, images, audio, video, computer code, summaries, recommendations, or other content;
2. Automated decision systems;
3. Algorithmic screening or ranking systems;
4. Artificial intelligence incorporated into software, search engines, productivity applications, human resources platforms, educational technology, surveillance systems, or vendor products; and
5. Any other technology that makes or materially assists predictions, recommendations, evaluations, or decisions.

C. Approved Tools

Employees may use only artificial intelligence tools that have been approved by the Employer for the intended use.

Approval of a tool for one purpose does not constitute approval for all purposes. For example, a tool approved to assist with routine drafting may not be used to process confidential personnel information or recommend employment decisions.

Employees shall not purchase, subscribe to, install, integrate, or enable an artificial intelligence tool using Employer funds, systems, or data without appropriate authorization.

D. Appropriate Uses

Subject to supervisory approval and other applicable policies, appropriate uses may include:

1. Brainstorming and development of preliminary ideas;
2. Drafting routine or nonconfidential communications;
3. Summarizing information that the employee is authorized to access;
4. Creating outlines, templates, training materials, or administrative documents;
5. Assisting with data organization or analysis;
6. Improving readability, grammar, or formatting;
7. Generating preliminary research questions; and
8. Supporting other tasks approved by the employee's supervisor.

Artificial intelligence should ordinarily be treated as a preliminary drafting or analytical tool, not as an authoritative source or final decision maker.

E. Confidential and Sensitive Information

Employees shall not enter confidential, privileged, protected, or sensitive information into a public or unapproved artificial intelligence tool.

Restricted information includes, but is not limited to:

1. Personally identifiable information;
2. Student education records;
3. Medical or disability information;
4. Personnel records;
5. Social Security numbers, financial account information, passwords, and security credentials;
6. Information protected by attorney client privilege, attorney work product, or another legal privilege;
7. Information relating to pending investigations, grievances, litigation, discipline, or collective bargaining;
8. Information protected by a confidentiality agreement;
9. Cybersecurity information or system vulnerabilities; and
10. Information that the employee is not otherwise authorized to disclose.

Deidentification does not necessarily eliminate confidentiality risk. Employees should not submit information that could reasonably be combined with other information to identify an individual or confidential matter.

F. Accuracy and Human Accountability

Employees are responsible for all work product they create, approve, sign, transmit, publish, or submit, regardless of whether artificial intelligence assisted in its preparation.

Before using artificial intelligence generated content, the employee shall:

1. Review the complete output;
2. Verify factual assertions against reliable sources;
3. Confirm quotations against the original source;
4. Independently verify legal citations, statutes, regulations, policies, and authorities;
5. Review numerical calculations and data analyses;
6. Evaluate the output for bias, omissions, misleading statements, and inappropriate assumptions;
7. Confirm that the content is suitable for the intended audience and purpose; and
8. Exercise independent professional judgment.

An employee shall not represent artificial intelligence generated content as verified merely because the output appears detailed, confident, or plausible.

G. Employment and Other Consequential Decisions

Artificial intelligence shall not be the sole basis for a decision involving:

1. Recruitment or applicant screening;
2. Hiring;
3. Promotion;
4. Compensation;
5. Performance evaluation;
6. Work assignments or scheduling;
7. Attendance or productivity assessment;
8. Leave or accommodation;
9. Discipline;
10. Layoff, nonrenewal, or termination; or
11. Any other decision materially affecting an applicant, employee, student, resident, or member of the public.

Before an approved artificial intelligence system is used to assist a consequential decision, the Employer should document:

1. The purpose and scope of the system;
2. The information considered by the system;
3. The system's limitations and known error rates;
4. The identity and responsibilities of the human decision maker;
5. Procedures for detecting discriminatory or inaccessible results;
6. Procedures for requesting an accommodation or alternative process;
7. Procedures for reviewing or contesting an incorrect result; and
8. The records necessary to explain and reproduce the decision.

Human review must be meaningful. A person who lacks the information, training, authority, or time to evaluate the system's recommendation does not provide meaningful human oversight.

H. Prohibited Uses

Employees shall not use artificial intelligence to:

1. Fabricate facts, evidence, quotations, records, credentials, or authorities;
2. Impersonate another person without authorization;
3. Create deceptive audio, video, images, or communications;
4. Engage in harassment, discrimination, retaliation, bullying, intimidation, or unlawful surveillance;
5. Make decisions based on protected characteristics or unlawful proxies for protected characteristics;
6. Circumvent security controls, access restrictions, purchasing requirements, or records retention obligations;
7. Generate unlawful, defamatory, threatening, or fraudulent content;
8. Submit artificial intelligence generated work as the employee's independent analysis without appropriate review;
9. Replace an individualized assessment required by law, policy, contract, or professional standards;
10. Monitor protected union, concerted, whistleblower, or other legally protected activity; or
11. Use copyrighted, proprietary, or confidential material in a manner inconsistent with applicable law or authorization.

I. Transparency and Attribution

Employees should disclose material artificial intelligence assistance when disclosure is required by law, court rule, professional obligation, assignment instructions, grant requirements, contract, or Employer procedure.

The Employer may require employees to identify:

1. The artificial intelligence tool used;
2. The purpose for which it was used;
3. The date of use;
4. The portions of the work product materially generated or revised by the tool; and
5. The verification steps taken by the employee.

Routine spelling, grammar, formatting, or autocomplete assistance ordinarily does not require disclosure unless otherwise directed.

J. Public Records and Records Retention

The use of artificial intelligence does not eliminate public records, discovery, litigation hold, or records retention obligations.

Employees shall preserve prompts, outputs, source materials, approvals, audit logs, and related communications when those materials:

1. Document an official decision;
2. Are required under an applicable retention schedule;
3. Are responsive to a public records request;
4. Are subject to a litigation hold, grievance, investigation, audit, or administrative proceeding; or
5. Are otherwise required to explain the basis for an official action.

Employees shall not use artificial intelligence tools or temporary chat functions to evade records retention or disclosure requirements.

K. Vendor and Procurement Review

Before acquiring or implementing an artificial intelligence enabled product, the Employer should evaluate:

1. The vendor's data ownership and permitted uses;
2. Whether prompts or uploaded information are retained or used for model training;
3. Data location, encryption, access controls, and breach notification;
4. Subcontractors and third party integrations;
5. Accessibility and accommodation capabilities;
6. Bias testing and validation documentation;
7. The ability to audit or explain system outputs;
8. Records retention and export capabilities;
9. Intellectual property and indemnification provisions;
10. The vendor's ability to modify the product or terms of service;
11. Procedures for correcting inaccurate data or results; and
12. Procedures for termination, data return, and deletion.

Vendor assurances should not substitute for independent review.

L. Training and Supervision

Employees authorized to use artificial intelligence shall receive training appropriate to the risks of the tool and the employee's responsibilities.

Supervisors remain responsible for reviewing work delegated to employees, contractors, or nonprofessional staff. The existence of a written policy does not replace active supervision and meaningful review.

M. Reporting Concerns

Employees shall promptly report suspected:

1. Disclosure of confidential information;
2. Security incidents;
3. Materially inaccurate or fabricated output;
4. Discriminatory or inaccessible results;

5. Unauthorized artificial intelligence use;
6. Failure of an automated system affecting an individual’s rights or employment; or
7. Other violations of this policy.

No employee shall be retaliated against for making a good faith report or raising a good faith concern regarding an artificial intelligence system.

N. Collective Bargaining and Other Rights

Nothing in this policy is intended to alter rights or obligations arising under applicable law, a collective bargaining agreement, civil service requirements, professional standards, whistleblower protections, or protected concerted activity.

The Employer shall evaluate whether the implementation or effects of an artificial intelligence system implicate notice, consultation, or bargaining obligations.

O. Violations

Violations will be evaluated based on the circumstances, including the employee’s knowledge, training, intent, the sensitivity of the information involved, the harm or potential harm, and whether the employee promptly reported and corrected the issue.

Any corrective or disciplinary action shall be administered in accordance with applicable law, policy, due process requirements, just cause standards, and collective bargaining agreements.

Disclosure Regarding Artificial Intelligence Assistance

This policy was developed with the assistance of generative artificial intelligence tools for purposes such as preliminary research, organization, editing, and drafting. The policy was independently reviewed, revised, and approved by authorized representative of [Organization]. The use of artificial intelligence did not replace legal review, professional judgment, or the organization’s responsibility for the accuracy, appropriateness, and final content of this policy.

No confidential, privileged, personally identifiable, or student information was entered into a generative artificial intelligence system during the development of this policy.

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Other Resources

Statewide Ohio Government Policy

1. **State of Ohio Administrative Policy IT 17: Use of Artificial Intelligence in State of Ohio Solutions**
   This is the principal statewide executive branch policy. It addresses planning, approval, procurement, security, privacy, data classification, governance, and implementation of AI solutions by state agencies.
   https://das.ohio.gov/technology-and-strategy/policies/it-17

2. **State of Ohio AI Governance Operations Chart**
   This describes the roles of the statewide AI Council, agency leadership, information technology personnel, legal counsel, data officers, and other participants in the approval and oversight structure.
   https://das.ohio.gov/technology-and-strategy/policies/ai+governance+operations+chart

3. **State of Ohio IT 19: Data Governance**
   This is not exclusively an AI policy, but it is a useful companion because AI implementation depends heavily on data classification, ownership, access, quality, retention, and governance.
   https://das.ohio.gov/technology-and-strategy/policies/IT-19

Ohio Department of Transportation

4. **ODOT Policy 28-019(P): Generative AI Acceptable Use Policy**
   This is a particularly useful employee acceptable use example. It became effective August 13, 2024, and works in conjunction with statewide Policy IT 17.
   https://www.transportation.ohio.gov/about/agency-overview/policies-procedures/gen-ai-policy

5. **ODOT Generative AI Procedures and Guidelines**
   This companion document addresses the procedures employees must follow before purchasing, implementing, or using a generative AI application. It is useful because it demonstrates the distinction between a high-level policy and operational procedures.
   https://www.transportation.ohio.gov/about/agency-overview/policies-procedures/generative-ai-genai-procedures-and-guidelines

Ohio Public Schools

6. **Ohio Department of Education and Workforce AI Model Policy**
   This is the main state model for school districts, community schools, and STEM schools. It addresses AI literacy, stakeholder engagement, privacy, procurement, acceptable use, academic integrity, staff use, and implementation.
   https://education.ohio.gov/Topics/AI-in-Ohio-s-Education/Model-Policy

7. **ODEW AI in Ohio Education Resource Page & ODEW Model Policy**
   This is the broader landing page for state requirements, model policy materials, instructional resources, special education considerations, and funding information.
   https://education.ohio.gov/Topics/AI-in-Ohio-s-Education

8. **Ohio Revised Code Section 3301.24**
   This is the statutory authority requiring each Ohio school district, community school, and STEM school to adopt an AI policy by July 1, 2026.
   https://codes.ohio.gov/ohio-revised-code/section-3301.24

County Government

12. **Franklin County Microsoft Copilot Artificial Intelligence Policy**
    Franklin County's Automatic Data Processing Board adopted this policy through Resolution 25-083 on November 10, 2025. The policy begins on page 8 of the linked board packet. It requires training, fact checking, disclosure of AI use, records retention compliance, and acknowledgement that Copilot can access information stored throughout the employee's Microsoft 365 environment. It also states that the policy is an interim, product specific policy.
    https://www.franklincountyohio.gov/files/assets/public/v/3/data-center/documents/2025-11-10-data-board.pdf

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Ohio Courts and Legal Practice

13. **Eighth District Court of Appeals Local Rule 13.4: Use of Generative Artificial Intelligence**
    Effective March 2, 2026, this rule requires attorneys and self represented parties using generative AI in court filings to review, validate, and correct AI generated material. Signing the filing constitutes certification of compliance. Violations may result in sanctions.
    https://appeals.cuyahogacounty.gov/docs/default-source/announcements/030226-amendmentannouncement.pdf?sfvrsn=cb9612e5_1

14. **Supreme Court of Ohio Artificial Intelligence Resource Library**
    This is guidance and a research repository, not an independently binding statewide court AI policy. It compiles Ohio ethics materials, disciplinary cases, judicial conduct considerations, court policies from other states, educational resources, and links to State of Ohio IT 17.
    https://www.supremecourt.ohio.gov/courts/services-to-courts/artificial-intelligence-resource-library/

15. The **Ohio Board of Professional Conduct's 2026 Artificial Intelligence for Lawyers and Judicial Officers Ethics Guide** similarly emphasizes independent verification, protection of client information, appropriate supervision, and the continued responsibility of the lawyer for the final work product.
    https://www.bpc.ohio.gov/_files/ugd/c6a571_4e12e5f9a0104eaebe9351007c899b4f.pdf

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Recent Cases and Enforcement Developments

1. **Mobley v. Workday, Inc., No. 23-cv-00770-RFL, N.D. California, May 16, 2025**

Applicants alleged that Workday's artificial intelligence based applicant recommendation system discriminated based on age, race, and disability. The court granted preliminary collective certification of the Age Discrimination in Employment Act claim for notice purposes.

Operational lesson: This was not a final determination that Workday or its customers discriminated. It nevertheless demonstrates the litigation risk surrounding automated applicant ranking and the possibility that a technology vendor may face direct liability based on its role in employment decisions. Employers should not assume that purchasing a vendor product transfers responsibility to the vendor. Employers should understand what the system scores, preserve applicant data, validate results, and monitor rejection patterns.

2. **EEOC v. iTutorGroup, Inc., E.D. New York settlement announced September 11, 2023**

The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission alleged that application software automatically rejected female applicants age 55 or older and male applicants age 60 or older. The matter settled for $365,000 and injunctive relief.

Operational lesson: The matter settled and therefore did not produce a judicial merits decision. It remains a useful enforcement example because the discrimination allegedly occurred through a programmed screening rule rather than an individualized human decision. Automated rejection criteria must be tested before deployment and monitored after implementation.

3. **Whiting v. City of Athens, Tennessee, Sixth Circuit, 2026 U.S. App. LEXIS 7479**

The Sixth Circuit identified more than two dozen nonexistent citations, inaccurate quotations, and misrepresentations in appellate briefs. The court required the attorneys to reimburse appellate attorney fees, imposed double costs, ordered each attorney to pay a $15,000 punitive sanction, and referred the matter for possible disciplinary proceedings.

Operational lesson: The opinion is particularly significant in Ohio because it comes from the Sixth Circuit. No pleading, report, investigation summary, arbitration brief, or other official document should contain a citation or quotation that the responsible professional has not personally reviewed and verified.

4. **State v. Coleman, 2026-Ohio-965, Eleventh District Court of Appeals, March 20, 2026**

A paralegal uploaded case materials to a public generative artificial intelligence platform. Fabricated transcript quotations were incorporated into an application to reopen a criminal appeal. The attorney did not adequately verify the filing or take prompt corrective action after the inaccuracies were identified.

The court found failures involving competence, candor, supervision of nonlawyer staff, and verification. Sanctions included a $2,000 monetary sanction, striking the filing, removing counsel from the representation, notification and certification requirements, and other remedial measures.

Operational lesson: A policy prohibiting certain uses of artificial intelligence was not enough. The court emphasized active supervision and meaningful review. Employers and law offices need training, technical controls, supervision, and verification procedures, not merely a written directive.

5. **In re M.A.L.B., 2026-Ohio-2289, Fourth District Court of Appeals, May 26, 2026**

The court initially struck a brief containing nonexistent or unsupported authorities. A replacement brief continued to misquote statutes and misrepresent authorities. The court dismissed the appeal and stated that it suspected the citation problems resulted from unverified artificial intelligence use.

Operational lesson: Replacing fictitious citations with real citations does not solve the problem when the authorities still do not support the stated proposition. Citation verification requires confirming existence, quotation accuracy, holding, subsequent history, and applicability.

6. **LNU v. Blanche, Ninth Circuit, No. 24-4790, June 3, 2026**

The Ninth Circuit sanctioned attorneys for filing briefs containing nonexistent cases, misattributed quotations, and substantial misrepresentations, and for failing to be candid about the source of the inaccuracies.

The court expressly distinguished between using artificial intelligence and filing inaccurate material. The use of artificial intelligence in research or drafting was not itself the sanctionable event. The violation occurred when attorneys signed, filed, and continued to advocate inaccurate submissions.

Conference point: Artificial intelligence does not create a separate or reduced standard of professional responsibility.

Operational lesson: Policies should focus on verification, accountability, candor, supervision, and prompt correction rather than attempting to ban all artificial intelligence assistance.

IT-17 Use of Artificial Intelligence in State of Ohio Solutions

https://das.ohio.gov/technology-and-strategy/policies/it-17

State of Ohio Administrative Policy

No: IT-17 Information Technology

Effective: January 5, 2026

Issued By: Kathleen C. Madden, Director

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1. Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to provide statewide planning, implementation, procurement, security, privacy, and governance requirements for the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI). The policy authorizes the implementation of AI, while establishing an operational framework that will assist in protecting Ohioans' Data and the Integrity and Quality of the information delivered through AI solutions. All defined terms are capitalized and a link to the glossary of definitions is found in section IV.

2. Scope

This policy applies to all state agencies, boards, and commissions under the authority of the Governor (collectively referred to as Agency or Agencies).

3. Policy

While AI can deliver significant business value to the State of Ohio, responsible implementation requires a deliberate and detailed approach. Agencies considering the implementation of AI must ensure that processes are in place to effectively manage the technology and achieve the desired results. This policy details the requirements for integrating AI technologies into state solutions.

1. AI Solution Development

As part of AI planning and implementation, Agencies must follow the iterative activities outlined below:

1. Defining a formal process for identifying, documenting, reviewing, and approving AI use cases. Agency use cases and solutions must align with the core AI Principles.
2. Submission of Agency approved use cases to the AI Council as appropriate (refer to section F. for additional information).
3. Designing an approved use case pilot prior to a full production implementation.
4. Conducting any necessary data quality testing for pilot and full production of AI deployments, including:
    a. Reviewing and testing any AI generated output for proper functionality and security.
    b. Testing the Data sets for AI Models to determine errors related to bias and variance.
    c. Testing activities must be properly documented.

5. Defining the hand-off criteria to determine when judgment and decisions from an AI solution are transitioned to a human.
6. Charging human operators with reviewing AI outputs for accuracy, appropriateness, privacy, and security before being acted upon or disseminated. AI outputs must not be assumed to be truthful, credible, or accurate.
7. Ensuring that a human verification process is in place for decisions made by AI that have a legal, financial, human resources, legislative, organizational, or regulatory impact.
8. Ongoing monitoring of AI generated output to validate that errors or Data bias are not introduced as the Model evolves.

2. Workforce Requirements

Agencies must ensure that the workforce understands the requirements for appropriate AI use as outlined below. To assist in this effort, the Ohio Department of Administrative Services (DAS), in coordination with Agencies, must establish AI training for the state's workforce.

1. Authorization for Use: The use of Generative AI for work purposes must be approved by the Agency director or designee and must be in alignment with the requirements defined by the AI Council (refer to section III.F. for additional details).
2. Authorized Solutions: Only State-Managed or Governed Data Ecosystem, and AI Council approved, Generative AI solutions can be used to conduct state business.
3. Disclosing Use: When Generative AI is used to create a deliverable for Agency use, employees, contractors, and temporary personnel must be required to disclose this information to their Agency (e.g., written documentation, research, correspondence, and software code).
4. Importance of Verifying Accuracy: Review, revise, and fact check via multiple sources any output from a Generative AI solution before use. The human user is responsible for any material created with AI support.
5. Ethical Considerations: The training must create awareness regarding the ethical considerations surrounding the use of AI, in particular, Generative AI.
    a. AI outputs must not be used to impersonate individuals or organizations without their written permission.
    b. Material that is inappropriate for public release must not be entered as input to AI solutions unless explicitly approved by the Agency director, chief legal counsel, chief information officer or designee for the intended use case.
    c. Generative AI can make assumptions based on past stereotypes and the information provided may need to be corrected.
6. Secure Use: The security, privacy, and Data concerns surrounding the use of AI.

3. AI Procurements

When seeking to procure an AI solution, Agencies must adhere to the following requirements:

1. AI procurement solicitations offered by suppliers must align with the requirements of this policy.
2. All AI software services, even if they are free or part of a pilot or proof-of-concept project, must be reviewed by the Agency to ensure the software meets all necessary security and privacy requirements. This requirement applies to downloadable software, Software as a Service (SaaS), web-based services, browser plug-ins, and smartphone apps.
    a. The following elements must be captured and evaluated for any AI solution during the procurement process:
        i. Technical/design details of the AI system and algorithms
        ii. How the AI system was trained (including personnel and documentation)
        iii. How the AI system works (i.e., what are the inputs and outputs)
        iv. Data sources (documentation of all Data sources)
        v. Audit Logging
        vi. Change Management details and documentation that impact the AI system algorithms (i.e., decisions, inputs, outputs)
        vii. Testing practices and results
        viii. Timeframe documentation (captures time periods of testing, governance approval, deployment, and other critical milestones of the AI solution)
    b. New AI software requests must be submitted for review and possible approval to the AI Council (refer to section F.).
3. Agency contracts must prohibit suppliers from using State of Ohio materials or Data in Generative AI solutions, unless such use is explicitly approved by the Agency director or designee.
4. Procuring Agencies must ensure suppliers disclose the utilization of Generative AI when producing works owned by the state or the integration of Generative AI in products used by the state.
5. Procuring Agencies must submit to the AI Council the Supplier Assessment for Generative AI Solutions form, completed by the supplier, in the following circumstances:
    a. statewide contracts for Generative AI solutions;
    b. custom Generative AI solutions;
    c. public facing Generative AI solutions; and

    d. when requested by DAS.

6. Procuring Agencies must perform due diligence to ensure proper licensure of Model training Data for all Generative AI services using non-state Data.
7. All copyrightable works owned by the state that are created with the involvement of Generative AI must include an accompanying annotation sufficient to meet the requirements of the U.S. Copyright Office for Works Containing Material Generated by Artificial Intelligence (88 FR 16190). The annotation should include at least the Generative AI technology used and a description of how it was used to create the work.

4. Security and Privacy

Agencies must ensure that AI solutions adhere to state IT security and privacy laws, policies, and standards. In addition, Agencies must comply with the following requirements:

1. Security: Agencies must implement the following security controls when designing AI solutions:
    a. Conduct a risk assessment of a proposed AI solution, including considerations of exploitation by malicious actors or inadvertent uses by authorized users. Determine appropriate security controls to mitigate against such risk.
    b. Establish controls to prevent adversarial learning attacks that try to influence or corrupt the Data Model by detecting abnormal network traffic.
    c. Ensure that authentication and authorization controls align with state and Agency policy.
    d. Confidential Data, including Personally Identifiable Information (PII) and Confidential Personal Information, must not be input into unconstrained Generative AI solutions and publicly accessible service or training Models.
2. Privacy: Agencies must protect the privacy of individuals when using AI solutions. This includes, but is not limited to, implementing the following privacy controls:
    a. AI Models must not be used to collect or store PII without the consent of the individual.
    b. AI solutions must only collect, use, share, and store Data in accordance with federal and state privacy and personal Data laws and policies.
    c. The AI solution must disclose to the user that they are interacting with a State of Ohio AI solution and the Data sources for the information must be provided.

5. Data Governance

The State of Ohio Chief Data Officer (CDO) Council must be responsible for establishing and maintaining statewide Data governance requirements, including those for AI solutions. The requirements must define information management controls, procedures, and processes for Data set selection, evaluation, and preparation. The controls must address, but not be limited to, the following principles:

1. Data Availability, Quality, and Integrity are critical for AI systems. AI systems must not be trained with Data that is biased, inaccurate, incomplete, or misleading.
2. AI systems must only have access to the Data sources they need for the specific context.
3. Data must be regulated through established Data sharing agreements that identify the applicable federal and state laws and policies for the AI solution use case. The agreements must outline the acceptable terms for Data use, storage, and transmission.
4. Data sources used with AI Models must be properly parsed into multiple, randomized Data sets consisting of training, cross-validation, and test Data.
5. Data validation procedures must be in place to select, analyze, clean, and certify the Integrity of the Data sources that will be used for AI automation solutions.
6. Data Steward, Data Owner, and Data Custodian roles must be responsible for maintaining the Quality and Integrity of Agency AI Data Models.
7. Every proposed Generative AI solution's Data Model must receive Agency executive and data governance approval followed by the AI Council (refer to section F.) prior to implementation.

6. AI Council

DAS must establish a multi-Agency AI Council to govern the statewide use of Generative AI solutions. The AI Council must include representatives from the Governor's Office; DAS and Agency business, human resources, information technology, security, privacy, Data analytics, and legal functional areas; and the DAS Office of Opportunity and Accessibility.

The AI Council must provide oversight for the following:

1. Directing the establishment of and the ongoing use of a statewide sandbox environment to safely explore the use of Generative AI to enhance the experience of the workforce and Ohioans.
2. Examining the social, economic, and legal impacts of AI adoption on the workforce, Ohioans, and business operations.
3. Defining the legal requirements for the use of third-party AI services, contracts, licenses, agreements, and specific AI solution use cases.
4. Establishing the framework for evaluating and authorizing the use of AI technology (e.g., architecture frameworks, software, infrastructure, and relevant tools).

5. Developing and maintaining a statewide central repository that captures approved Generative AI use cases.

6. Documenting protocols and procedures for assessing and handling inquiries or incidents regarding AI system anomalies.

7. Auditing AI current and future solutions to ensure alignment with the requirements of this policy.

4. Definitions

All defined terms are capitalized within the policy and the online glossary of definitions can be found at IT Policy Glossary - Department of Administrative Services.

5. Authority

ORC 125.18

6. Resources

- IT-13 Data Classification - Department of Administrative Services
- IT-14 Data Encryption and Securing Confidential Data - Department of Administrative Services
- IT-19 Data Governance - Department of Administrative Services
- ITS-SEC-02 Enterprise Security Controls Framework - Department of Administrative Services
- State of Ohio IT Hub - Generative AI (Supplier Assessment for Generative AI Solutions Form)
- National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) Special Publication 800-53, Security and Privacy Controls for Federal Information Systems and Organizations
- AI Risk Management Framework - NIST
- NIST-AI-600-1, Artificial Intelligence Risk Management Framework: Generative Artificial Intelligence Profile (PDF)
- NIST AI Resource Center

7. Inquiries

Direct inquiries about this policy to:

State IT Policy Manager
Office of Information Technology
Ohio Department of Administrative Services
30 East Broad Street, 39th Floor
Columbus, Ohio 43215
1-614-644-6860 | DAS.State.ITPolicy.Manager@das.ohio.gov

State of Ohio Administrative Policies may be found online at Policy Finder - Department of Administrative Services

8. Revision History

This policy must be reviewed no less than every two years and updated as needed.

Date	Description of Change
12/04/2023	Original Policy
01/05/2026	Clarified the workforce requirements. Removed the references to underfitting and overfitting. Added a requirement that only state-managed or governed data ecosystem and AI Council approved, generative AI solutions can be used to conduct state business. Removed the data input requirement as it was replaced with the new authorized solutions requirement. Added requirements for when a Supplier Assessment for Generative AI Solutions form must be completed. Updated the data model requirements to require data governance approval. Replaced sensitive data with confidential data and updated the resources and terminology.
01/05/2028	Scheduled policy review.

Other Resources

Innovate US courses and workshops

InnovateUS At Your Own Pace Page

National Institute of Technology and Standards (NIST)

NIST AI Risk Management Framework

NIST AI Resource Center

Mastering the ORC 124.34 Order Form: Step-by-Step Guidance, Best Practices, and Common Pitfalls to Avoid

Raymond M. Geis, Esq.
Administrative Law Judge
SERB/SPBR, State of Ohio

1

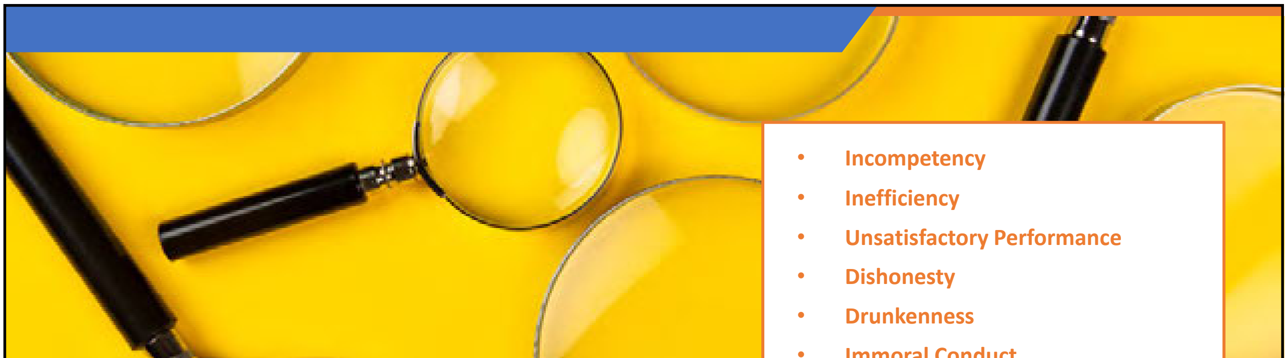
WHAT MUST THE R.C. 124.34 ORDER INCLUDE?

Facts and Law! Why? -- Due Process One cannot defend against the unknown!

- **What act or omission (what did the employee do/not do)?**
- **When and/or where?**
- **What violation does it constitute?**
  - ✓**Recite "particular" agency work rule(s) OR**
  - ✓**Recite one or more R.C. 124.34 grounds**
  - ✓**OR recite both**

2

2



- Incompetency
- Inefficiency
- Unsatisfactory Performance
- Dishonesty
- Drunkenness
- Immoral Conduct
- Insubordination
- Discourteous Treatment of the Public
- Neglect of Duty
- Violation of any Policy or Work Rule of the Officer's or Employee's Appointing Authority

R.C. 124.34 violations
*pre-existing standard
*reasonably known to guilty employee

3

3

INCORPORATION BY REFERENCE ("this" includes "that")

Incorporating facts from an Investigative Report

Is the referential document or addendum clearly labeled in the R.C. 124.34 Order?

Incorporating Agency work rules

Does the order clearly articulate which "particular" rules of the agency were violated?

Guilty of one or more charges

Are the facts and rules recited in the R.C. 124.34 Order included in the notice of charges leading to the Loudermill hearing?

4

4

INCORPORATION BY REFERENCE AND ADDENDA

Methods and Examples

SEE ADDENDUM
- ADDENDUM TO R.C. 124.34 Order to Ariel Hassle

AS FOUND IN…
- Pre-Discipline Report by Percy Cute 1-1-29 (ATTACHED)

ATTACHED TO AND MADE PART OF THIS ORDER
- Attachment to R.C. 124.34 Order to Xavier Zelf

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O.A.C. 124-3-01 | REQUIREMENTS OF "124.34 ORDERS"

(A) "124.34 Orders" may be affirmed only if **each** of the following criteria are satisfied:

(1) Must be **served on the employee** and contain the **original signature** of the appointing authority and the **date of signature**. (If the appointing authority is a public body, the order must contain the signatures of a majority of the members, OR a certified copy of the resolution adopting the order; and

(2) Must be served **on or before the effective date** of the action; and

(3) Must contain **a list of particulars** showing what the employee did/did not do in violation of something; and

(4) The appointing authority can demonstrate all of the above.

(B) Appointing authority can refile if the order is disaffirmed for lack of compliance with the above.

6

6

O.A.C. 124-3-02 | SERVICE OF “124.34 ORDERS”

(A) “Service” means:

(1) The “124.34 Order” is **personally served** upon the employee; or

(2) The “124.34 Order” is delivered to the employee's last known address, by **certified mail with electronic delivery confirmation**; or

(3) The “124.34 Order” is **left at the usual place of residence**, or last known address of the affected employee, **with an adult** residing therein.

(B) If service fails -- send by **ordinary mail**, evidenced by a **certificate of mailing**. The “124.34 Order" will be **deemed served** on the **third calendar day after the order is mailed.**

(C) **Employees are responsible** for keeping their **address current** with their employer. The **burden is on the employee** to prove the appointing authority was notified of a change in the employee's address but sent the “124.34 Order” to the wrong address.

7

7

CHECKLIST: DID YOU … ?

Use last known address?

Do you keep a business record of the employee-provided address?

Make effective date after signing?

Did you allow enough time to resend by regular mail if it comes back unclaimed?

Include Page 2

Notice of right to appeal or comparable form?

8

8

GOOD ORDER
OR
BAD ORDER?

Order of Removal, Reduction, Suspension, Fine, Involuntary Disability Separation

Herb E. Side

Important: See Next Page for Employer and Employee Instructions.

9

9

GOOD ORDER
OR
BAD ORDER?

Order of Removal, Reduction, Suspension, Fine, Involuntary Disability Separation

Ellis Dee
(employee name)

This will notify you that you are: ☑ Removed ☐ Suspended ☐ Suspended (working) ☐ Fined
☐ Involuntary Disability Separated ☐ Reduced in Pay

from your position of Cannabis/Marijuana Compliance Supervisor
(employee position title)

and/or reduced to new position of ______ effective February 6, 2030
(new position title - if applicable) (date)

The reason for this action is that you have been guilty of: (List relevant R.C. 124.34 disciplinary offense(s) and facts.)
Note: Section not applicable for involuntary disability separation.

You violated the State of Ohio and Agency Drug Free Workplace Policy when you repeatedly inhaled or ingested regulated product and became under the influence during the period January 1, 2029, through the present. You deceptively claimed you were testing the product for purity.

Notice of pre-disciplinary/separation hearing given to employee: February 1, 2030
(date)

10

10

Poll Question

Is this specific enough to identify what the employee did wrong?

You violated the State of Ohio and Agency Drug Free Workplace Policy when you repeatedly inhaled or ingested regulated product and became under the influence during the period January 1, 2029, through the present. You deceptively claimed you were testing the product for purity.

A) Yes

B) No

C) Maybe

D) I don't know!

11

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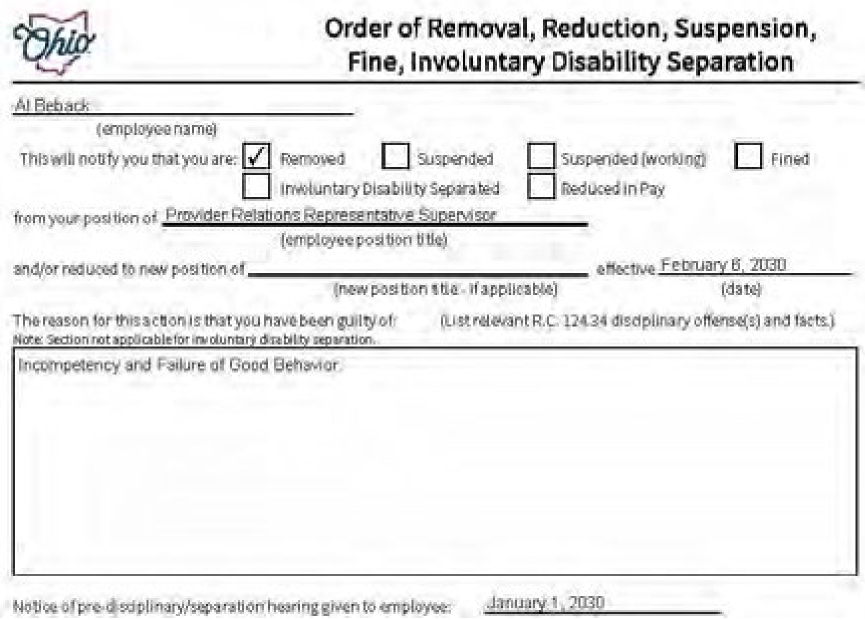
GOOD ENOUGH OR NOT ENOUGH?

12

12

GOOD ENOUGH OR NOT ENOUGH?



Order of Removal, Reduction, Suspension, Fine, Involuntary Disability Separation

Al Beback
(employee name)

This will notify you that you are: ☑ Removed ☐ Suspended ☐ Suspended (working) ☐ Fined ☐ Involuntary Disability Separated ☐ Reduced in Pay

from your position of Provider Relations Representative Supervisor
(employee position title)

and/or reduced to new position of ____________ effective February 6, 2030
(new position title - if applicable) (date)

The reason for this action is that you have been guilty of: (List relevant R.C. 124.34 disciplinary offense(s) and facts.)
Note: Section not applicable for involuntary disability separation.

Incompetency and Failure of Good Behavior

Notice of pre-disciplinary/separation hearing given to employee: January 1, 2030

13

13

Poll Question

Is this specific enough to identify what the employee did wrong?

Incompetency and failure of good behavior.

A) Yes
B) No
C) Maybe
D) I don't know!

14

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O.A.C. 124-13-03 | REQUEST TO MAKE DEFINITE AND CERTAIN

(A) If Appellant requests, Appellee must make the factual allegations of a “124.34 Order” definite and certain

(B) Appellant needs to seek specific information

(C) Timelines: request > or = 42 days before RH; Response > or = 28 days before RH (remedy for lateness is exclusion of all evidence which would be used to support the “124.34 Order”)

(D) Board may compel response from the Appellee

(E) Board may determine adequacy of response (remedy again - is exclusion of evidence – if found inadequate)

CASE LAW: [The employee] was under no obligation to ensure that ODRC met its burden by directing it to add a list of particulars and thereby cure a defect in the order. ODRC's argument incorrectly shifts the burden to the employee to point out any procedural defects before the close of ODRC's case. *Thomas-Abel v. Ohio Dept. of Rehab. & Corr., 10th Dist.* Franklin No. 08AP-46, 2008-Ohio-3302, ¶ 20

Practice Pointer: A “124.34 Order” should stand up on its own to avoid summary disaffirmance.

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HARMLESS ERROR?

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FATAL ERROR?

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EXAMPLE 1 – ADEQUATE OR NOT?

BEFORE THE STATE PERSONNEL BOARD OF REVIEW

Al Beback	Case No. 2030-REM-01-0001
v.	
Bureau of Citizen Wellbeing	Judge Fake Example I

APPELLEE'S RESPONSE TO APPELLANT'S REQUEST
TO MAKE DEFINITE AND CERTAIN PURSUANT TO O.A.C. 124-13-03

Appellee Bureau of Citizen Wellbeing ("BCW") responds to Appellant's Request to Make Definite and Certain as follows:

On or about December 12, 2029, Appellant Beback made an offensive statement to a care recipient. The recipient's wellbeing declined as a result of his becoming reasonably offended. The statement was pejorative in reference to one's municipal origin and is considered demeaning towards residents of that city according to its widely held community standards. This is considered failure of good behavior and/or incompetency.

18

18

Poll Question

Is this specific enough to satisfy the Request to Make Definite and Certain?

On or about December 12, 2029, Appellant Beback made an offensive statement to a care recipient. The recipient's wellbeing declined as a result of his becoming reasonably offended. The statement was pejorative in reference to one's municipal origin and is considered demeaning towards residents of that city according to its widely held community standards. This is considered failure of good behavior and/or incompetency.

A) Yes

B) No

C) Maybe

D) I don't know!

19

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EXAMPLE 1 CRITIQUE

Conclusory Statements

Non-descript (not particular)

Ambiguous terms

20

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EXAMPLE 2 – ADEQUATE OR NOT?

BEFORE THE STATE PERSONNEL BOARD OF REVIEW

Al Beback — Case No. 2030-REM-01-0001

v.

Bureau of Citizen Wellbeing — Judge Fake Example II

APPELLEE'S RESPONSE TO APPELLANT'S REQUEST TO MAKE DEFINITE AND CERTAIN PURSUANT TO O.A.C. 124-13-03

Appellee Bureau of Citizen Wellbeing ("BCW") responds to Appellant's request to make definite and certain as follows:

In December 2029, Appellant was overheard asking a customer "Where are you from, Cleveland? The 'Mistake on the Lake'?" or similar words. He uttered this statement as a response to the customer asking a question about whether she could apply for wellbeing benefits at the BCW. The customer was from Cleveland, Ohio and declared that she was offended. This constitutes discourteous treatment of the public.

21

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Poll Question

Is this specific enough to satisfy the Request to Make Definite and Certain?

In December 2029, Appellant was overheard asking a customer "Where are you from, Cleveland? The 'Mistake on the Lake'?" or similar words. He uttered this statement as a response to the customer asking a question about whether she could apply for wellbeing benefits at the BCW. The customer was from Cleveland, Ohio and declared that she was offended. This constitutes discourteous treatment of the public.

A) Yes

B) No

C) Maybe

D) I don't know!

22

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EXAMPLE 3 – ADEQUATE OR NOT?

BEFORE THE STATE PERSONNEL BOARD OF REVIEW

Al Beback — Case No. 2030-REM-01-0001

v.

Bureau of Citizen Wellbeing — Judge Fake Example III

APPELLEE'S RESPONSE TO APPELLANT'S REQUEST TO MAKE DEFINITE AND CERTAIN PURSUANT TO O.A.C. 124-13-03

Appellee Bureau of Citizen Wellbeing ("BCW") responds to Appellant's request to make definite and certain as follows:

Appellant made an uncouth comment to a customer on the phone, which was discourteous treatment of the public, on December 12, 2029 at 9:30 a.m.

23

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Poll Question

Is this specific enough to satisfy the Request to Make Definite and Certain?

Appellant made an uncouth comment to a customer on the phone, which was discourteous treatment of the public on December 12, 2029, at 9:30 a.m.

A) Yes

B) No

C) Maybe

D) I don't know!

24

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R.C. 124.11(D)3(a) Forfeiture Letters

Dual Purpose Letter

Unclassified Removal/Revocation Letter <u>with</u> Termination of Fallback Rights

Name the violation

Add a brief statement of Fact to support violation

You have the right to appeal this decision

You may appeal this decision to terminate your right to resume a previously held classified position to a court of competent jurisdiction. Consult legal counsel regarding time limits and methods for making an appeal.

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*PSA from the **D**epartment of **U**nderachieving **H**uman-Resources **M**anagers "DUHM"*

- Don't Make DUHM Mistakes!
  - Don't recite the entire statute in the order and forget to state facts that constitute the violation!
  - Don't sign the order with someone else's name than the actual Appointing Authority ("AA") (usually the Director)!
  - Don't use an unauthorized person to sign in the name of the AA!
  - Do preserve a WRITTEN delegation of authority from the AA to the signer of the order to sign as the AA for R.C. 124.34 Orders!

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1) Where can I find a fillable R.C. 124.34 Order form online?

PBR Website > Forms Section

https://pbr.ohio.gov/documents-and-decisions/forms-and-guidebooks/order-of-involuntary-disability-separation-form

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2) Are there any instructions on how to fill out the R.C. 124.34 Order form?

Yes, page 2 of the form has instructions for the employer and employee.

29

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3) How many copies of the R.C. 124.34 Order should I make and how?

At least one original copy for the employee plus a "true" copy or original duplicate for the file.

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4) How can I show an order was personally delivered?

Have the employee sign an acknowledgement. If the employee refuses, have two witnesses attest to the personal delivery. Video or photographic evidence is also admissible.

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5) What if the employee throws the order back at me or runs away from me when I try to serve it?

As long as the order was physically left with the employee, it has been served. You do not need to physically contact the employee with the order.

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6) My employer refuses to give me copy of my removal, can I still appeal?

Yes, go online to https://pbr.ohio.gov/filing-an-appeal and submit your appeal electronically!

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7) My employee won't accept personal service (e.g. won't meet with me or come to work), and I cannot get certified mail delivery confirmation, (i.e. postal service states attempted delivery, delivery failed or unclaimed) or USPS will no longer deliver mail to the address.

Send it by regular mail (to the last known address on file) and create a certificate of mailing. It will be considered deemed served on the 3rd day after mailing, according to O.A.C. 124-3-02(8)

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8) I knocked on the door at my employee's last known address, and a teenager answered. I handed him the order and told him to give it to his Mom. Mom appealed. Now I wonder if he was at least 18, is this a problem?

Yes, if the minor testifies that he was not an adult at the time he was served with his Mom's order, the order may be disaffirmed at the hearing, in which case the employee can be served with a new order at the hearing.

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9) My boss is extremely long-winded and wrote an epic order consisting of 14 pages of pompous legal jargon in 10-point font with single spacing. Is this a problem?

It could be a problem especially if the pages aren't numbered and labeled correctly with the proper addendum language, most of the order could be stricken.

36

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10) I found a material mistake on an already issued order. What should I do?

Have the order rescinded with notice to the employee. Issue and serve a new order with a new effective date (which must be on or after when the new order is successfully served)!

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Order of Removal, Reduction, Suspension, Fine, Involuntary Disability Separation

____
(employee name)

This will notify you that you are: ☐ Removed ☐ Suspended ☐ Suspended (working) ☐ Fined ☐ Involuntary Disability Separated ☐ Reduced in Pay

from your position of ______________________________
(employee position title)

and/or reduced to new position of ______________________________ effective ______________
(new position title - if applicable) (date)

The reason for this action is that you have been guilty of: (List relevant R.C. 124.34 disciplinary offense(s) and facts.)
Note: Section not applicable for involuntary disability separation.

Notice of pre-disciplinary/separation hearing given to employee: ______________
(date)

Pre-disciplinary/separation hearing held or waived: ______________
(date)

Employee allowed to meet with employer: ☐ Yes ☐ No

Order hand-delivered to employee: ______________
(date, if hand-delivered)

If employee is suspended, list dates of suspension: ______________

Signed at ______________________________ , Ohio ______________
(city) (date)

Countersignature, if applicable	Signature of Appointing Authority
Countersignature, if applicable	Name and Title of Appointing Authority
Countersignature, if applicable	Department, Agency, or Institution

Important: See Next Page for Employer and Employee Instructions.

“SECTION 124.34 ORDER” FORM

EMPLOYER AND EMPLOYEE INSTRUCTIONS

IMPORTANT INSTRUCTIONS TO THE APPOINTING AUTHORITY

(1) Actual signature means that each Order served on the employee must contain the actual signature of the Appointing Authority. Appointing Authority means the actual appointing officers of the department or agency, as well as any approving officer or board required by law. If the appointment of an employee requires the approval of a board or commission, then a certified copy of the resolution of such board or commission approving the action must accompany this Order unless the actual signatures of the members of the board or commission appear on the front of the Order served on the employee.

(2) The Appointing Authority must set forth in detail the particular acts and circumstances constituting the offense(s) charged. Evidence presented on appeal must be limited to that which relates to the charge(s) made; hence, the Appointing Authority must set forth the charge(s) broadly enough to encompass all the evidence the Appointing Authority intends to offer. It is equally important that the Appointing Authority fully state the ground(s) for the action.

(3) The Appointing Authority MUST provide an original of the Order to the employee on or before the effective date. The date on which the Order is served is the date the Order is delivered to the employee by hand or to the employee’s last known mailing address by certified United States mail, whichever occurs first.

IMPORTANT INSTRUCTIONS TO THE EMPLOYEE

If you wish to appeal this action, then you must file your written appeal with the State Personnel Board of Review (SPBR) at 65 East State Street, 12th Floor, Columbus, Ohio 43215-4213. **Your appeal must be received and time-stamped by SPBR on or before the tenth calendar day from the date the order was served.** For the purposes of your appeal, the date on which the Order is served is the date the Order is delivered to you by hand or to your last known mailing address, as maintained by your Appointing Authority, by certified United States mail, whichever occurs first. You may obtain SPBR’s Administrative Rules by writing the above office or by telephoning SPBR at (614) 466-7046. You may also obtain the rules from SPBR’s website at https://pbr.ohio.gov.

> **Example of the deadline to file an appeal:**
> An employee is given a 40-hour suspension. The suspension is to begin on October 11 and run five working days through October 15. The employee is served with the forthcoming suspension Order on October 8. The employee has until October 18 to file a written appeal (10 days from the date the employee was served with the Order).

Reminder: If you are employed by a municipality or township that has a civil service commission, your appeal lies with that commission and not SPBR.

You may contact SPBR at (614) 466-7046 regarding the above information or regarding SPBR’s jurisdiction, or you may visit our website at https://pbr.ohio.gov.

Classified vs. Unclassified Employment:

Understanding the Differences, Common Missteps, and Practical Applications

Rory P. Callahan, Esq.
Administrative Law Judge
SERB/SPBR, State of Ohio

Lane C. Hagar, Esq.
Staff Attorney/Administrative Law Judge
SERB, State of Ohio

STATE PERSONNEL BOARD OF REVIEW
OHIO

1

Classified v. Unclassified Employment:

Understanding the Differences, Common Missteps, and Practical Applications

2

2

Classified or Unclassified?

3

3

Why Employee Status Matters

4

4

Unclassified? Acknowledgement and Waiver

- If employee is accepting an appointment or being newly hired into an unclassified position, if the employee signs an "acknowledgment and waiver" of unclassified status, employee will generally be prohibited from later claiming classified status. *Chubb v. Ohio Bur. Of Workers' Comp.,* 81 Ohio St.3d 275 (1998).

- Language: "[The employee] acknowledges that s/he will be assigned to work in ________ for [your Agency or Institution]. [The employee] understands that the work in this position is in the unclassified service and [the employee] serves at the pleasure of [the appointing authority]."

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R.C. 124.11(A) - Unclassified

- The civil service of the state and the several counties, cities, civil service townships, city health districts, general health districts, and city school districts of the state shall be divided into the unclassified service and the classified service.

- (A) The unclassified service shall comprise the following positions, which shall not be included in the classified service, and which shall be exempt from all examinations required by this chapter:

  - 33 subsections to R.C. 124.11(A)

6

6

R.C. 124.11(A) - Unclassified

- (A) (1) – Elected Officers / Persons appointed to fill vacancies in those Offices
- (A) (3) – Members of Boards / Commissions, Heads of Principal Departments, Boards, and Commissions Appointed by Governor or with Governor's consent;
- (A) (5) – Officers and Employees elected or appointed by either or both branches of the General Assembly and employees of the city legislative authority engaged in legislative duties;
- (A) (11) – Assistants to the AG, Special Counsel appointed by the AG, Assistants to County Prosecutors and City Directors of Law.

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R.C. 124.11(A) - Unclassified

- (A) (7) – All presidents, business managers, administrative officers, superintendents, assistant superintendents, principals, deans, assistant deans, instructors, teachers, and such employees as are engaged in educational or research duties connected with the public school system, colleges, and universities, as determined by the governing body of the public school system, colleges, and universities;
- (A) (8) – Four clerical and administrative support employees for each of the elective state officers, four clerical and administrative support employees for each board of county commissioners and one such employee for each county commissioner, and four clerical and administrative support employees for other elective officers and each of the principal appointive executive officers, boards, or commissions, except for civil service commissions, that are authorized to appoint such clerical and administrative support employees.

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R.C. 124.11(A) - Unclassified

- (A) (16) – Employees of the Governor's Office;
- (A) (17) – Fire Chiefs and Chiefs of Police in civil service townships appointed by boards of township trustees;
- (A) (27) – Seasonal Produce Graders and Gypsy Mothtrap Tenders.

9

9

R.C. 124.11(A) - Unclassified

- The Fiduciary / Administrative Exemption:
- (A) (9) - The deputies and assistants of state agencies authorized to act for and on behalf of the agency, or holding a fiduciary or administrative relation to that agency and those persons employed by and directly responsible to elected county officials or a county administrator and holding a fiduciary or administrative relationship to such elected county officials or county administrator . . .

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Fiduciary Exemption

- Ohio Administrative Code Section 124-1-02(I)

- "Fiduciary relationship" generally means a relationship where the appointing authority reposes a special confidence and trust in the integrity and fidelity of an employee to perform duties which could not be delegated to the average employee with knowledge of the proper procedures. These qualifications are over and above the technical competency requirements to perform the duties of the position. Whether one position occupies a fiduciary relationship to another is a question of fact to be determined by the board.

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Fiduciary Exemption

- Ohio Administrative Code Section 124-1-02(C)

- "Administrative relationship" generally means a relationship where an employee has substantial authority to initiate discretionary action and/or in which the appointing authority must rely on the employee's personal judgment and leadership abilities. The average employee would not possess such qualities or be delegated such discretionary authority. Whether one position occupies an administrative relationship to another is a question of fact to be determined by the board.

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Classified or Unclassified?

- The "Duties" Test
- Ohio Administrative Code Section 124-7-04
  - When an employee has been adversely affected as an unclassified employee, the burden of proving the unclassified status of the employee is on the appointing authority. The board will take evidence of the employee's duties over a reasonable period of time, which is generally defined as at least two calendar years immediately prior to the adverse action, provided that the employee was in an active work status during that time period.

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Quiz time!

14

Classified or Unclassified?

- Hypothetical: County Chief Deputy Dog Warden
- Unclassified pursuant to R.C. 124.11(A)(9)?
- Duties include: (A) supervision of personnel; (B) assist in developing procedures; (C) preparation of reports; (D) evaluate employees' work performance; (E) approve leave forms; and (F) make public appearances on behalf of the Executive."

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Classified or Unclassified?

- Hypothetical: Clerk for a City Auditor.
- Hired as part-time Clerk. After first year, the Deputy Auditor retired. As a result, the Auditor Clerk was assigned most of the same duties and responsibilities previously performed by Deputy Auditor. Job title is "Auditor Clerk."
- Auditor Clerk duties include: (A) signing documents on behalf of Auditor; (B) use a stamp with the Auditor's signature; (C) accesses and transfers funds from Auditor's bank account.

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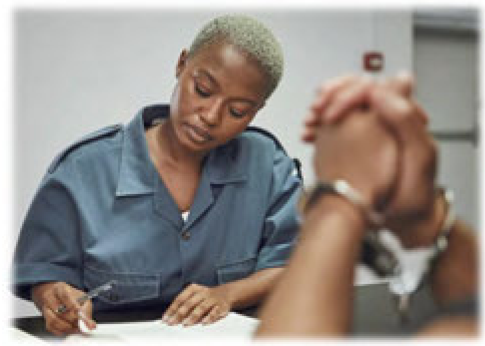
Classified or Unclassified?

- Hypothetical: Probation Officer for County Court of Common Pleas.
- Approximately 90% of duties are consistent with probation officer.
- However, 10% of employee's working time involved work of a grant administrator, fiscal officer, bailiff, purchasing agent, and payroll officer. These additional duties also occasionally included acting as the court's liaison to the County Auditor's office and County Commissioner's office.



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THANK YOU

Any Questions?

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18

Section 124.11 | Unclassified service - classified service.

https://codes.ohio.gov/ohio-revised-code/section-124.11

The civil service of the state and the several counties, cities, civil service townships, city health districts, general health districts, and city school districts of the state shall be divided into the unclassified service and the classified service.

(A) The unclassified service shall comprise the following positions, which shall not be included in the classified service, and which shall be exempt from all examinations required by this chapter:

(1) All officers elected by popular vote or persons appointed to fill vacancies in those offices;

(2) All election officers as defined in section 3501.01 of the Revised Code;

(3)(a) The members of all boards and commissions, and heads of principal departments, boards, and commissions appointed by the governor or by and with the governor's consent;

(b) The heads of all departments appointed by a board of county commissioners;

(c) The members of all boards and commissions and all heads of departments appointed by the mayor, or, if there is no mayor, such other similar chief appointing authority of any city or city school district;

Except as otherwise provided in division (A)(17) or (C) of this section, this chapter does not exempt the chiefs of police departments and chiefs of fire departments of cities or civil service townships from the competitive classified service.

(4) The members of county or district licensing boards or commissions and boards of revision, and not more than five deputy county auditors;

(5) All officers and employees elected or appointed by either or both branches of the general assembly, and employees of the city legislative authority engaged in legislative duties;

(6) All commissioned, warrant, and noncommissioned officers and enlisted persons in the Ohio organized militia, including military appointees in the adjutant general's department;

(7)(a) All presidents, business managers, administrative officers, superintendents, assistant superintendents, principals, deans, assistant deans, instructors, teachers, and such employees as are engaged in educational or research duties connected with the public school system, colleges, and universities, as determined by the governing body of the public school system, colleges, and universities;

(b) The library staff of any library in the state supported wholly or in part at public expense.

(8) Four clerical and administrative support employees for each of the elective state officers, four clerical and administrative support employees for each board of county commissioners and one such employee for each county commissioner, and four clerical and administrative support employees for other elective officers and each of the principal appointive executive officers, boards, or commissions, except for civil service commissions, that are authorized to appoint such clerical and administrative support employees;

(9) The deputies and assistants of state agencies authorized to act for and on behalf of the agency, or holding a fiduciary or administrative relation to that agency and those persons employed by and directly responsible to elected county officials or a county administrator and holding a fiduciary or administrative relationship to such elected county officials or county administrator, and the employees of such county officials whose fitness would be impracticable to determine by competitive examination, provided that division (A)(9) of this section shall not affect those persons in county employment in the classified service as of September 19, 1961. Nothing in division (A)(9) of this section applies to any position in a county department of job and family services created pursuant to Chapter 329. of the Revised Code.

(10) Bailiffs, constables, official stenographers, and commissioners of courts of record, deputies of clerks of the courts of common pleas who supervise or who handle public moneys or secured documents, and such officers and employees of courts of record and such deputies of clerks of the courts of common pleas as the appointing authority finds it impracticable to determine their fitness by competitive examination;

(11) Assistants to the attorney general, special counsel appointed or employed by the attorney general, assistants to county prosecuting attorneys, and assistants to city directors of law;

(12) Such teachers and employees in the agricultural experiment stations; such students in normal schools, colleges, and universities of the state who are employed by the state or a political subdivision of the state in student or intern classifications; and such unskilled labor positions as the director of administrative services, with respect to positions in the service of the state, or any municipal civil service commission may find it impracticable to include in the competitive classified service; provided such exemptions shall be by order of the commission or the director, duly entered on the record of the commission or the director with the reasons for each such exemption;

(13) Any physician or dentist who is a full-time employee of the department of mental health and addiction services, the department of developmental disabilities, or an institution under the jurisdiction of either department; and physicians who are in residency programs at the institutions;

(14) Up to twenty positions at each institution under the jurisdiction of the department of mental health and addiction services or the department of developmental disabilities that the department director determines to be primarily administrative or managerial; and up to fifteen positions in any division of either department, excluding administrative assistants to the director and division chiefs, which are within the immediate staff of a division chief and which the director determines to be primarily and distinctively administrative and managerial;

(15) Noncitizens of the United States employed by the state, or its counties or cities, as physicians or nurses who are duly licensed to practice their respective professions under the laws of this state, or medical assistants, in mental or chronic disease hospitals, or institutions;

(16) Employees of the governor's office;

(17) Fire chiefs and chiefs of police in civil service townships appointed by boards of township trustees under section 505.38 or 505.49 of the Revised Code;

(18) Executive directors, deputy directors, and program directors employed by boards of alcohol, drug addiction, and mental health services under Chapter 340. of the Revised Code, and secretaries of the executive directors, deputy directors, and program directors;

(19) Superintendents, and management employees as defined in section 5126.20 of the Revised Code, of county boards of developmental disabilities;

(20) Physicians, nurses, and other employees of a county hospital who are appointed pursuant to sections 339.03 and 339.06 of the Revised Code;

(21) The executive director of the state medical board, who is appointed pursuant to division (B) of section 4731.05 of the Revised Code;

(22) County directors of job and family services as provided in section 329.02 of the Revised Code and administrators appointed under section 329.021 of the Revised Code;

(23) A director of economic development who is hired pursuant to division (A) of section 307.07 of the Revised Code;

(24) Chiefs of construction and compliance, of operations and maintenance, of worker protection, and of licensing and certification in the division of industrial compliance in the department of commerce;

(25) The executive director of a county transit system appointed under division (A) of section 306.04 of the Revised Code;

(26) Up to five positions at each of the administrative departments listed in section 121.02 of the Revised Code and at the department of taxation, department of the adjutant general, department of education, Ohio board of regents, bureau of workers' compensation, industrial commission, state lottery commission, opportunities for Ohioans with disabilities agency, and public utilities commission of Ohio that the head of that administrative department or of that other state agency determines to be involved in policy development and implementation. The head of the administrative department or other state agency shall set the compensation for employees in these positions at a rate that is not less than the minimum compensation specified in pay range 41 but not more than the maximum compensation specified in pay range 47 of salary schedule E-2 in section 124.152 of the Revised Code. The authority to establish positions in the unclassified service under division (A)(26) of this section is in addition to and does not limit any other authority that an administrative department or state agency has under the Revised Code to establish positions, appoint employees, or set compensation.

(27) Employees of the department of agriculture employed under section 901.09 of the Revised Code;

(28) For cities, counties, civil service townships, city health districts, general health districts, and city school districts, the deputies and assistants of elective or principal executive officers authorized to act for and in the place of their principals or holding a fiduciary relation to their principals;

(29) Employees who receive intermittent or temporary appointments under division (C) of section 124.30 of the Revised Code;

(30) Employees appointed to administrative staff positions for which an appointing authority is given specific statutory authority to set compensation;

(31) Employees appointed to highway patrol cadet or highway patrol cadet candidate classifications;

(32) Employees appointed to participate in a prospective law enforcement training school under section 737.061 of the Revised Code;

(33) Employees placed in the unclassified service by another section of the Revised Code.

(B) The classified service shall comprise all persons in the employ of the state and the several counties, cities, city health districts, general health districts, and city school districts of the state, not specifically included in the unclassified service. Upon the creation by the board of trustees of a civil service township civil service commission, the classified service shall also comprise, except as otherwise provided in division (A)(17) or (C) of this section, all persons in the employ of a civil service township police or fire department having ten or more full-time paid employees. The classified service consists of two classes, which shall be designated as the competitive class and the unskilled labor class.

(1) The competitive class shall include all positions and employments in the state and the counties, cities, city health districts, general health districts, and city school districts of the state, and, upon the creation by the board of trustees of a civil service township of a township civil service commission, all positions in a civil service township police or fire department having ten or more full-time paid employees, for which it is practicable to determine the merit and fitness of applicants by competitive examinations. Appointments shall be made to, or employment shall be given in, all positions in the competitive class that are not filled by promotion, reinstatement, transfer, or reduction, as provided in this chapter, and the rules of the director of administrative services, by appointment from those certified to the appointing officer in accordance with this chapter.

(2) The unskilled labor class shall include ordinary unskilled laborers. Vacancies in the labor class for positions in service of the state shall be filled by appointment from lists of applicants registered by the director or the director's designee. Vacancies in the labor class for all other positions shall be filled by appointment from lists of applicants registered by a commission. The director or the commission, as applicable, by rule, shall require an applicant for registration in the labor class to furnish evidence or take tests as the director or commission considers proper with respect to age, residence, physical condition, ability to labor, honesty, sobriety, industry, capacity, and experience in the work or employment for which application is made. Laborers who fulfill the requirements shall be placed on the eligible list for the kind of labor or employment sought, and preference shall be given in employment in accordance with the rating received from that evidence or in those tests. Upon the request of an appointing officer, stating the kind of labor needed, the pay and probable length of employment, and the number to be employed, the director or commission, as applicable, shall certify from the highest on the list double the number to be employed; from this number, the appointing officer shall appoint the number actually needed for the particular work. If more than one applicant receives the same rating, priority in time of application shall determine the order in which their names shall be certified for appointment.

(C) A municipal or civil service township civil service commission may place volunteer firefighters who are paid on a fee-for-service basis in either the classified or the unclassified civil service.

(D)(1) This division does not apply to persons in the unclassified service who have the right to resume positions in the classified service under sections 4121.121, 5119.18, 5120.38, 5120.381, 5120.382, 5123.08, and 5139.02 of the Revised Code or to cities, counties, or political subdivisions of the state.

(2) A person who holds a position in the classified service of the state and who is appointed to a position in the unclassified service shall retain the right to resume the position and status held by the person in the classified service immediately prior to the person's appointment to the position in the unclassified service, regardless of the number of positions the person held in the unclassified service.

An employee's right to resume a position in the classified service may only be exercised when an appointing authority demotes the employee to a pay range lower than the employee's current pay range or revokes the employee's appointment to the unclassified service and any of the following apply:

(a) That person held a certified position prior to July 1, 2007, in the classified service within the appointing authority's agency;

(b) That person held a permanent position on or after July 1, 2007, in the classified service within the appointing authority's agency, and was appointed to the position in the unclassified service prior to January 1, 2016;

(c) That person held a permanent position on or after January 1, 2016, in the classified service within the appointing authority's agency, and is within five years from the effective date of the person's appointment in the unclassified service.

(3) An employee forfeits the right to resume a position in the classified service when:

(a) The employee is removed from the position in the unclassified service due to incompetence, inefficiency, dishonesty, drunkenness, immoral conduct, insubordination, discourteous treatment of the public, neglect of duty, violation of this chapter or the rules of the director of administrative services, any other failure of good behavior, any other acts of misfeasance, malfeasance, or nonfeasance in office, or conviction of a felony while employed in the civil service; or

(b) Upon transfer to a different agency.

(4) Reinstatement to a position in the classified service shall be to a position substantially equal to that position in the classified service held previously, as certified by the director of administrative services. If the position the person previously held in the classified service has been placed in the unclassified service or is otherwise unavailable, the person shall be appointed to a position in the classified service within the appointing authority's agency that the director of administrative services certifies is comparable in compensation to the position the person previously held in the classified service. Service in the position in the unclassified service shall be counted as service in the position in the classified service held by the person immediately prior to the person's appointment to the position in the unclassified service. When a person is reinstated to a position in the classified service as provided in this division, the person is entitled to all rights, status, and benefits accruing to the position in the classified service during the person's time of service in the position in the unclassified service.

Last updated December 29, 2025 at 1:51 PM

Partisan Political Activity and Public Service: Navigating Ethics, Legal Boundaries, and Professional Responsibilities in a Polarized Environment (Do's and Don'ts for Public Employees and Leaders)

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STATE PERSONNEL BOARD OF REVIEW
OHIO

PROHIBITED PARTISAN POLITICAL ACTIVITY

1

1

R.C. 124.57

- Generally prohibits "partisan" political activity

- Generally permits "non-partisan" political activity

2

2

R.C. 124.57 PROHIBITS

Any officer or employee *in the classified service* from soliciting or receiving (directly or indirectly) specified items for/from a *political party* or for/from any candidate for public office;

<u>Anyone</u> from soliciting (directly or indirectly) specified items from an officer or employee in the classified service;

Any officer or employee *in the classified service* from being an officer in a political organization or from taking part in politics …

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R.C. 124.57 PERMITS

An officer or employee *in the classified service* to vote as he or she pleases and to freely express political opinions (allows officers and employees in the classified service to exercise their Constitutionally-protected freedom of expression and also to engage in non-partisan political activities.)

An officer or employee *in the unclassified service* to solicit or receive specified items for/from a political party or for/from any candidate for public office.

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R.C. 124.57

PERMITS

5

An officer or employee *in the unclassified service* to serve as an officer in a political organization and to take part in politics.

An officer or employee *in either the classified or unclassified service* to serve as a "precinct election official" under R.C. 3501.22.

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Campaigning

Video Clip

6

6

CONCEPTS TO REMEMBER

- R.C. 124.57 *balances* the need to protect freedom of expression *with* the need to ensure the political system is free from excessive partisan political influence and free of corruption.
- Ohio has not, as yet, adopted the changes the federal government has made to the Hatch Act.

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O.A.C. 123:1-46-02

- Applies directly to all State of Ohio government employees.
- A good guide for all other (non-federal) civil service employees.

8

8

Improperly Disturbing Campaign Literature and Materials

Video Clip

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9

Abuse of Political Influence and Workplace Coercion

Video Clip

10

10

Soliciting/Compelling Participation and Making Threats

Video Clip

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11

Compliance Remediation

Video Clip

12

12

Scenarios

- Candidate B, a classified employee, wants to run for a city council seat that has traditionally been nonpartisan.
- B has avoided getting an endorsement from any political party.
- B's opponent, candidate C, has received an endorsement from a political party.
- Does Candidate C's endorsement make the election partisan?
- Has Candidate B violated the law?

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Scenarios

- Deputy D is a classified employee of a county sheriff's department. D initiated a run for sheriff.
- Sheriff S fires D for violating R.C. 124.57. D is then charged with and convicted of violating R.C. 124.62 ("Violations of Civil Service Rules or Statutes."), which is a general/unclassified misdemeanor.
- Can D continue to run for sheriff?

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Scenarios

- Employee E is a classified county employee. E wants to run for county recorder and begins circling petitions.
- E's friend F warns E that she may be in violation of R.C. 124.57 and to contact SPBR. After a discussion with SPBR, E voluntarily withdraws from the county recorder race.
- Did E violate 124.57?
- Did E's decision to voluntarily withdraw make any difference as to whether E violated the statute?

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Scenarios

- McKinley Heights has a city charter stating that all city employees are classified except for department heads. The city charter also makes all city council races partisan. Police Captain C, who is not a department head, wants to run for city council.
- Is he allowed to run?

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Scenarios

- Sergeant S agrees to participate in a campaign advertisement for a candidate for the county sheriff position.
- Sergeant S is a union employee whose collective bargaining permits its members to participate in campaign ads.
- Is Sergeant S allowed to participate in the ad?

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Scenarios

- Person U is an unclassified state employee. U is thinking of running for a partisan county position.
- U checked with their department head and received permission to run for the position.
- Is U legally allowed to run under 124.57

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Scenarios

- Person P, a classified employee working in the County Building Inspection Office, wants to run for County Commissioner.
- Are they allowed to run?
- **Bonus:**
  If they run and win, do they have to resign from their Building Inspection Office position?

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Scenarios

- Attorney A is a classified employee who works for the Ohio Department of Tax and Spending.
- A wants to begin circulating petitions to be able to participate in an election to be a judge at the Court of Common Pleas.
- The election has a partisan primary and nonpartisan general election.
- Is A allowed to run?

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WHY DO WE CARE ABOUT R.C. 124.57?

- Violation of R.C. 124.57 is an Unclassified/General Misdemeanor in Ohio. In other words, IT IS A CRIMINAL OFFENSE.
- Violation of R.C. 124.57 is a DISCIPLINABLE OFFENSE that can result in discipline up to and including removal. The appointing authority decides the level of discipline to impose.
- Most people want to see State and Local government that is open, honest, and free from corruption.

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ASK BEFORE YOU ACT!

- When in doubt (or even if you're not), ask first. Once an illegal act has been committed (even if unknowingly), it cannot be taken back.
- In other words, "You can't unring the bell."
- The appointing authority can decide the level of discipline for a classified employee alleged to have violated R.C. 124.57. If a classified employee is so disciplined and if SPBR or the Civil Service Commission has jurisdiction over the matter, SPBR or the Civil Service Commission is barred from modifying that discipline, as long as the appointing authority is able to substantiate the facts in the case.

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WHO CAN WE ASK?

- Start with your supervisor. Even if your position falls within the unclassified service, it is common sense to make sure your supervisor understands your actions, before you take them.
- Your supervisor can also act as a safety net, in case there is a potential conflict of which you are unaware.
- This may include other bars regarding this type of activity of which the employee is unaware. (*e.g.* "No, you can't use your office at the City Tax Department as the base of operations for your campaign!").

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WHO ELSE CAN WE ASK?

For questions regarding:

- *Prohibited partisan political activity*, contact the **State Personnel Board of Review** at (614) 466-7046.
- *Compatibility of positions*, contact the **Opinions Section of the Office of the Ohio Attorney General** at (614) 752-6417.
- *Ethics issues (and compatibility of position issues)*, contact the **Ohio Ethics Commission** at (614) 466-7090.
- *Other elections laws, elections processes and procedures*, contact the **Office of the Ohio Secretary of State** at (614) 466-3205 or the pertinent **County Board of Elections**.

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CAVEATS

- A City Charter (and properly promulgated city ordinances) can supersede R.C. Chapter 124. (including R.C. 124.57), if the subject matter of R.C. 124.57 is addressed therein – not all city charters address the subject matter. Charters may place fewer or even additional restrictions on the employees of the city (or county).

- A Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA) can supersede R.C. Chapter 124., if the CBA covers the subject matter at issue and provides for a grievance procedure culminating in final and binding arbitration.

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Cookies

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Section 124.57 | Prohibition against partisan political activity.

https://codes.ohio.gov/ohio-revised-code/section-124.57

Effective:
September 29, 2013

(A) No officer or employee in the classified service of the state, the several counties, cities, and city school districts of the state, or the civil service townships of the state shall directly or indirectly, orally or by letter, solicit or receive, or be in any manner concerned in soliciting or receiving, any assessment, subscription, or contribution for any political party or for any candidate for public office; nor shall any person solicit directly or indirectly, orally or by letter, or be in any manner concerned in soliciting, any such assessment, contribution, or payment from any officer or employee in the classified service of the state, the several counties, cities, or city school districts of the state, or the civil service townships of the state; nor shall any officer or employee in the classified service of the state, the several counties, cities, and city school districts of the state, or the civil service townships of the state be an officer in any political organization or take part in politics other than to vote as the officer or employee pleases and to express freely political opinions.

(B)(1) Nothing in division (A) of this section prohibits an officer or employee described in that division from serving as a precinct election official under section 3501.22 of the Revised Code.
(2) Nothing in division (A) of this section prohibits an employee of OSU extension whose position is transferred from the unclassified civil service to the classified civil service and who also holds the office of president of a city legislative authority from completing the existing term of office as president.

Rule 123:1-46-02 | Political activity of employees in the classified service of the state.

https://codes.ohio.gov/ohio-administrative-code/rule-123:1-46-02

Effective:
May 29, 2026

(A) The purpose of this rule is to provide appointing authorities, personnel officers, and others with guidelines concerning political activity. Employees in the classified service of the state are prohibited by section 124.57 of the Revised Code from engaging in certain political activity.
(B) Examples of permissible activities for employees in the classified service include, but are not limited to the following:

(1) Registration and voting;

(2) Expression of opinions, either oral or written;

(3) Voluntary financial contributions to political candidates or organizations;

(4) Circulation of nonpartisan petitions, petitions that do not identify with any particular party, or petitions stating views on legislation;

(5) Attendance at political rallies;

(6) Signing nominating petitions in support of individuals;

(7) Display of political materials in the employee's home or on the employee's property;

(8) Wearing political badges or buttons, or the display of political stickers on private vehicles; and

(9) Serving as a precinct election official under section 3501.22 of the Revised Code.
(C) Employees in the classified service are prohibited from engaging in the following political activities:

(1) Candidacy for public office in a partisan election;

(2) Candidacy for public office in a nonpartisan general election if the nomination to candidacy was obtained in a partisan primary or through the circulation of nominating petitions identified with a political party;

(3) Filing of petitions meeting statutory requirements for partisan candidacy to elective office;

(4) Circulation of official nominating petitions for any candidate participating in a partisan election;

(5) Service in an elected or appointed office in any partisan political organization;

(6) Acceptance of a party-sponsored appointment to any office normally filled by partisan election;

(7) Campaigning by writing for publications, by distributing political material, or by writing or making speeches on behalf of a candidate for partisan elective office, when such activities are directed toward party success;

(8) Solicitation, either directly or indirectly, of any assessment, contribution or subscription, either monetary or in-kind, for any political party or political candidate;

(9) Solicitation of the sale, or actual sale, of political party tickets;

(10) Partisan activities at the election polls, such as solicitation of votes for other than nonpartisan candidates and nonpartisan issues;

(11) Service as a witness or challenger for any party or partisan committee;

(12) Participation in political caucuses of a partisan nature; and

(13) Participation in a political action committee that supports partisan activity.

(D) An employee in the classified service who engages in any of the political activities listed in paragraphs (C)(1) to (C)(13) of this rule is subject to removal from his or her position in the classified service.

(E) Employees in the unclassified service of the state, are not prohibited from engaging in political activity unless specifically precluded by federal or state constitutional or statutory provisions.

(F) Service in an appointed or elected position is prohibited when such position is subordinate to or in any way a check upon a position concurrently occupied by a classified or unclassified employee, or when it is physically impossible for one person to discharge the duties of both positions, or if some specific constitutional or statutory bar exists prohibiting a person from serving both positions.

(G) If any person holding public office or employment is convicted of violating the Revised Code provisions prohibiting abuse of political influence, such office or position will thereby be rendered vacant.

OHIO ETHICS COMMISSION
William Green Building
30 West Spring Street, L3
Columbus, Ohio 43215-2256
Telephone: (614) 466-7090
Fax: (614) 466-8368

www.ethics.ohio.gov

October 2, 2024

Valerie Kuenzli, Fiscal Officer
PMP Joint Ambulance District
[redacted]

Dear Ms. Kuenzli:

On August 27, 2024, the Ohio Ethics Commission received your request for an advisory opinion.

Key Facts

In your letter and subsequent email dated September 25, 2024, you stated:

- You are the appointed Fiscal Officer for the PMP Joint Ambulance District, Hancock County.
- The District has a levy issue on the ballot this fall to raise tax dollars to continue its operations.[1]
- If the levy fails, the District would "most likely dissolve."
- You would like to support the levy by making signs and informational pamphlets.
- You have consulted with the Ohio Elections Commission and have been told that to accomplish this, a PAC (Political Action Committee) would need to be formed.
- You understand that no money from the District's general fund can be used to promote the levy.
- You are interested in forming a PAC with another District employee to promote the levy.
- You do not live in the area that the District serves and are not able to vote on the levy.

Question Presented

Under the Ohio Ethics Law and related statutes, are you, as the District's Fiscal Officer, prohibited from creating a PAC in support of the levy?

Brief Answer

No. The Ohio Ethics Law and related statutes do not prohibit you from creating a PAC to support the passage of the District's operations levy. These laws also do not prohibit you from making signs and informational pamphlets. However, you **cannot**:

- Use your public position or title to benefit the PAC. Specifically, you cannot use your public title on any PAC signs, literature, or any correspondence you may send on behalf of the PAC.

- Represent the PAC before the District's trustees or any other public entity.

- Disclose, without appropriate authorization, any confidential information you have acquired in the course of your duties as a District employee.

Jurisdiction of the Ohio Ethics Commission

You stated that you were advised by the Ohio Elections Commission that, in order for you to make signs and informational pamphlets to support the levy, a PAC needed to be formed. The authority of the Ohio Ethics Commission is limited to ethics issues that arise under Ohio Revised Code Chapter 102 and Sections 2921.42 and 2921.43. Therefore, the Ethics Commission cannot opine or advise as to any advice you were given by the Elections Commission that falls outside of the Ethics Law.

I recommend that you discuss this matter with your county prosecutor's office or private counsel to address any issues outside of the jurisdiction of the Ethics Commission. You may also want to consult with the Ohio Auditor of State's Office concerning any other laws that govern levy campaigns.[2]

Public Officials/Employees and Political Issues

In most situations, the Ohio Ethics Law does not prohibit a public official or employee from also being personally involved with a group that supports a political issue.[3] However, as explained below, the Ethics Law **does** prohibit a public official or employee from using the authority or influence of her public position to benefit her private interests.

Political Action Committee

A Political Action Committee ("PAC"), is defined in R.C. 3517.01(C)(8) as:

> a combination of two or more persons, the primary or major purpose of which is to support or oppose any candidate, political party, or issue, or to influence the result of any election through express advocacy, and that is not a political party, a campaign committee, a political contributing entity, or a legislative campaign fund.

You understand that the District is prohibited from using public funds to support the levy.[4] You stated that you would like to support the passage of the levy and that, upon the advice of the Elections Commission, you and another District employee are willing to form a PAC to do this.

Securing Improper Things of Value– R.C. 102.03(D)

R.C. 102.03(D) provides:

> No public official or employee shall use or authorize the use of the authority or influence of office or employment to secure anything of value or the promise or offer of anything of value that is of such a character as to manifest a substantial and improper influence upon the public official or employee with respect to that person's duties.

A "public official or employee" is defined for purposes of R.C. 102.03 to include any person who is elected or appointed to an office, or is an employee, of any public agency.[5] A "public agency" includes any governmental entity.[6] A joint ambulance district is a public agency.[7] Therefore, as the Fiscal Officer of the District, you are a public employee for purposes of RC. 102.03(D).[8]

The term "anything of value" as defined for purposes of R.C. 102.03 includes money and every other thing of value, including employment and its attendant compensation.[9] Your continued employment and the funding that the District will receive if the voters approve the levy fall within the definition of "anything of value."

R.C. 102.03(D) prohibits a public employee from participating in any matter, or securing a thing of value, where the employee would have an inherent conflict of interest that would manifest substantial and improper influence upon her with respect to her official decisions and responsibilities.[10] The prohibition imposed by R.C. 102.03(D) serves the public interest in effective, objective, and impartial government by preventing the creation of a situation that may impair the objectivity and independence of judgment of a public employee, and, therefore, the effectiveness of the political subdivision with which she serves.[11] The application of R.C. 102.03(D) is dependent upon the facts and circumstances of each individual situation.[12]

Not all "conflicts of interest" are prohibited by R.C. 102.03(D). Only those created when a public employee has a dual interest that would impair her independence of judgment in making decisions are prohibited.[13] You stated that if the levy does not pass, the District "would most likely dissolve." This would ultimately result in the loss of your position as its Fiscal Officer. However, as the District's Fiscal Officer, you did not make any decisions regarding the levy being placed on the ballot. Further, it is the voters, not you, who will make the decision as to whether the levy is approved.[14] The District's receipt of the public funds "depends upon the individual behavior of large numbers of persons," i.e., the voters of the District.[15] It would be speculative to assert that your actions in creating a PAC to support the passage of the levy will result in a definite and direct benefit to you (avoiding the loss of your employment). Therefore, you are not prohibited from creating a PAC to support the passage of the levy.

However, R.C. 102.03(D) does prohibit you from using your official authority as the District's Fiscal Officer and your unique access to other District officials or employees to benefit the PAC.[16] You are prohibited from using your public title and office, or District time, facilities, or resources, to assist the PAC.[17] Specifically, you cannot use your public title in any PAC literature or in any correspondence you send on behalf of the PAC. This makes clear that you are participating in the PAC in your personal capacity and not as a District official or employee.

Representation Restriction– R.C. 102.03(A)(1)

R.C. 102.03(A)(1) prohibits you from representing the PAC before the District or any other public agency in Ohio on matters in which you personally participated as the District's Fiscal Officer, even if you receive no compensation from the PAC for providing the representation. In other words, you cannot communicate with the District's trustees or any other public official or employee, on behalf of the PAC, on matters related to the levy.

You are not prohibited from acting or speaking for the PAC before private individuals or private meetings on your own time.[18] You are also not prohibited from supporting the levy in your private, individual capacity, separate from the PAC. However, in either case, you:

- Must work through channels that are available to any other citizen who is not a public official or employee, meaning you cannot use your unique access to other public officials and employees and information that is not available to any other private citizen; and

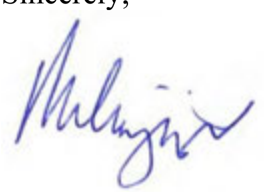
- Must follow the same procedures, comply with the same requirements, and obey the same rules that apply to any other private citizen advocating her personal interests.[19]

Confidential Information Restriction– R.C. 102.03(B)

R.C. 102.03(B) prohibits you from disclosing or using, without appropriate authorization, any confidential information you acquire as the District's Fiscal Officer.[20] You cannot disclose confidential information to the PAC or use it to benefit the PAC.

This Staff Advisory Opinion represents the views of the undersigned, based on the facts presented and Commission precedent. It is limited to questions arising under R.C. Chapter 102 and Sections 2921.42 and 2921.43 and does not purport to interpret other laws or rules. Please do not hesitate to contact this Office if you have any further questions or if you wish to request reconsideration of this opinion under Ohio Adm.Code 102-3-07.

Sincerely,



Melissa K. Riggins
Advisory Attorney

Enclosure (via email only): Staff Opinion issued to Welch (07-03-13)

CC (via email only): Phillip A. Riegle, Hancock County Prosecuting Attorney

The Ohio Ethics Commission Advisory Opinions referenced in this opinion are available on the Commission's website: www.ethics.ohio.gov.

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[1] Hancock County Board of Elections, *Election Notice*, 100Day-Notice-G24.pdf (hancockcountyohioelections.gov) (accessed Oct. 1, 2024). The levy is on the ballot for the November 5, 2024 General Election.

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[2] For example, the Ohio Auditor of State has published an FAQ addressing levies that is available on its website: ohioauditor.gov.
[3] However, there may be statutes and rules outside of the Ethics Law that restrict your involvement in political activities.
[4] *See* R.C. 9.03(C)(1)(e).
[5] R.C. 102.0l(B).
[6] R.C. 102.01(C)(1).
[7] Ohio Ethics Commission Advisory Opinion No. 83-009.
[8] Adv. Op. No. 92-008.
[9] R.C. 102.01(G); R.C. 1.03; Adv. Op. No. 92-008.
[10] Adv. Op. No. 91-004.
[11] Adv. Ops. No. 89-014 and 90-002.
[12] Adv. Ops. No. 87-007 and 89-003.
[13] Adv. Op. No. 85-006.
[14] *See* Adv. Op. No. 93-016.
[15] *Id.*
[16] Adv. Op. No. 2011-02.
[17] Adv. Op. No. 96-004.
[18] *See* R.C. 9.03(E).
[19] Adv. Ops. No. 96-004 and 2011-02.
[20] Adv. Op. No. 88-009.

OHIO ETHICS COMMISSION

Merom Brachman
Commission Chair

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Executive Director

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Advisory Opinion Number 2002-03
August 2, 2002

Syllabus by the Commission:

(1) The Ohio Ethics Law does not restrict ordinary campaign contributions given to an elected state officer;

(2) Where there is evidence of wrongdoing as set forth in Division (G) of Section 102.03 of the Revised Code in connection with a campaign contribution to an elected state officer, and a nexus exists between the public office and the contributor, the conflict of interest protections set forth in Divisions (D), (E), and (F) of Section 102.03 of the Revised Code will apply;

(3) A nexus exists between an elected state officer and a person making a contribution if the contributor is doing or seeking to do business with, regulated by, or interested in matters pending before, the state office he holds, as described herein;

(4) Where a person serves simultaneously as an elected state officer, with authority to distribute public funds or enter into contracts, and as a significant local political party official, the potential for a prohibited conflict of interest is heightened because of the duality of roles and responsibilities.

* * * * * *

In this opinion, the Ohio Ethics Commission first considers whether the Ethics Law applies when an elected state officer, who also serves as a significant local political party official, solicits or accepts a campaign contribution from a person that is doing or seeking to do business with, regulated by, or interested in matters before, the public office the official serves. This appears to be the first time the question has been considered, either by the Ethics Commission or by the other two state appropriate ethics commissions with authority under Revised Code Chapter 102. See R.C. 102.01(F) (Joint Legislative Ethics Committee and Board of Commissioners on Grievances and Discipline of the Supreme Court). The Commission issues this opinion as a part of its ongoing responsibility to provide advice and guidance regarding issues of public concern that are within its jurisdiction.

Brief Answer

As described more fully below, the Ethics Law does not restrict ordinary campaign contributions given to a public official. The Ethics Law, as amended in 1986, however, expressly restricts campaign contributions to a public official where evidence of wrongdoing as described by law is present.

Where there is evidence of wrongdoing as set forth in R.C. 102.03(G), in connection with a campaign contribution to an elected state officer, and a nexus exists between the officer and the contributor, the conflict of interest protections set forth in R.C. 102.03(D), (E), and (F) will apply to the parties to the contribution. A nexus exists between an elected state officer and a person making a contribution if the contributor is doing or seeking to do business with, regulated by, or interested in matters pending before, the state office he holds.

Where a person serves simultaneously as an elected state officer, with authority to distribute public funds or enter into contracts, and as a significant local political party official, the potential for conflict of interest is heightened because of the duality of roles and responsibilities. Because a state officer who is also serving as a local political party official may be unable to avoid a conflict of interest, the Ohio Ethics Commission recommends that state officers with such authority decline to serve as local party officials.

1986 Amendment to Ohio Ethics Law-Am. Sub. H.B. 300

The Ohio Ethics Law was significantly amended in Am. Sub. H. B. 300, enacted by the 116th General Assembly and effective September 17, 1986. In the preface to the Act, the General Assembly explained the purpose of the omnibus revisions in Am. Sub. H.B. 300:

> [T]o restrict the circumstances under which candidates and others may use their campaign funds for personal and business use, to restrict the circumstances under which candidates and others may accept funds for personal and business use from other campaign committees, political action committees, and political parties, to make other changes in the Campaign Finance Law, to extend bribery and other prohibitions against public officials and employees using their position for personal gain, to protect employees who report violations of laws or rules or misuse of public resources and to extend the respective jurisdictions of the Ohio Elections Commission, the Ohio Ethics Commission, the House and Senate Legislative Ethics Committees, and the Board of Commissioners on Grievances and Discipline of the Supreme Court to include such matters.

Within the Ethics Law, Am. Sub. H.B. 300 extended the definition of "anything of value," for purposes of the conflict of interest provisions to include "contributions," as defined for purposes of the Elections Law. As amended, R.C. 102.01(G) provides: "'Anything of value' has the same meaning as provided in section 1.03 of the Revised Code and includes . . . a contribution as defined in section 3517.01 of the Revised Code." (Emphasis added.)
The term "contribution," as defined in R.C. 3517.01(B)(5), is:

> "Contribution" means a loan, gift, deposit, forgiveness of indebtedness, donation, advance, payment, transfer of funds or transfer of anything of value including a transfer

> of funds from an inter vivos or testamentary trust or decedent's estate, and the payment by any person other than the person to whom the services are rendered for the personal services of another person, which contribution is made, received, or used for the purpose of influencing the results of an election. "Contribution" does not include:
>
> (a) Services provided without compensation by individuals volunteering a portion or all of their time on behalf of a person;
> (b) Ordinary home hospitality;
> (c) The personal expenses of a volunteer paid for by that volunteer campaign worker;
> (d) Any gift given to a state or county political party pursuant to section 3517.101 [3517.10.1] of the Revised Code. As used in division (B)(5)(d) of this section, "political party" means only a major political party.

Am. Sub. H.B. 300 expanded the prohibitions against the coercion of campaign contributions. R.C. 2921.43(C). The bill also extended the Ethics Commission's jurisdiction to include issues arising under R.C. 2921.43. R.C. 102.06 and 102.08.

R.C. 102.03(G)-Campaign Contribution Exception

Am. Sub. H.B. 300 also amended the conflict of interest restrictions in R.C. 102.03, and enacted R.C. 102.03(G), which provides an exception to the conflict of interest restrictions:

> In the absence of bribery or another offense under the Revised Code or a purpose to defraud, contributions made to a campaign committee, political party, legislative campaign fund, political action committee, or political contributing entity on behalf of an elected public officer or other public official or employee who seeks elective office shall be considered to accrue ordinarily to the public official or employee for the purposes of divisions (D), (E), and (F) of this section. (Emphasis added.)

The amendment to the definition of "anything of value" in R.C. 102.01(G) to include campaign contributions, and the enactment of R.C. 102.03(G) and 2921.43(C), as parts of an omnibus revision of ethics and elections statutes in Am. Sub. H.B. 300, make clear that the General Assembly intended for the Ohio Ethics Law and its related statutes to restrict select and limited campaign finance activity where types of conduct involving conflicts of interest are present. Further, it is clear that the General Assembly intended that the authority of the three ethics agencies, extended in Am. Sub. H.B. 300, include limited campaign finance issues regulated by R.C. 102.03(G) and 2921.43(C). See R.C. 102.08.

Application of Ethics Law to Campaign Contributions-R.C. 102.03(G)

R.C. 102.03(G) provides a clear exception to the general Conflict of Interest restrictions in the Ethics Law contained within three interrelated statutory sections of R.C. 102.03(D), (E), and (F), which provide:

> (D) No public official or employee shall use or authorize the use of the authority or influence of office or employment to secure anything of value or the promise or offer of

> anything of value that is of such a character as to manifest a substantial and improper influence upon the public official or employee with respect to that person's duties.
>
> (E) No public official or employee shall solicit or accept anything of value that is of such a character as to manifest a substantial and improper influence upon the public official or employee with respect to that person's duties.
>
> (F) No person shall promise or give to a public official or employee anything of value that is of such a character as to manifest a substantial and improper influence upon the public official or employee with respect to that person's duties.

Generally, R.C. 102.03(D) and (E) prohibit a public official or employee from soliciting, accepting, or using his position to secure anything of value of a substantial nature, if the thing of value is provided by a source that is doing or seeking to do business with, interested in matters before, or regulated by, the agency that the official serves. Ohio Ethics Commission Advisory Opinions No. 95-001 and 2001-03. See also State v. Lordi, 140 Ohio App.3d 561, 569 (2000), discretionary appeal not allowed, 91 Ohio St.3d 1523; 91 Ohio St.3d 1526 (2001) (involving a county commissioner convicted of a violation of R.C. 102.03(E) for concurrently discussing public business and soliciting private business from a township seeking road improvement funds from the county). R.C. 102.03(F), in turn, prohibits any person, including an individual or corporation, that is doing or seeking to do business with, interested in matters before, or regulated by a governmental entity, from promising or giving anything of a substantial nature to a public official or employee connected with the entity. Adv. Op. No. 90 001.

R.C. 102.03(G) provides that a contribution will ordinarily accrue to a public official "in the absence of bribery or another offense under the Revised Code or a purpose to defraud." The language in the exception set forth in R.C. 102.03(G) makes clear the General Assembly's intention that most contributions, regardless of any ties between the public official and the contributor, "ordinarily accrue" to the official who received them, and are not subject to Ethics oversight. However, when wrongdoing of the kind described in R.C. 102.03(G) is specifically present in connection with a contribution, the contribution does not ordinarily accrue to the official, and the exception set forth in R.C. 102.03(G) does not apply. In that case, the contribution comes within the conflict of interest law and presents a potential impropriety under the Ethics Law if the contribution was also solicited or received by a public official from a contributor that is doing or seeking to do business with, directly regulated by, or interested in matters before, the official's public agency.

In order to understand the application of the conflict of interest provisions if a public official also serves as a local political party official, it is necessary to examine the first clause in R.C. 102.03(G). As stated above, R.C. 102.03(G) applies in the absence of specific wrongdoing, i.e., "bribery or another offense under the Revised Code or a purpose to defraud."

<u>Bribery</u>

"Bribery" is an offense set forth in R.C. 2921.02:

> (A) No person, with purpose to corrupt a public servant or party official, or improperly to influence him with respect to the discharge of his duty, whether before or after he is elected, appointed, qualified, employed, summoned, or sworn, shall promise, offer, or give any valuable thing or valuable benefit.
>
> (B) No person, either before or after he is elected, appointed, qualified, employed, summoned, or sworn as a public servant or party official, shall knowingly solicit or accept for himself or another person any valuable thing or valuable benefit to corrupt or improperly influence him or another public servant or party official with respect to the discharge of his or the other public servant's or party official's duty.

R.C. 2921.02, a felony of the third degree, was first codified in 1974, as part of the overall codification of the criminal code in Ohio. For purposes of R.C. 2921.02, "valuable thing or valuable benefit" includes, but is not limited to, a contribution. R.C. 2921.01(G). There is also a specific election-related bribery statute set forth in R.C. 3599.01.

It is not necessary, in order for a violation of R.C. 2921.02 to occur, that the public servant or party official personally receives or benefits from a valuable thing or benefit he solicits or accepts. For example, an elected state officer who is also a local party official is prohibited from soliciting a campaign contribution for himself, or any candidate, political party, or campaign committee, when the contribution will corrupt or improperly influence him or any other public servant or party official in the performance of that public servant's or local party official's duties. This prohibition applies regardless of whether the campaign contribution ultimately benefits the elected state officer or passes to his or any other campaign committee.

<u>Another Offense Under the Revised Code</u>

R.C. 2901.02(A) provides that, as used in the Revised Code:

> Offenses include aggravated murder, murder, felonies of the first, second, third, fourth, and fifth degree, misdemeanors of the first, second, third, and fourth degree, minor misdemeanors, and offenses not specifically classified.

Further, R.C. 2901.03(B) provides:

> An offense is defined when one or more sections of the Revised Code state a positive prohibition or enjoin a specific duty, and provide a penalty for violation of such prohibition or failure to meet such duty.

Therefore, an offense exists where there is a violation of a statutory provision and where the provision is classified as a felony, misdemeanor, or minor misdemeanor. However, the Ohio Supreme Court has also recognized the existence of a criminal offense where a penalty of more than $100 is imposed for violation of a statutory provision and where the provision is not classified as a felony, misdemeanor, or minor misdemeanor. State v. Tipka, 12 Ohio St.3d 253 (1984). An offense can be present even where the person connected with the offense has not been convicted of a violation of the law. See Clinton v. Leis, 56 Ohio App.2d 30, 32 (1977) (The word 'offense' "means the conduct constituting a violation of law, and not a conviction of that violation.").

There are a number of provisions set forth in the Revised Code that state a positive prohibition, and provide a penalty, which could be "another offense" for purposes of R.C. 102.03(G). Examples of other offenses include: R.C. 2921.13 (falsification), R.C. 3517.13(F) (prohibits cash contributions of over one hundred dollars in each election), R.C. 3517.13(G) (concealing or misrepresenting campaign contributions), R.C. 3517.13(I) and (J) (prohibits awarding of unbid government contracts over $1000 to a contributor), R.C. 3517.13(W) (prohibits candidates from soliciting or accepting contributions from foreign nationals), and R.C. 3599.03 (prohibits, with certain exceptions, corporations and labor unions from aiding any candidate, party, political action committee, legislative campaign fund, or organization that supports or opposes such candidate).

Purpose to Defraud

The phrase "purpose to defraud" is not defined in the Ohio Revised Code. However, both "purpose" and "defraud" are defined in the Revised Code for their use in the criminal code, Title 29. Because R.C. 102.03 has criminal sanctions, it is helpful to examine the definitions set forth in Chapter 2921., for guidance as to the meaning of those words when used in R.C. 102.03(G).

"Purpose," as defined in R.C. 2901.22, requires an intention to cause a certain result or to engage in conduct that will cause that result. R.C. 2901.022(A). R.C. 2913.01(B) provides that "'defraud' means to knowingly obtain, by deception, some benefit for oneself or another, or to knowingly cause, by deception, some detriment to another." "Deception" is defined in R.C. 2913.01(A) as:

> [K]nowingly deceiving another or causing another to be deceived by any false or misleading representation, by withholding information, by preventing another from acquiring information, or by any other conduct, act, or omission that creates, confirms, or perpetuates a false impression in another, including a false impression as to law, value, state of mind, or other objective or subjective fact.

Therefore, a "purpose to defraud" is the intention to engage in, or engaging in, conduct to knowingly obtain, by deception, some benefit for oneself or another, or to knowingly cause, by deception, some detriment to another. See also State v. Hedrick, 92 Ohio App.3d 618, 621-623 (1994).

Examples of offenses in the Revised Code that incorporate the notion of a purpose to defraud include R.C. 3517.10(C) (failure to file, late filing, or filing incomplete or inaccurate statement of contributions or expenditures), R.C. 3517.13(A), (B), (C), (D), (E), and (V) (failure to file, late filing, or filing incomplete or inaccurate campaign finance report), and R.C. 3599.02 (bribery concerning voters or potential voters). However, it is important to note that where a "purpose to defraud" is present, in and of itself, there is no requirement in the specific language of R.C. 102.03(G) that it must be accompanied by any other elements of any criminal offense.

Summary

R.C. 102.03(G) clearly establishes that the Ethics Law does not limit ordinary campaign contributions given to a public official. A contribution given to a public official "ordinarily accrues" to the official, and is not a violation of the Ethics Law, unless there is specific wrongdoing-bribery, another offense under the Revised Code, or a purpose to defraud-in connection with the contribution.

However, where there is evidence of wrongdoing, the contribution does not ordinarily accrue to the official, and the exception as defined in R.C. 102.03(G) does not apply. In such a case, R.C. 102.03(D) and (E) would prohibit the elected officer, who is also a local party official, from soliciting, accepting, or using his position to secure anything of value, including campaign contributions, from a person that is doing or seeking to do business with, interested in matters before, or regulated by the public agency he serves. The prohibition applies regardless of whether the contribution solicited is made to the elected official's own campaign fund, or to the campaign fund of another elected official or candidate. Further, the contributor is also subject to R.C. 102.03(F), which prohibits any person from promising or giving anything of value, including a campaign contribution, to a public official, if the contributor is doing or seeking to do business with, interested in matters before, or regulated by, the official.
Where one person serves both as an elected state officer, with authority to distribute public funds or enter into contracts using state money, and as a significant local party official, the duality of roles expands the person's umbrella of influence and widens the pool of potential contributors. With respect to contributors that have a nexus to the state office he held, because they are doing or seeking to do business with the office, interested in matters pending before the office, or regulated by the office, the respective responsibilities of the two roles inherently collide. This conflict in roles heightens the likelihood that the elected state officer will fail to properly and independently administer his respective duties, particularly involving contributors who have any tie to the state officer or his office.

By its enactment of Am. Sub. H.B. 300, and specifically R.C. 102.03(G), in 1986, the General Assembly evidenced its intent that provisions protecting against conflicts of interest have application to an elected state office holder who also acts in another role as an active local political party official and solicits a contribution from any person with a nexus to the state office held. Because a state officer who is also serving as a local political party official may be unable to avoid a conflict of interest, the Ohio Ethics Commission recommends that state officers with such authority decline to serve as local party officials.

This advisory opinion is based on the analysis and direction of the Commission. It is limited to questions arising under Chapter 102. and Sections 2921.42 and 2921.43 of the Revised Code, and does not purport to interpret other laws or rules.

Therefore, it is opinion of the Ohio Ethics Commission that: (1) The Ohio Ethics Law does not restrict ordinary campaign contributions given to an elected state officer; (2) Where there is specific and verifiable evidence of wrongdoing as set forth in Division (G) of Section 102.03 of the Revised Code in connection with a campaign contribution to an elected state officer, and there is a nexus between the officer and the contributor, the conflict of interest protections set forth in Divisions (D), (E), and (F) of Section 102.03 of the Revised Code will apply to the parties to the contribution; (3) A nexus exists between an elected state officer and a person making a contribution to the officer if the contributor is doing or seeking to do business with, regulated by, or interested in matters pending before, the state office he holds, as described herein; and (4) Where a person serves simultaneously as an elected state officer, with authority to distribute public funds or enter into contracts, and as a significant local political party official, the potential for conflict of interest is heightened because of the duality of roles and responsibilities.

Merom Brachman

Merom Brachman, Chairman
Ohio Ethics Commission

From Conflict to Collaboration: Bridging Workplace Perspectives Through Policy, Culture, and Economic Change

Kelly Winston, MSLS
Employee & Labor Relations Manager
Hamilton County


HAMILTON
COUNTY
HUMAN RESOURCES
FROM
CONFLICT
TO
COLLABORATION
Bridging Workplace Perspectives Through
Policy, Culture and Economic Change
STATE PERSONNEL BOARD OF REVIEW
ANNUAL CONFERENCE
SEPTEMBER 1, 2026
Dublin, Ohio
STRONGER TOGETHER.
BETTER FOR ALL.
Kelly Winston
EMPLOYEE & LABOR RELATIONS MANAGER
HAMILTON COUNTY JOB & FAMILY SERVICES
RESPECT
INTEGRITY
INCLUSION
SERVICE
COLLABORATION

1


OUR PURPOSE TODAY
Building Bridges. Breaking Barriers. Creating Better Futures.
HAMILTON
COUNTY
HUMAN RESOURCES
"Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much."
– Helen Keller
OUR TIME TOGETHER IS DESIGNED TO:
SHIFT mindsets from positions to possibilities.
We move from adversaries to allies.
BUILD bridges through policy, culture, and economic understanding.
We create common ground.
COLLABORATE with purpose and empathy.
We listen, learn, and lead together.
DELIVER better outcomes for employees, agencies, and the communities we serve.
We rise together.
OUR GOAL: TRANSFORM CONFLICT INTO COLLABORATION AND CHALLENGES INTO CHANGE.

2


THE REALITY
WE FACE TOGETHER
Complex Challenges. Human Impact. Shared Responsibility.
HAMILTON
COUNTY
HUMAN RESOURCES
Today's workplaces are more dynamic than ever. We face real challenges that demand courage, understanding, and a commitment to work together.
WE ARE NAVIGATING:
DIFFERING PERSPECTIVES
Varied experiences and viewpoints can create misunderstandings and division.
POLICY & COMPLIANCE PRESSURES
Increasing regulations and accountability require clarity, consistency, and collaboration.
CULTURAL & WORKFORCE SHIFTS
Changing workforce expectations, generational differences, and evolving needs.
ECONOMIC UNCERTAINTY
Budget constraints, resource limitations, and economic changes impact every decision.
TRUST & RELATIONSHIP GAPS
Breakdowns in trust make it harder to communicate, problem solve, and move forward.
"Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much."
— KELLY WINSTON
Employee & Labor Relations Manager
Hamilton County Job & Family Services
OUR MISSION: ADDRESS THESE CHALLENGES TOGETHER— WITH INTENTION, EMPATHY, AND A SOLUTION-FOCUSED MINDSET.
Stronger Together.
Better for All.

3


OUR JOURNEY TOGETHER
FROM CONFLICT
TO COLLABORATION
A TRANSFORMATION, NOT JUST A TRANSITION.
HAMILTON
COUNTY
HUMAN RESOURCES
Conflict is natural.
Collaboration is a choice.
Transformation is the result of our commitment to a better way forward—together.
CONFLICT
Divides.
Drains energy.
Limits potential.
COLLABORATION
Connects.
Builds trust.
Expands possibilities.
TRANSFORMATION
Creates impact.
Drives results.
Builds stronger futures.
OUR COMMITMENT:
Listen with curiosity
Lead with respect
Act with integrity
Partner with purpose
Deliver with excellence
OUR BELIEF: When we work together across perspectives, we build workplaces where people thrive and communities prosper.

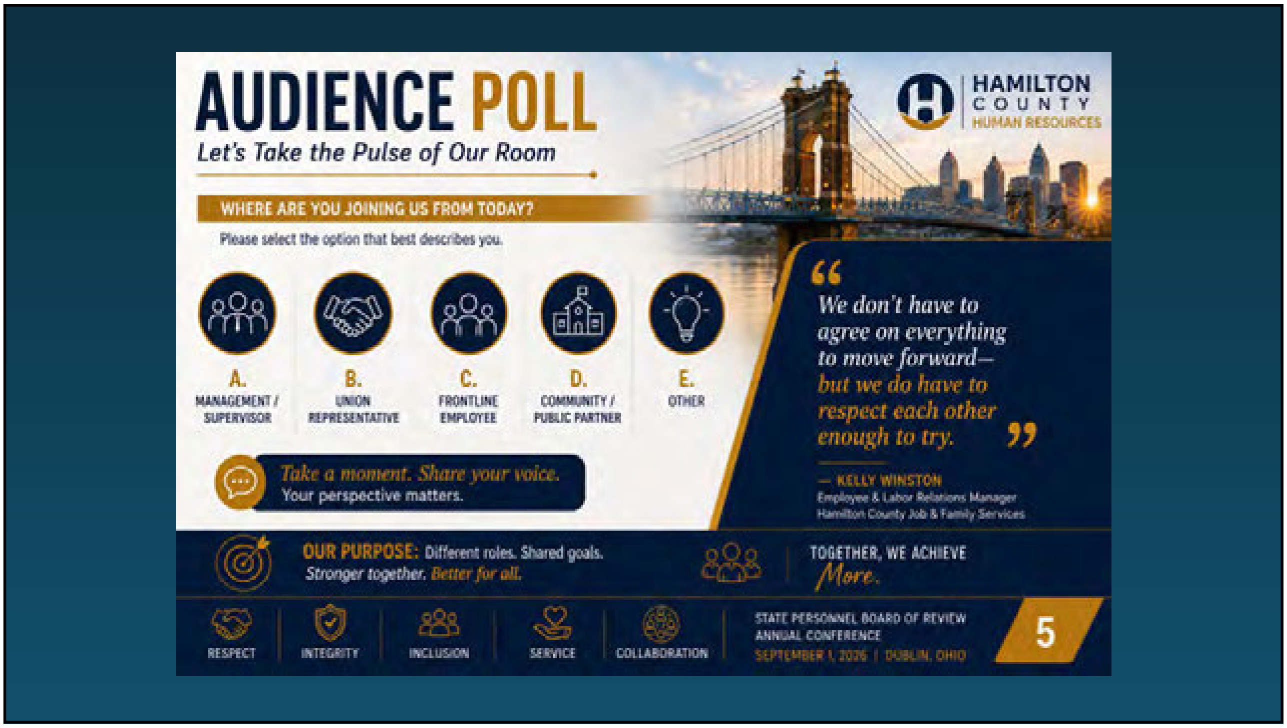
4


OUR WHY. OUR IMPACT. OUR FUTURE.
THE POWER OF
WORKING TOGETHER
Better Teams. Stronger Organizations. Thriving Communities.
HAMILTON COUNTY HUMAN RESOURCES
"Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much."
— KELLY WINSTON
Employee & Labor Relations Manager
Hamilton County Job & Family Services
WHEN WE COLLABORATE, WE:
SOLVE PROBLEMS
Diverse perspectives lead to smarter solutions.
BUILD TRUST
Relationships grounded in respect create stronger teams.
DRIVE RESULTS
Aligned efforts produce measurable impact.
SUPPORT PEOPLE
When we work together, everyone thrives.
STRENGTHEN COMMUNITIES
Our work today shapes a better future for all.
THE BOTTOM LINE
Collaboration isn't just good for our teams—it's essential for our mission and the people we serve.
Stronger Together.
Better for All.

5


AGENDA
A ROADMAP FOR MEANINGFUL CONNECTION AND ACTION
HAMILTON COUNTY HUMAN RESOURCES
1 WELCOME & OPENING
Setting the stage for a collaborative journey.
2 THE REALITY WE FACE
Understanding today's workplace challenges.
3 BUILDING BRIDGES
Policy, culture, and trust as our foundation.
4 FROM PERSPECTIVES TO PARTNERSHIPS
Tools and strategies for meaningful collaboration.
5 THE ECONOMIC IMPACT OF COLLABORATION
Stronger workplaces. Stronger communities.
6 ACTION PLANNING & COMMITMENTS
Turning insights into intentional action.
7 CLOSING & NEXT STEPS
Our commitments. Our future. Our impact.
Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much.
— KELLY WINSTON
Employee & Labor Relations Manager
Hamilton County Job & Family Services

6


AUDIENCE POLL
Let's Take the Pulse of Our Room
HAMILTON COUNTY HUMAN RESOURCES
WHERE ARE YOU JOINING US FROM TODAY?
Please select the option that best describes you.
A. MANAGEMENT / SUPERVISOR
B. UNION REPRESENTATIVE
C. FRONTLINE EMPLOYEE
D. COMMUNITY / PUBLIC PARTNER
E. OTHER
Take a moment. Share your voice.
Your perspective matters.
We don't have to agree on everything to move forward— but we do have to respect each other enough to try.
— KELLY WINSTON
Employee & Labor Relations Manager
Hamilton County Job & Family Services
OUR PURPOSE: Different roles. Shared goals.
Stronger together. Better for all.
TOGETHER, WE ACHIEVE More.
RESPECT
INTEGRITY
INCLUSION
SERVICE
COLLABORATION
STATE PERSONNEL BOARD OF REVIEW
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5

7


THE PERSPECTIVE COMPASS
Different Views. One Destination.
HAMILTON COUNTY HUMAN RESOURCES
Every role brings a unique point of view. When we understand each other, we unlock better solutions and stronger outcomes.
MANAGEMENT
Focuses on strategy, resources, and organizational stewardship.
N
W
E
S
EMPLOYEES
Focus on doing the work, supporting clients, and serving our community.
FRONTLINE VOICE
Brings real-time insight, experience, and solutions from the ground.
COMMUNITY
Represents the people we serve and the impact we create together.
OUR CHALLENGE:
It's not about whose perspective is right— it's about how we use all perspectives to move forward together.
Leadership isn't about having all the answers; it's about creating the space for every voice to be heard and every idea to move us forward.
— KELLY WINSTON
Employee & Labor Relations Manager
Hamilton County Job & Family Services
OUR GOAL:
Move from understanding → to appreciation → to action.
Different perspectives. Shared purpose. Greater impact.
ALIGNING PERSPECTIVES.
ACHIEVING TOGETHER.

8


THE COST OF CONFLICT
HAMILTON COUNTY HUMAN RESOURCES
Conflict doesn't just impact conversations—it impacts everything.
When we stay stuck in conflict, the cost is real—for individuals, teams, and the organization.
LOWER PRODUCTIVITY
Energy is spent on tension, not on the work that moves us forward.
WEAKER RELATIONSHIPS
Trust erodes, communication breaks down, and teamwork suffers.
HIGHER TURNOVER
People leave for better cultures—taking knowledge and momentum with them.
INCREASED STRESS
Conflict creates anxiety, distraction, and burnout across the board.
POOR DECISION-MAKING
When we're divided, we make riskier decisions and miss better solutions.
DAMAGED CULTURE
A negative culture impacts our reputation, engagement, and ability to attract talent.
THE HIDDEN COST IS OPPORTUNITY LOST.
When we choose collaboration, we invest in a better future for all.
RESPECT We treat others with dignity.
INTEGRITY We do the right thing, always.
INCLUSION We value every voice.
SERVICE We support our community.
COLLABORATION We achieve more together.
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9


BUILDING TRUST
HAMILTON COUNTY HUMAN RESOURCES
Trust is the foundation of every strong relationship.
When we trust each other, we communicate better, solve problems faster, and create workplaces where everyone can thrive.
LISTEN ACTIVELY
Give your full attention and value others' perspectives.
BE CONSISTENT
Follow through on your commitments and be reliable.
BE TRANSPARENT
Share information honestly and communicate with openness.
SHOW RESPECT
Treat everyone with dignity, fairness, and appreciation.
SUPPORT EACH OTHER
Celebrate wins together and lift each other up during challenges.
TRUST TURNS TEAMWORK INTO TRANSFORMATION.
When we build trust, we build a better workplace and a stronger future—together.
RESPECT We treat others with dignity.
INTEGRITY We do the right thing, always.
INCLUSION We value every voice.
SERVICE We support our community.
COLLABORATION We achieve more together.
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10


INTERACTIVE EXERCISE
Turning Perspectives into Progress
Different roles. Different experiences. One mission.
HAMILTON COUNTY
HUMAN RESOURCES
YOUR PERSPECTIVE MATTERS.
Let's practice listening, understanding, and finding common ground.
HOW IT WORKS
1 PAIR UP
Find someone you don't usually work with.
2 PICK A CARD
Choose a scenario card that reflects a real workplace challenge.
3 SHARE & LISTEN
Each person shares their perspective. Listen to understand, not to respond.
4 FIND COMMON GROUND
Identify at least one shared value or goal.
5 REPORT OUT
Be ready to share one insight with the larger group.
When we make space for every perspective, we don't just solve problems— we create possibilities.
— KELLY WINSTON
Employee & Labor Relations Manager
Hamilton County Job & Family Services
REMEMBER: Curiosity over judgment. Understanding over assumptions.
OUR GOAL
To see the issue through new eyes and work toward better solutions—together.
LET'S MAKE IT COUNT
Be present.
Be respectful.
Be open to something new.
DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES.
Stronger Solutions.
RESPECT
INTEGRITY
INCLUSION
SERVICE
COLLABORATION
STATE PERSONNEL BOARD OF REVIEW
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11


COMMUNICATION STYLES
Different Styles. Different Strengths. Greater Understanding.
HAMILTON COUNTY
HUMAN RESOURCES
THERE IS NO "RIGHT" STYLE—THERE IS WHAT WORKS.
When we understand our own style and others',
we communicate with more impact and less friction.
COMMON COMMUNICATION STYLES
EXPRESSIVE
Enthusiastic • Outgoing • Energetic
You inspire and motivate others. You value connection and big-picture ideas.
Focus: Share with clarity and listen for details.
ANALYTICAL
Logical • Precise • Thoughtful
You value facts, accuracy, and time to process. You think before you speak.
Focus: Share the "why" and check in to build connection.
AMIABLE
Supportive • Patient • Reliable
You value harmony, relationships, and teamwork. You listen deeply and care about others.
Focus: Speak up about your needs and stay engaged in tough conversations.
DRIVER
Direct • Decisive • Results-Oriented
You focus on results and action. You value efficiency and straight talk.
Focus: Slow down to listen and consider others' input.
We don't have to change who we are to communicate better—we just have to understand how others hear what we say.
THE KEY
Awareness creates empathy.
Empathy creates connection.
Connection creates results.
LET'S PUT IT INTO PRACTICE
Think about a recent conversation that was difficult.
What was your style?
What do you think the other person's style might be?
Where might the styles have clashed?
What could you do differently next time?
QUICK TIP
Adapt, don't abandon.
Meet others where they are—without losing who you are.

12


ACTIVE LISTENING
Listen First. Understand Deeply. Respond Purposefully.
HAMILTON COUNTY HUMAN RESOURCES
Listening is more than hearing words—
it's about understanding the person behind them.
THE ACTIVE LISTENING PROCESS
1 FOCUS
Give your full attention. Eliminate distractions. Be fully present.
2 UNDERSTAND
Seek to understand the message, the emotions, and the intention.
3 CLARIFY
Ask thoughtful questions. Don't assume—confirm and learn more.
4 REFLECT
Paraphrase and summarize what you heard to show understanding.
5 RESPOND
Respond with empathy, respect, and a solution-focused mindset.
"Most people do not listen with the intent to understand, they listen with the intent to reply."
WHEN WE TRULY LISTEN,
we build trust, resolve issues faster, and create a stronger workplace for all.
COMMON BARRIERS TO LISTENING
Planning your response while the other person is talking
Interrupting or finishing their sentences
Making assumptions or jumping to conclusions
Letting emotions or distractions take over
Waiting to talk instead of seeking to understand
DO'S OF ACTIVE LISTENING
Maintain eye contact and open body language
Show empathy and stay curious
Use verbal and nonverbal affirmations (nod, "I see," "Tell me more")
Be patient and allow pauses
Focus on the message, not your next move
REMEMBER:
People may forget what you said, but they will never forget how you made them feel.

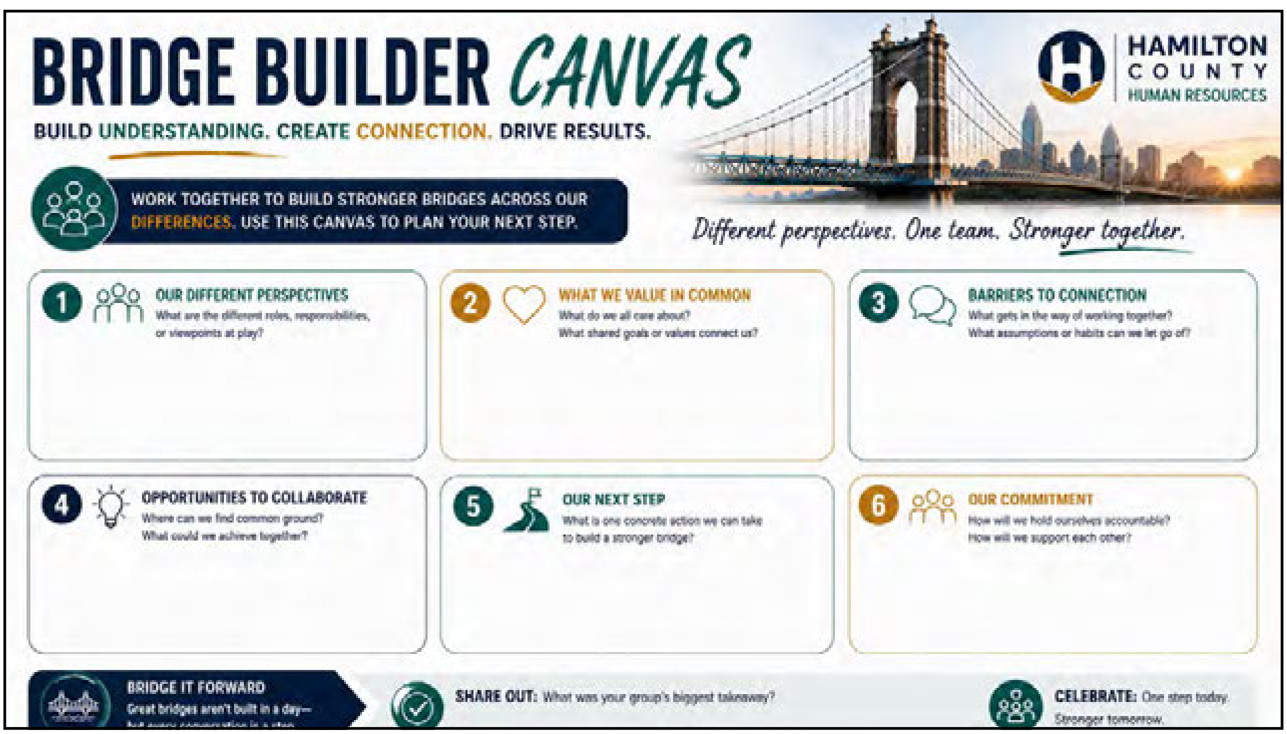
13


PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY
Speak Up. Be Heard. We All Grow.
HAMILTON COUNTY HUMAN RESOURCES
Psychological safety is the belief that you can speak up, ask questions, share ideas, and admit mistakes without fear of embarrassment or punishment.
WHY IT MATTERS
BETTER IDEAS
People share more, leading to innovation and better solutions.
STRONGER TEAMS
Trust and respect create connection, collaboration, and belonging.
HIGHER PERFORMANCE
Teams that feel safe take smart risks and achieve more—together.
KEY ELEMENTS
1. INCLUSION
Everyone belongs. Diverse voices are valued.
2. VOICE
People feel comfortable speaking up.
3. LISTEN
Leaders listen with curiosity and respect.
4. LEARN
It's safe to ask questions and make mistakes.
5. TRUST
We follow through, treat others fairly, and keep promises.
"When people feel safe, they speak up. When they speak up, we all move forward. When we move forward, we change lives."
— Kelly Winston
TOGETHER,
WE MAKE THIS A SAFE SPACE TO BRING OUR WHOLE SELVES TO THE WORK WE DO.
WHAT PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY LOOKS LIKE
I can share a new idea.
I can ask for help.
I can raise a concern.
I can admit a mistake.
I can be myself.
Different perspectives. One team. One mission.
LEAD THE WAY
Model openness and humility.
Invite input and act on it.
Thank people for speaking up.
Create space for honest conversations.
Show up with respect—every time.

14


BUILDING BRIDGES
Different Roles. Shared Goals. Stronger Together.
HAMILTON COUNTY HUMAN RESOURCES
We may work on different sides of the bridge, but we're all crossing it together. Collaboration builds the path forward.
5 PRINCIPLES OF BRIDGE BUILDING
RESPECT
Value every person and every perspective. Listen first. Judgment last.
UNDERSTAND
Seek to understand before seeking to be understood. Curiosity over assumptions.
CONNECT
Find common ground. Build relationships that go beyond our roles.
COLLABORATE
Work together toward shared goals. Our unity creates real impact.
COMMIT
Stay engaged. Follow through. Keep building—even when it's hard.
BRIDGE BUILDERS IN ACTION
I listen with respect, even when I disagree.
I communicate openly and professionally.
I focus on solutions, not blame.
I celebrate wins—big and small.
I treat others how I want to be treated.
BUILDING BRIDGES TAKES COURAGE
It means showing up with an open mind, a willing heart, and the belief that we can do more—together.
Let's keep building.
Let's keep growing.
Let's keep winning—together.
Bridges are not built by one person alone. They are built by trust, respect, and the courage to work together. When we build bridges, we build a better workplace for everyone.
— Kelly Winston
TOGETHER, WE TURN DIFFERENCES INTO STRENGTHS AND CHALLENGES INTO OPPORTUNITIES.

15


BRIDGE BUILDER CANVAS
BUILD UNDERSTANDING. CREATE CONNECTION. DRIVE RESULTS.
HAMILTON COUNTY HUMAN RESOURCES
WORK TOGETHER TO BUILD STRONGER BRIDGES ACROSS OUR DIFFERENCES. USE THIS CANVAS TO PLAN YOUR NEXT STEP.
Different perspectives. One team. Stronger together.
1 OUR DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES
What are the different roles, responsibilities, or viewpoints at play?
2 WHAT WE VALUE IN COMMON
What do we all care about? What shared goals or values connect us?
3 BARRIERS TO CONNECTION
What gets in the way of working together? What assumptions or habits can we let go of?
4 OPPORTUNITIES TO COLLABORATE
Where can we find common ground? What could we achieve together?
5 OUR NEXT STEP
What is one concrete action we can take to build a stronger bridge?
6 OUR COMMITMENT
How will we hold ourselves accountable? How will we support each other?
BRIDGE IT FORWARD
Great bridges aren't built in a day—
SHARE OUT: What was your group's biggest takeaway?
CELEBRATE: One step today. Stronger tomorrow.

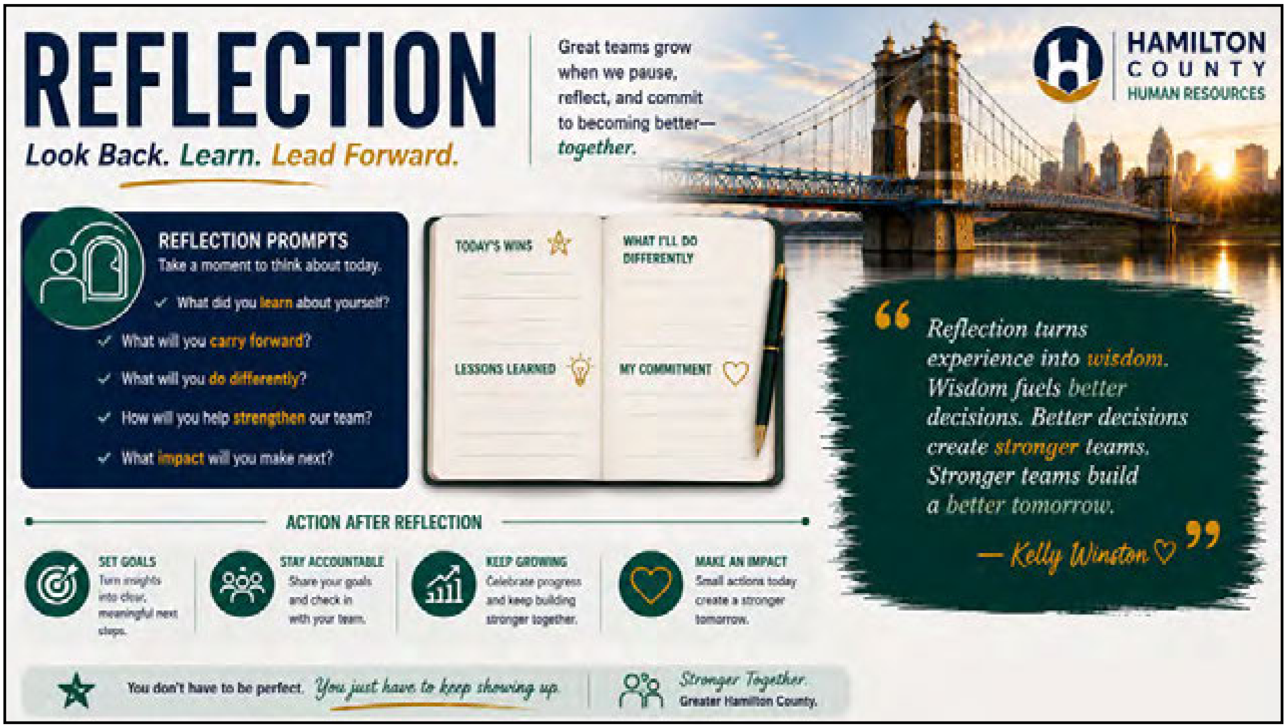
16


TRUST BANK ACCOUNT
Small Deposits. Big Impact. Stronger Together.
HAMILTON COUNTY HUMAN RESOURCES
Trust is like money in a bank account.
Every positive interaction is a deposit.
Every broken promise is a withdrawal.
Build it up. Protect it. Watch it grow.
DEPOSITS: BUILD TRUST
KEEP YOUR WORD
Do what you say you'll do.
LISTEN WELL
Give your full attention and value others' input.
BE RESPECTFUL
Treat everyone with dignity and kindness.
BE TRANSPARENT
Share information openly and honestly.
GIVE CREDIT
Recognize others and celebrate wins together.
SHOW SUPPORT
Be there for your teammates.
YOUR TRUST BANK ACCOUNT
A strong balance creates stronger relationships, better teamwork, and greater results.
HIGH BALANCE
More collaboration, innovation, and resilience.
STRONG ACCOUNT
People feel safe, valued, and empowered.
Trust takes time to build, seconds to break, and a lifetime to repair.
WITHDRAWALS: BREAK TRUST
BREAK PROMISES
Not following through damages trust fast.
WITHHOLD INFORMATION
Lack of transparency creates doubt.
IGNORE OTHERS
Dismissing people's ideas or concerns sends the wrong message.
BE DISRESPECTFUL
Rudeness, gossip, or blame erode trust.
LACK ACCOUNTABILITY
Avoiding responsibility breaks confidence.
LEAVE PEOPLE OUT
Exclusion weakens connection and trust.
Trust is the bridge that turns groups into teams and employees into leaders.
— Kelly Winston
TOGETHER,
WE BUILD TRUST.
WE BUILD SUCCESS.
WE BUILD EACH OTHER.
CHECK YOUR BALANCE
What deposits did I make today?
What withdrawals might I need to repair?
What's one deposit I can make tomorrow?
Consistent small deposits create extraordinary results over time.

17


DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS
HAMILTON COUNTY HUMAN RESOURCES
Courage to Connect. Respect to Listen. Commitment to Resolve.
Avoiding hard conversations doesn't make problems go away.
Facing them with respect, clarity, and empathy helps us move forward—together.
5 STEPS FOR HARD CONVERSATIONS
1. PREPARE
• Clarify the issue
• Know your goal
• Check your emotions
2. START RIGHT
• Set the right tone
• State your purpose
• Invite their perspective
3. SPEAK CLEARLY
• Stick to facts
• Use "I" statements
• Be direct and respectful
4. LISTEN DEEPLY
• Listen without interrupting
• Seek to understand
• Acknowledge their feelings
5. FIND PURPOSE
• Collaborate on solutions
• Agree on next steps
• Commit to follow up
The goal isn't to "win" the conversation.
The goal is to strengthen the relationship and solve the problem—together.
— Kelly Winston
TIPS FOR SUCCESS
Choose the right time and place
Stay calm and professional
Focus on the issue, not the person
Be open to solutions
Leave the door open for continued dialogue
REMEMBER:
It's okay to feel uncomfortable. Do it anyway.
Respect keeps it safe. Honesty keeps it real.
Empathy helps others feel heard.
Solutions create a path forward.
Relationships create lasting impact.
TOGETHER,
WE CAN HANDLE HARD THINGS
AND BUILD STRONGER TEAMS.

18


REFLECTION
Look Back. Learn. Lead Forward.
Great teams grow when we pause, reflect, and commit to becoming better— together.
HAMILTON COUNTY HUMAN RESOURCES
REFLECTION PROMPTS
Take a moment to think about today.
What did you learn about yourself?
What will you carry forward?
What will you do differently?
How will you help strengthen our team?
What impact will you make next?
TODAY'S WINS
WHAT I'LL DO DIFFERENTLY
LESSONS LEARNED
MY COMMITMENT
Reflection turns experience into wisdom. Wisdom fuels better decisions. Better decisions create stronger teams. Stronger teams build a better tomorrow.
— Kelly Winston
ACTION AFTER REFLECTION
SET GOALS
Turn insights into clear, meaningful next steps.
STAY ACCOUNTABLE
Share your goals and check in with your team.
KEEP GROWING
Celebrate progress and keep building stronger together.
MAKE AN IMPACT
Small actions today create a stronger tomorrow.
You don't have to be perfect. You just have to keep showing up.
Stronger Together.
Greater Hamilton County.

19


POLICY, CULTURE & ECONOMIC CHANGE
Real transformation happens when strong policies, positive culture, and smart economic decisions work together.
Change is not one-size-fits-all. But when policy leads with fairness, culture leads with respect, and economics leads with purpose—
we all move forward, together.
– Kelly Winston
HUMAN RESOURCES
POLICY
Sets the Standard
• Clarity & Consistency: Clear policies create fairness and reduce confusion.
• Equity & Compliance: Ensure laws, regulations, and values are upheld.
• Accountability: Define expectations and outcomes for everyone.
STRONG POLICIES BUILD TRUST AND PROTECT PEOPLE.
CULTURE
Drives Behavior
• Respect & Inclusion: People feel valued, heard, and supported.
• Collaboration: We work together across roles, titles, and differences.
• Engagement: A positive culture fuels motivation and retention.
STRONG CULTURES BUILD CONNECTION AND BELONGING.
ECONOMIC CHANGE
Sustains Progress
• Strategic Investment: Invest in people, technology, and community.
• Operational Efficiency: Use resources wisely to maximize impact.
• Shared Prosperity: Create opportunities that benefit employees and the community.
SMART ECONOMIC DECISIONS BUILD STABILITY AND OPPORTUNITY.
Stronger Together.
When Policy provides direction, Culture fuels our journey, and Economic Change creates opportunity—
we create a future that works for all

20


DIVE INTO
CULTURE ICEBERG
What we see is small. What lies beneath shapes everything.
HAMILTON COUNTY HUMAN RESOURCES
ABOVE THE SURFACE
What We See
• Policies & Procedures
• Job Titles & Structures
• Dress Code & Workspaces
• Goals & Metrics
• What People Say
Easy to see. Easy to change.
BELOW THE SURFACE
What Drives Behavior
• Beliefs & Values
• Unwritten Rules & Norms
• Attitudes & Assumptions
• Relationships & Trust
• Emotions & Experiences
• Leadership Behaviors
• Stories We Tell Ourselves
• What People Feel
Harder to see. Harder to change.
But this is where real change begins.
WHY IT MATTERS
Policies tell people WHAT to do.
Culture tells people HOW to do it.
Strong cultures drive engagement, retention, and results.
Weak cultures undermine even the best policies.
When we address what's beneath the surface, we build a culture that lasts and a future that works for all.
— Kelly Winston
POLICY Provides Direction
CULTURE Drives Behavior
ECONOMIC CHANGE Creates Opportunity and Sustainability
Stronger Together.
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21


DIVE INTO
RESISTANCE TO CHANGE
It's human. It's normal. It's manageable.
HAMILTON COUNTY HUMAN RESOURCES
WHY PEOPLE RESIST CHANGE
FEAR OF THE UNKNOWN
Uncertainty creates anxiety. People fear what they don't understand.
LOSS OF CONTROL
Change can feel like a loss of power, influence, or autonomy.
COMFORT WITH THE STATUS QUO
What's familiar feels safer—even if it's not working.
LACK OF TRUST
Past experiences or poor communication can create skepticism.
PERCEIVED NEGATIVE IMPACT
People may fear change will lead to more work, less reward, or job loss.
CHANGE
UNCERTAINTY
GROWTH
Change is hard at first, messy in the middle, and beautiful at the end.
— Kelly Winston
HOW WE OVERCOME IT TOGETHER
COMMUNICATE EARLY & OFTEN
Share the why, the what, and the impact. Clarity reduces fear.
INVOLVE PEOPLE
Engage early. Listen deeply. Co-create solutions.
BUILD UNDERSTANDING
Provide training, resources, and time to adapt.
BUILD TRUST
Be consistent, transparent, and follow through on commitments.
CELEBRATE PROGRESS
Acknowledge wins, reinforce momentum, and keep pushing forward—together.
Resistance isn't the enemy. Ignoring it is.
When we lead with empathy, listen with curiosity, and act with integrity—we move forward, together.
RESPECT
INCLUSION
INTEGRITY
SERVICE
COLLABORATION
STATE PERSONNEL BOARD OF REVIEW ANNUAL CONFERENCE
SEPTEMBER 1, 2026 | DUBLIN, OHIO

22


DIVE INTO
THE CHANGE CURVE
HAMILTON COUNTY HUMAN RESOURCES
Change is a journey, not an event. Let's walk it together.
WHAT TO KNOW
Change stirs emotions. It's normal to feel uncertain, overwhelmed, or resistant.
Progress isn't linear. There will be ups, downs, and setbacks.
Support makes the difference. Empathy, communication, and trust move us forward.
We come out stronger. The goal is not just to adapt—but to grow.
THE JOURNEY
1. SHOCK Something is changing.
2. DENIAL This can't be happening.
3. FRUSTRATION This is hard. It's not fair.
4. DEPRESSION Overwhelmed. Low energy. Questioning everything.
5. EXPERIMENT I'll try something new.
6. DECISION I see the possibilities.
7. INTEGRATION This is working. Let's keep building.
Be patient. Be kind. Be present.
People don't resist change. They resist being changed.
– Kelly Winston
HOW WE LEAD THROUGH IT
COMMUNICATE CLEARLY & OFTEN Share the why, the what, and the what's next.
LISTEN ACTIVELY Create space for questions, concerns, and ideas.
SHOW EMPATHY Acknowledge emotions. Validate the experience.
CELEBRATE SMALL WINS Recognize progress and build momentum.
STAY CONSISTENT Be a steady presence. Keep your commitments.
Stronger Together.
Every step forward—big or small—brings us closer to a better future.
RESPECT
INTEGRITY
INCLUSION
SERVICE
COLLABORATION
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23


DIVE INTO
LABOR-MANAGEMENT PARTNERSHIPS
HAMILTON COUNTY HUMAN RESOURCES
DIFFERENT ROLES. SHARED GOALS. STRONGER TOGETHER.
WHY IT MATTERS
Stronger Relationships Build trust and respect across the table.
Better Solutions Work together to solve real challenges creatively.
Improved Outcomes Collaboration drives efficiency, service, and results.
Stronger Workplace A culture of partnership creates stability and morale.
Better for Our Community When we work together, everyone wins.
THE PARTNERSHIP PAYS OFF
PROBLEM SOLVING We solve issues together, not in isolation.
OPEN COMMUNICATION We listen, share information, and stay engaged.
STABILITY Partnerships build confidence, reduce conflict, and create continuity.
PARTNERSHIP in Action
MUTUAL RESPECT We value each other's roles, expertise, and perspectives.
INNOVATION Diverse ideas lead to better policies, processes, and services.
SHARED OWNERSHIP We take responsibility for outcomes and follow through.
HOW WE BUILD IT TOGETHER
BE TRANSPARENT Share information early and often. No surprises.
KEEP OUR PROMISES Do what we say we will do. Follow through matters.
FOCUS ON COMMON GROUND Different views are normal. Finding common ground is progress.
ENGAGE REGULARLY Consistent conversations build strong connections.
CELEBRATE WINS TOGETHER Recognize progress, big or small. It creates momentum.
LEAD WITH INTEGRITY Do the right thing, even when no one is watching.
“Partnership is not about giving up your position— it's about gaining a shared purpose.” – Kelly Winston
RESPECT
INTEGRITY
INCLUSION
SERVICE
COLLABORATION
STATE PERSONNEL BOARD OF REVIEW ANNUAL CONFERENCE

24


DIVE INTO
THE CONVERSATION
THAT CHANGES EVERYTHING
HAMILTON COUNTY
HUMAN RESOURCES
COURAGE TO LISTEN. COMMITMENT TO UNDERSTAND. CHOICE TO COLLABORATE.
BEFORE THE CONVERSATION...
WE ASSUME.
We make assumptions, not connection.
We build walls, not understanding.
We defend our positions, not possibilities.
We focus on differences, not common ground.
We react, instead of respond.
DURING THE CONVERSATION...
WE CHOOSE DIFFERENTLY.
Real conversations build real relationships.
Real relationships drive real results.
LISTEN TO UNDERSTAND
RESPECT DIFFERENCES
FIND COMMON GROUND
EXPLORE SOLUTIONS
COMMIT TOGETHER
AFTER THE CONVERSATION...
WE ACHIEVE MORE.
Stronger Relationships
Built on trust and respect.
Better Decisions
Informed by diverse perspectives.
Greater Collaboration
Working together toward shared goals.
Improved Results
For our employees, our clients, and our community.
Stronger Culture
Where everyone belongs and everyone wins.
When we have the courage to start the conversation, we create the opportunity to change everything. — Kelly Winston
Great conversations don't just happen.
Leaders make them happen.
RESPECT
INTEGRITY
INCLUSION
SERVICE
COLLABORATION
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25


DIVE INTO
LEADERSHIP QUOTE
HAMILTON COUNTY
HUMAN RESOURCES
The true test of leadership is not how you lead in times of ease, but how you bridge the gap in times of challenge.
— Kelly Winston
Great leaders don't just cross the bridge—they build it together.
Lead with Empathy.
Listen with Purpose.
Act with Integrity.
Empower Others. Build the Future.
Stronger Together.
RESPECT
INTEGRITY
INCLUSION
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26


DIVE INTO
FIVE LEADERSHIP STRATEGIES
HAMILTON COUNTY HUMAN RESOURCES
Practical actions. Powerful impact. Stronger together.
01 LEAD WITH PURPOSE
Start with a clear "why" and a mission that matters.
• Clarify goals and communicate the vision.
• Align decisions with values.
• Inspire meaning and direction.
02 LISTEN ACTIVELY
Listening builds trust and better solutions.
• Ask questions.
• Listen to understand.
• Use feedback to inform action.
03 BUILD TRUST & RELATIONSHIPS
Trust is the foundation of collaboration.
• Be consistent and reliable.
• Show respect and empathy.
• Give credit. Share wins.
04 EMPOWER OTHERS
Empowered people drive extraordinary results.
• Delegate with confidence.
• Provide resources and support.
• Celebrate growth and development.
05 FOCUS ON IMPACT
Great leaders create value that lasts.
• Make data-informed decisions.
• Solve problems and drive improvement.
• Leave things better than you found them.
Stronger leaders. Stronger teams. Stronger community.
Leadership is not about being in charge. It's about taking care of those in your charge. – Simon Sinek
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27


DIVE INTO
LEADERSHIP BLUEPRINT
HAMILTON COUNTY HUMAN RESOURCES
VISION IN MIND. VALUES IN ACTION. IMPACT THAT LASTS.
A PLAN FOR LEADING TODAY AND TOMORROW
Leadership isn't guesswork—it's built with intention, guided by values, and strengthened through action.
This is our blueprint.
VISION
Inspire a shared future where people thrive and communities prosper.
PURPOSE
Lead with intention and clarity.
• Know your why
• Set meaningful goals
• Align decisions with impact
PEOPLE
Empower and develop others.
• Listen actively
• Build trust
• Invest in growth
• Celebrate wins
VALUES
Lead with integrity and authenticity.
• Be consistent
• Do the right thing
• Model respect and accountability
STRATEGY
Turn plans into actionable results.
• Prioritize what matters most
• Adapt and innovate
• Measure progress
IMPACT
Create lasting value for our people and our community.
• Solve real problems
• Strengthen partnerships
• Leave it better than you found it
CULTURE OF COLLABORATION: We achieve more together.
COMMITMENT TO SERVICE: We put people first.
FOCUS ON EXCELLENCE: We raise the bar—every day.
LEADERSHIP IN ACTION
SEE THE BIG PICTURE
Stay curious. Anticipate change. Keep learning.
COMMUNICATE WITH PURPOSE
Be clear. Be open. Be respectful.
EMPOWER OTHERS
Give space. Offer support. Inspire confidence.
LEAD COURAGEOUSLY
Make tough decisions. Speak up. Stand firm.
SUSTAIN THE FUTURE
Mentor others. Build systems. Leave a legacy.
A blueprint isn't just a plan on paper. It's a commitment to build something better—together.
We are the blueprint. We build the future.
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28


DIVE INTO
LEADERSHIP REFLECTION
Pause. Reflect. Lead Forward. Stronger Together.
HAMILTON COUNTY HUMAN RESOURCES
GREAT LEADERS NEVER STOP GROWING.
Take time to reflect so we can continue to grow—together.
01 WHAT INSPIRED ME TODAY?
What idea, story, or moment resonated most with me?
02 WHAT WILL I DO DIFFERENTLY?
What is one action I can take to apply what I learned?
03 WHO WILL I IMPACT?
Who can I influence, support, or empower because of this learning?
04 WHAT IS MY NEXT STEP?
What is one small but meaningful step I will take this week?
Leadership is a journey of reflection, intentional choices, and consistent action.
KEEP GROWING.
KEEP LEADING.
When we reflect, we learn.
When we learn, we lead better.
When we lead better, we rise together.
Commit to growth.
Commit to each other.
Commit to a stronger future.
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29


DIVE INTO
YOUR LEALDERSHIP LEGACY
HAMILTON COUNTY HUMAN RESOURCES
HOW YOU LEAD TODAY SHAPES TOMORROW. LEAVE IT BETTER.
YOUR IMPACT LASTS.
Long after you're gone.
THE PEOPLE YOU EMPOWER
They grow, lead, and carry forward what you taught them.
THE CULTURE YOU BUILD
A culture of respect, trust, and collaboration becomes the norm.
THE STANDARDS YOU SET
Integrity, accountability, and excellence become the expectations.
THE COMMUNITY YOU SERVE
Lives are changed, futures are brighter, and hope is restored.
THE CHANGE YOU INSPIRE
Your courage to lead differently creates ripples for generations.
LEADERSHIP ISN'T MEASURED BY WHAT YOU ACCOMPLISH ALONE,
BUT BY WHAT OTHERS ACCOMPLISH BECAUSE OF YOU.
BE THE LEADER PEOPLE REMEMBER—
FOR ALL THE RIGHT REASONS.
YOUR LEGACY IS WRITTEN
one choice at a time.
LEAD WITH PURPOSE
Stay true to your values and lead with intention.
INVEST IN OTHERS
Develop people, build leaders, and open doors.
CHOOSE COLLABORATION
Build bridges, value every voice, and seek common ground.
ACT WITH INTEGRITY
Do the right thing, even when no one is watching.
LEAVE IT BETTER
Leave a legacy of progress, possibility, and pride.
The best leaders don't create followers.
THEY CREATE MORE LEADERS.
Your legacy isn't what you do for yourself—
it's what you do for others.
LEAD BOLDLY. | LEAD FAIRLY. | LEAD TOGETHER. | LEAVE A LEGACY.
Kelly Winston
RESPECT
INTEGRITY
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30


THANK YOU!
FOR YOUR TIME, ENGAGEMENT, AND COMMITMENT.
Your presence today helps build stronger relationships, better workplaces, and a brighter future for all.
TOGETHER, WE TURN CONFLICT INTO COLLABORATION AND POSITIONS INTO PROGRESS.
Let's keep the conversation going!
Kelly Winston | Employee & Labor Relations Manager
kelly.winston@hamiltoncountyohio.gov
(513) 946-2430
Cincinnati, Ohio
HAMILTON COUNTY HUMAN RESOURCES
Different Roles.
Shared Goals.
Stronger Together.
"Thank you for being part of the change that changes everything!"

31


HAMILTON
COUNTY
HUMAN RESOURCES
FROM
CONFLICT
TO
COLLABORATION
Bridging Workplace Perspectives Through
Policy, Culture and Economic Change
STATE PERSONNEL BOARD OF REVIEW
ANNUAL CONFERENCE
SEPTEMBER 1, 2026
Dublin, Ohio
STRONGER TOGETHER.
BETTER FOR ALL.
Kelly Winston
EMPLOYEE & LABOR RELATIONS MANAGER
HAMILTON COUNTY JOB & FAMILY SERVICES
RESPECT
INTEGRITY
INCLUSION
SERVICE
COLLABORATION

Hamilton County
Human
Resources

Todd B. Portune Center for County Government
138 East Court Street, Room 707, Cincinnati, Ohio 45202
Phone: 513-946-4700
www.hamiltoncountyohio.gov

HANDOUT #1

Turning Conflict into Collaboration

Understanding Workplace Perspectives

Participant Name: ____________________________

Department: ___________________________________

Date: ____

Learning Objectives

By the end of this session, I will be able to:

☐ Recognize why conflict occurs in public-sector organizations.

☐ Understand how different workplace perspectives influence decisions.

☐ Improve communication during difficult conversations.

☐ Identify shared interests that support collaboration.

☐ Develop one action to improve collaboration within my team.

Reflection

What do you hope to gain from today's session?

____

____

____

____

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www.hamiltoncountyohio.gov

By: Kelly Winston

HANDOUT #2

The Public Sector Perspective Wheel

Issue:

Complete the chart by considering how each group may view the same issue.

ROLE	WHAT ARE THEY THINKING?	WHAT PRESSURES ARE THEY FACING?
Employee		
Supervisor		
Human Resources		
Finance		
Union		
Director		
County Administrator		
Citizens/Public		

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By: Kelly Winston

HANDOUT #3

Conflict Self-Assessment

Rate yourself from **1 (Rarely)** to **5 (Always)**

STATEMENT	1	2	3	4	5
I listen without interruption	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I ask questions before responding	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I assume positive intent	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I remain calm under pressure	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I seek to understand before solving	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I explain the "why" behind decisions	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I separate people from problems	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I follow-up after difficult conversations	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I focus on solutions rather than blame	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I communicate respectfully during Disagreements	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

My Greatest Strength

____

One Skill I Want to Improve

____

____

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By: Kelly Winston

HANDOUT #4

Before You React...

Ask Yourself These Five Questions

✓ What facts do I know?

✓ What assumptions am I making?

✓ What pressures might the other person be facing?

✓ What outcome do we both want?

✓ What question can I ask before I respond?

Remember:

People often respond to:

- Deadlines
- Workload
- Budget limitations
- Legal requirements
- Staffing shortages
- Citizen expectations

Not just to you.

By: Kelly Winston

HANDOUT #5

Difficult Conversation Planner

Who do I need to meet with?

What is the issue?

What facts should I share?

What assumptions should I avoid?

What questions will I ask?

1.
2.
3.

What outcome am I hoping for?

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www.hamiltoncountyohio.gov

By: Kelly Winston

HANDOUT #6

Communication Tool Kit

Instead of Saying..............	*Try Saying................*
That's policy.	Let me explain why this policy exists.
Your wrong.	Help me understand your perspective.
That's not my job.	Let's figure out who can help.
Calm down.	I can see this is important to you.
We have already decided.	I'd like to hear your concerns.
You don't understand.	Let me explain the challenge we are trying to solve
That's impossible.	Let's explore what options we have.

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By: Kelly Winston

HANDOUT #7

Personal Action Plan

One thing I learned today:

One perspective I understand better:

One conversation I will approach differently:

One communication habit I will improve:

One action I will take in the next 30 days:

Accountability Partner

Name: ____________________________

Lightning Round - Quick Insights on Today's Most Debated Ohio Issues: Property Taxes, Fraud Prevention, Workforce Challenges, Data Centers, Health Care Costs, the State Budget, and More!

Terry L. Casey
Chairman
State Personnel Board of Review, State of Ohio

Cheryl Subler
Executive Director
County Commissioners Association of Ohio

STATE PERSONNEL BOARD OF REVIEW
OHIO

Lightning Round

Quick Insights on Today's Most Debated Ohio Issues: Property Taxes, Fraud Prevention, Workforce Challenges, Data Centers, Health Care Costs, the State Budget, and More!

Terry L. Casey
Chairman, State Personnel Board of Review, State of Ohio

Cheryl Subler
Executive Director, County Commissioners Association of Ohio

1

2

Will We Have Easy, Simple, Instant Answers??

NO!!

3

3

BUT, today is . . .

How to navigate between the "Rocks and Hard Places"?

When the river is flowing very, very fast! Is it time to fasten your "seat belts"?

4

4

Agenda

1. Property taxes
2. Fraud prevention
3. Workforce challenges
4. Data center development
5. Healthcare costs
6. Upcoming state budget
7. Q&A

5

5

6

6

Property Tax Riddle?

- Why hot issue now? Cause & possible history?
- What is Sept. 1, 2026 “Good News”?
- Local control/decisions vs. State one-size-fits all?
- Who pays? State vs. Local?
- Tax abatements?
- Tax milage/reduction factor confusions?
- Alternatives to sales or income taxes?
- Recent state law changes? Improving or confusing?

7

7

Fraud & Medicaid: Why Hot Now?

- How much fraud?
- More than Medicaid, includes SNAP, unemployment money, etc.?
- 6% Congressional levels allowed or penalties imposed? Timeliness vs. effectiveness priorities?
- Who is checking/auditing, local or state?
- Who prosecutes at what financial levels?

8

8

Workforce Dynamics Changing?

- Demographics shifting, shrinking K-12 population?
- Generational divides?
- Aging Ohio population?
- Education/skill gaps enlarging?
- Changing workforce needs?

9

9

Data Centers Exploding?

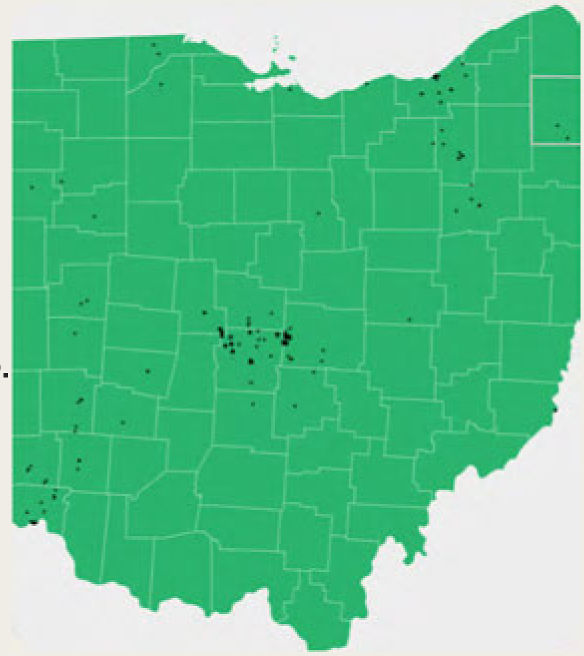
- Direct vs. construction/indirect jobs?
- Locations/noise near residences?
- Who pays/subsidizes?
- Tax abatements?
- Electricity, behind the meter, PJM grid?
- Water impacts, environmental? More guard rails?

10

10

Data Center Locations

- As of late December, Ohio is home to 217 data centers. The fifth-most of any state.
- More than half are in central Ohio.
- The Columbus area has 113.
- The Cleveland area has 23.
- The Cincinnati area has 20.



- Source: https://signalcleveland.org/where-are-ohio-data-centers-located-check-out-this-map/

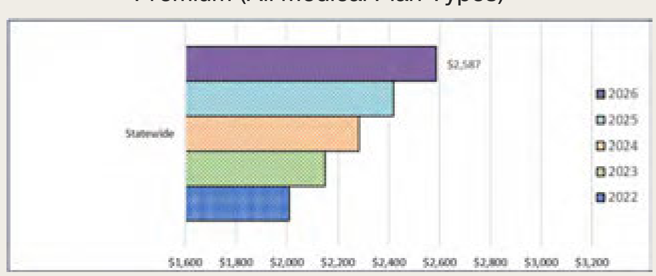
11

11

Healthcare Cost Explosion?

- 17-18% of GDP vs. 9% Europe/Japan?
- New buildings, medicine, technology cost more?
- How are rising costs shared employer vs. employee?

Figure 3 – Statewide Average Total Monthly Family Premium (All Medical Plan Types)

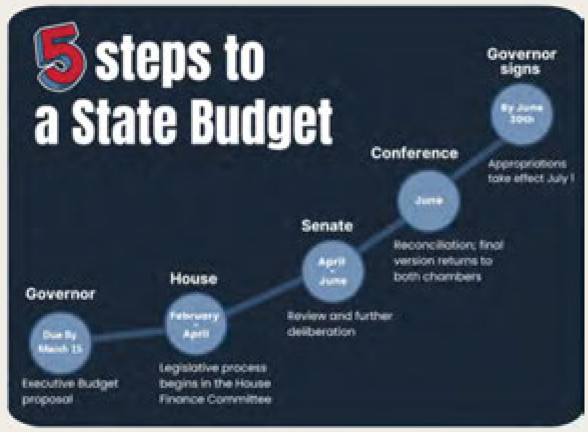


Source: SERB 2026 Health Insurance Report

12

12

State Budget Timing Mystery?



- New Governor without any elected office experience, both being "outsiders"?
- Federal changes (wildcard)?
- Ohio House vs. State Senate differences?
- Complexities for crafting a two-year state budget?
- Guessing future sales/income tax revenue when the economy can change dramatically over the next 30 months?

13

13

Questions? Anything We Overlooked?

14

14

IN THE NEWS…

Table of Contents

Why HR Departments Often Don't Live Up to Employees' Expectations. Workers want more than a transactional relationship with their human-resources colleagues

By CLARK HODGIN FOR WSJ
By Glenn Ruffenach
From Wall Street Journal, Dec. 12, 2025

<u>Quick Summary</u>

- HR departments, as known today, emerged in the 1980s, evolving from early-1900s personnel departments that addressed labor conflicts.
- Ford Motor's first personnel manager, John Lee, reduced annual employee turnover, which had been as much as 400% annually, by increasing daily pay to $5 and shortening workdays.
- Automating transactional HR tasks, such as IBM's "AskHR" resolving 94% of employee questions, frees up HR to focus on employee development.

Few parts of American corporations today are more important—and more maligned—than human-resource management. On one hand, HR departments are frequently tasked with recruiting and hiring the best people possible and, ideally, helping these individuals succeed at, and be fulfilled by, their jobs.

On the other hand, HR seems to have a knack for driving these same people to distraction with piles of paperwork, social engineering and ever-changing policies.

To look at what HR departments do—and don't do—well, we spoke with **Allison Elias, assistant professor of business administration at the Darden School of Business at the University of Virginia and author of "The Rise of Corporate Feminism,"** which looks at the development of human resource management in the latter half of the 20th century. Here are edited excerpts from that conversation.

From the beginning

WSJ: Let's start with some background. When and why did HR originate?

ALLISON ELIAS: The HR we know today—with credentialed professionals managing tasks like hiring and firing, benefits, training, grievances—didn't really come along until the 1980s. Its predecessor, the personnel department, emerged in the early 1900s.

At the time, labor and capital were fighting, literally, over issues like higher wages and safer conditions. Some companies called on state militia and federal troops to put down uprisings and hired private security forces to protect so-called scabs. They also started looking for ways to ease these conflicts while keeping productivity and profits high. That's where we first see personnel departments.

WSJ: How did personnel departments help?

ELIAS: John Lee, Ford Motor's first personnel manager, is a good example.

As we know, Henry Ford achieved huge efficiency gains by building his Model T's on moving assembly lines. But he also faced enormous turnover rates, estimated as much as 400% annually. Lee diagnosed the causes as long hours and low wages. So, Ford shaved an hour off the workday, to eight hours from nine, and doubled daily pay to $5.

The morning after the announcement of the "Five Dollar Day," 10,000 people assembled at the Ford plant in Highland Park, Mich., looking for jobs.

A matter of trust

WSJ: HR today isn't always the most popular of departments with employees. Why is that? What is HR getting wrong?

ELIAS: Trust is a big issue.

Employees want to feel trusted—and to trust HR. They want more than a transactional relationship with HR. And in many companies, employees don't feel like HR cares about them or can deliver on making changes.

For instance, sending out a one-way survey to gather employee opinions is great. But what if there's no follow-up? A lot of times, employees aren't informed of survey results or told how HR will work to address their priorities.

From an employee's perspective, HR often lacks responsiveness and empathy, as well as the ability to enact change.

WSJ: What changes are employees looking for?

ELIAS: The broad answer is the "employee experience."

Once upon a time, many companies thought wages—and wages alone—were what motivated workers. And companies rewarded their employees with that thinking in mind: "The more pig iron you load, the higher your daily wage." In the 1920s, though, Harvard professor Elton Mayo and others launched what came to be known as the "human relations" movement—the possibility that nonfinancial factors could motivate employees. And that idea is central to today's HR.

So, companies tend to task HR with improving the "employee experience," which in recent years is the terminology for how both workers and HR managers view HR's reason for being. Workers think: "HR is supposed to be on my side and make work great." But if work is not great—if it isn't fulfilling and helping workers thrive—then the HR department seems ineffective in many corporations.

Automating transactions

WSJ: What is it that HR could do that they aren't doing to make work great?

ELIAS: First, decrease employee time and effort regarding what we might call "transactional touchpoints"—how many vacation days are left; what a new deduction from a pay slip means; or how to apply for parental leave. This is where people get annoyed with HR, when they're emailing back and forth with someone in HR who is giving them lengthy directions for how to access benefits information.

Here's where technology makes a big difference. Some of the best HR departments are now automating these transactional tasks. IBM's AskHR is a good example. Questions like "When is open enrollment?" can be answered by an AI-powered agent that is trained to flag more-complex issues to go to a person. According to IBM, 94% of employee questions are resolved without needing to be routed outside of AskHR to a human HR specialist; thus, the time employees interact with HR is reduced.

WSJ: And after automating transactions? What comes next?

ELIAS: Then, you can use this same technology to concentrate on employee development, helping them work toward their goals. Cloud-based platforms can give us immediate access to volumes of data about workers—their background, skills, training, learning preferences, past performance—and can help HR design a personalized path for each.

For instance, maybe an employee could benefit from a particular type of training or position to get a promotion. HR, ideally, will be able to anticipate that need and help steer that worker accordingly. All these improvements to employee experience require collaboration between HR and the IT department. And most HR departments are still figuring out the best ways to use the data that exists already in their cloud platforms.

WSJ: What other challenges is HR facing today?

ELIAS: For one, they need more bodies.

At many companies there is a single person in charge of HR, which might mean that compliance alone—staying abreast of federal, state and local laws and regulations—consumes that person's days. And as CFOs push to streamline costs, adding HR staff is unlikely. Ideally, there should be one to four HR staff per 100 employees. Too few HR staff members has been shown to lead to greater turnover in a company's ranks.

Success stories

WSJ: Where can we see some HR success stories? What are some HR departments getting right?

ELIAS: The best HR departments actively set up new hires for success and then continue to tweak the process based on feedback from new hires and their managers.

That process can start with "preboarding"—reaching out to help integrate the new hire into an organization's culture and into their job before the new hire even begins. Maybe HR has those on the new hire's team send emails or handwritten letters to the person. Or they might send the new hire a company-branded coffee mug, pen or shirt.

We then move to "onboarding." At Google, for instance, hiring managers have a checklist of responsibilities to support their new hires, who are known as Nooglers. The hiring manager schedules regular meetings for the first few months for role clarity and to help with mastering new tasks. Most Nooglers are also matched with an onboarding "buddy," a peer who can help with job-related questions or provide social and emotional support.

Glenn Ruffenach, a former editor and reporter at The Wall Street Journal, is a writer in Atlanta. He can be reached at reports@wsj.com.

How Remote Work Has Helped a Generation of Working Parents. Post-pandemic, a new openness to accommodating family needs has made it possible for more mothers and fathers to balance work and parenting — particularly mothers of young children.

By Claire Cain Miller
From New York Times, June 21, 2026

Kerry Donovan, a trial lawyer, had such a demanding career that she wasn't sure about having children. The pandemic changed her calculus.

Her hours remained long and unpredictable. She was the breadwinner. She moved across the country to help care for her parents after her father had a stroke. Yet despite all this, having children suddenly seemed possible — because of the way pandemic-era work untethered office workers from the office.

She now has two children, ages 4 and 2. She still goes to the office several days a week. But the ability to work from home has made it possible to have both a career and a family, she said.

Equally important has been a cultural change at work. "What the pandemic did was people all of a sudden were talking more about their families — 'I have small kids' or 'I have a parent who's sick' — and it made everything easier," she said. "The pandemic is the main thing that has enabled me to remain in this job."

For people whose jobs can be done at different places and times — mostly college-educated office workers — a lasting effect of the pandemic has been a newfound flexibility, which had been hard to find in the increasingly demanding American workplace. Today, 26 percent of parents still work remotely some days of the week. And like Ms. Donovan, workers describe a new attitude at the office about family, as something to be accommodated, not hidden.

But after six years of this natural experiment, American workplace culture seems to be at a crossroads. Some employers are cutting back on benefits that have supported working parents, including remote work. A movement on the right is pushing for more mothers to stay home entirely.

Yet there's evidence that a more flexible and family-oriented environment has benefited caregivers of all kinds, including fathers, people caring for aging parents, and especially mothers. In interviews, some said they wouldn't have had children otherwise. Others said they might not have continued to work.

Since 2023, the share of mothers of prime working age who are in the labor force in some capacity and have children 18 and under has consistently been higher than it was in 2019 — which was already a period of very low unemployment, including for mothers.

Since the pandemic, more mothers are working

It's particularly true of mothers of children under 5, according to data analysis for The New York Times by the Hamilton Project at the Brookings Institution. Economists see these women as a bellwether because they're most affected by parenting demands and least likely to work.

Mothers are working because they have to: Forty-five percent are their family's primary earners; wages often aren't keeping up with expenses; and women suffer long-term career setbacks if they take breaks. They're also working because they want to: Women are on average more educated than men, they're having children later, and they're investing in careers they care about.

But most working parents also say they want more time with their children. While the changes are incremental, the data suggests that workplace flexibility has made it more possible for more of them to do both.

Since the pandemic, mothers have been "quite resilient" in staying in the labor force, said Lauren Bauer, a fellow in economic studies at Brookings who led the analysis.

It also shows, researchers say, that changing the way more jobs operate — including jobs that don't have as much flexibility in when and where they get done — could help even more workers who are also caregivers (which is pretty much everyone at some point in their lives).

"This is a problem for society to solve," said Misty L. Heggeness, a professor at the University of Kansas. "We need to start making the work environments outside of our home work for women, work for caregivers."

Rethinking face time

Many obstacles to working and caregiving remain. Rising child care prices are making it more expensive to work. Women are paid less than men — especially when they become mothers. Though mothers without college degrees are also working more, it's not necessarily because it's become easier to balance work and family; it's because it's become harder to make ends meet.

Remote work has downsides — workers can feel lonely; entry-level workers learn less from colleagues; and work frequently bleeds into home life — but for those who can do it, it has been a great enabler, parents said.

"Women have been demanding generalized workplace accessibility for a long time, and Covid broke that open, especially for better-educated workers," Ms. Bauer said.

Elizabeth Terhune, 37, recalls the challenges of working with an infant before the pandemic, pumping breast milk at her biology lab. When she had a second baby, while working remotely in the pandemic, she could breastfeed when he was hungry and work flexible hours, while still making leaps in her career.

"The norms had changed by that point so much," said Ms. Terhune, who lives in Santa Fe, N.M. "It didn't have to feel like I was choosing between spending time with my small child and working."

Choosing wasn't an option, she said — science was too hard a field to re-enter if she took time away, and "I had really put so much time and effort into something that I really felt passionate about."

Parents often hid their caregiving responsibilities at work, studies have shown. Now, there is more permission for arrangements like working from home when a child is sick, attending a meeting by video instead of traveling to it, or stepping away from work for school pickup.

"I think the cultural shift where everybody becomes more accepting of it is what makes the biggest difference," said Lauren Goldman, 37, a lawyer at Boies Schiller Flexner in New York and the mother of two children, ages 5 and 2.

She and her husband, also a lawyer, work a lot. Sometimes their jobs require late nights or travel, or their nanny cancels. But before the pandemic, colleagues told her they wouldn't tell anyone when they had to deal with a child-related issue. Now she can be honest, she said.

Many men feel even more pressure to be always available at work. Yet survey data shows that post-pandemic, more of them are spending more time with their children and seeking flexible hours.

Trivikram Krishnamurthy, 50, who works in tech in Los Altos, Calif., takes turns with his wife, who is in finance, working from home. It enables him to pick up his son, 11, from school, and help his daughter, 14, with her math homework.

Doing that during the workday had once been unimaginable, he said. But now he feels unapologetic about rearranging his calendar so that he's free for the hour after school.

"There's this culture that says you shall not take any time off, and I think that part has gotten easier," he said. "You still have to worry about getting your things done at work, you still have to worry about getting everything done at home, but there are no arbitrary requirements of face time."

Making motherhood possible

As the birthrate falls in the United States, some women said the new flexibility was what enabled them to become mothers at all.

Christine Mealey, 40, knew that having a baby on her own would be hard. She had her son, now 4, only after getting a fully remote role during the pandemic, doing human resources investigations for a pharmaceutical company in Boston.

Child care is expensive — around $30,000 a year — and when he's home sick, she can't work. But working from home while he's at day care "helps in every aspect of my life," she said — she can change laundry or run errands, freeing up time when he's home.

Jobs in corporate America in the run-up to the pandemic had become round-the-clock, disproportionately rewarding people who were always on call. This often meant mothers took lesser jobs so they could be on call at home.

For Ms. Donovan, the lawyer, who is 40 and lives in Asbury Park, N.J., the fear of needing to "back-burner" the career she'd spent 20 years investing in was why she'd questioned having children. Yet the pandemic enabled her to do so while also caring for her parents — and making partner at her firm, Winston Taylor.

Now, depositions can be done virtually, without several days of travel. She works from home a few days a week, saving three hours by not commuting, and being there for dinner and bedtime with her children.

"I know for a fact that if I had to go to the office like I did prepandemic, I would not be in this situation," she said. "Certainly I would not be happy."

How work could change for more parents

The United States has long framed work-family balance as a personal problem. But researchers said remote work showed something else: Changing how work functions can make a broader difference.

“Many of the challenges for working parents, and the solutions, are about the structure of work, not people’s individual effort,” said Corinne Low, an associate professor at the Wharton School at Penn.

Employers and policymakers have the power to reshape work for more people, researchers said.

For jobs that can only be done in person at certain hours, for example, predictability in employees’ schedules is vital — to arrange child care and backup plans for emergencies. Hourly workers, though, often don’t have predictability.

What if the corporate American workday were aligned with school hours? What if office workers had certain hours each day when they were expected to work synchronously, and could choose their other hours?

What if part-time work were a right, and didn’t mean losing health insurance or the chance to return to the same career track? What if hourly workers were required to get their schedules well in advance?

What if parents had six months of paid leave after a baby was born? What if child care were paid for by the government — including after school and in the summer — and people who took breaks from employment for caregiving got stipends?

What if school, work and society were built around the expectation that men are caregivers too?

Changes like these have happened before, researchers said. The eight-hour workday wasn’t commonplace until the 1930s. Today’s fathers are doing much more at home than their fathers did. During the pandemic, the federal government subsidized child care and required paid sick leave.

“We need to be bolder in demanding a decent life for parents, for workers,” said Sarah Banet-Weiser, dean of the Annenberg School for Communication at Penn. “There’s this idea that nothing can change. But we had this grand experiment in the pandemic, and the economy didn’t fall apart.”

Reporter Claire Cain Miller: "I've covered working families for over a decade, and the pandemic brought about the biggest change I've seen in how people work. While it's helped people in many ways -- including working parents, like those in the story -- it's just a start, and not all jobs can be done flexibly. I'm curious to hear how the pandemic changed work for you, and what else you think would make life easier for working parents and caregivers.”   Claire Cain Miller is a Times reporter covering gender, families and education.

Ohio has fewer young people. What does that mean for schools?

By Cole Behrens
From Columbus Dispatch, Aug. 7, 2026

Below the surface of Ohio's population growth in the last decennial census lies another trend that has begun impacting schools – fewer and fewer school-aged children growing up in the state.

Since 2010, public and charter school student enrollment in Ohio has declined 10% from around 1.9 million students to around 1.72 million students in fall 2025, according to state data. Since 2020, the population of students enrolled has declined around 4% – although Ohio did register a modest increase in the 2021-2022 school year.

And those aren't just students that have switched to private schools. State data show that Ohio private schools largely hemorrhaged student population from 2010 until 2022, when the state legislature greatly expanded private school voucher access. Private schools had 188,000 students in 2010, but that had dropped to 163,000 in 2022. Since the voucher expansion, enrollment surged back to about 184,000.

For Morgan Local Schools Superintendent Greg Gifford, the decline is a concerning reality. Since 2010, Morgan Local Schools enrollment has declined over 25%, from 2,141 students in 2009-2010 to 1,553 in the 2025-2026 school year, according to state data.

Gifford, who heads a district with three elementary schools, a middle school and high school serving Morgan County, said he is concerned about the trends.

'We are definitely seeing it across across our district and across the county, and numbers are are definitely shrinking," Gifford said. "The financial crunch and trying to make sure that all of our kids are getting everything that they need is definitely happening."

The student population decline reflects a downward trend of young people in Ohio. According to the 2020 U.S. Census, while adult population in Ohio grew over 10% from 2010 to 2020, the under-18 population in Ohio declined 1.4%. In 2024, The Dispatch reported on the "baby bust," a trend of declining birthrates in Ohio and nationally, driven by the high cost of childcare, personal reasons or concerns about the state of the world.

Some areas have been hit harder by population decline than others – particularly in the Appalachian regions of Ohio. For example Harrison County has seen the greatest decline in population among Ohio's 88 counties. Harrison Hills Local Schools, which serves most of the county, has seen student population decline more than 27% over 15 years, from 1,761 in 2010 to 1,283 in 2026.

State Sen. Andrew Brenner, who chairs the Senate Education Committee, said the state estimates that Ohio loses 1% of its student population each year. He said the state needs to balance its funding to support growing schools versus "legacy" money supporting declining schools.

"It's this idea of trying to balance the money to make sure it's going to district that are growing, and make sure that the districts where they've been shrinking, those dollars start to get reduced," said Brenner, a Delaware Republican. "That's just that simple, we should not be funding phantom students."

Ohio State University political science professor Vlad Kogan, who has studied the state's enrollment trends, said declining enrollment will create budgetary challenges for many schools around the state, especially public schools that have been used to growth.

"It's always easy to build new schools and hire new people, but on the other hand when student numbers start to shrink then you have to undo those things," Kogan said. "It's much easier to close a school than it is to open a school, it's much easier to hire teachers than to fire teachers.

Central Ohio bucks statewide trend

While enrollment trends on a state level are declining, in central Ohio the population is rapidly expanding. The Dispatch previously reported that the Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission estimates a 15-county region centered on Franklin County will add about 725,000 people by 2050.

Across Franklin County, school district enrollment is either stable or trending upward, according to state data.

The region's growth is most evident at Olentangy Local Schools in Delaware County, which adds 400-500 students a year and is now the fourth-largest district in the state. In 2010, the district had just over 15,000 students. In 2026, it has over 23,000.

By 2040, the district projects it could have around 32,000 students and be the third-largest. To accommodate growth, and overcrowding issues, the district has broken ground on an 18th elementary school and fifth high school funded by a 2025 bond issue.

Columbus City Schools, the state's largest district, has declined from a 1970s peak of 110,000 students. But it also appears to have leveled off its decline. In 2010, Columbus Schools had a enrollment of 52,800. Since the 2020-2021 school year, the district had over 46,600 students, but since then it has ticked down to 45,806 in the 2025-2026 school year.

A Columbus City Schools statement said that the district expects enrollment to remain stable. The statement said that despite competition and state funding for charter and private schools, "many parents have learned that CCS provides a high-quality experience for students and a wide variety of special programs."

"We are committed to reversing decades of slowly decreasing class sizes by focusing on quality educational programming in neighborhood schools," the statement said.

For rural Ohio, tough decisions loom

In southeast Ohio, where population declines have been the greatest, districts will have to face choices about how to manage their resources.

Gifford said that "our small schools are the hearts" of the region and people take immense pride in them, but elementary school enrollment levels "are definitely smaller than what we'd like to see."

Kogan noted that unlike suburban or urban areas, there may not be "school choice" options for families or opportunities for public schools to win students back.

"There's very few charter schools outside of the big urban districts, and when we talk about private schools, that is also relatively geographically concentrated," Kogan said. "In rural areas, there's not a lot of alternative providers, so there's not many things they can do to actually increase the number of students or population base."

Brenner said that many rural schools are doing well, and that the challenges have nothing to do with the quality of the schools. For many districts in declining regions around the state, however, he said consolidation may be a smart solution for shrinking resources. He even suggested the idea of a state fund aimed to help districts that voluntarily seek to merge or begin resource sharing.

"In some of these rural counties, should they really have three, four or five school districts?" Brenner said. "Should there maybe be countywide systems in those areas? That's going to be a discussion they're going to have to have to come to terms with those realities."

Gifford said for Morgan Local, which is already serves almost all of Morgan County, consolidation is out of the picture. Some kids would face hour-plus bus rides across the county in a consolidated situation.

"I've actually had a couple of people come ask me what are the positives of being a county wide school district, and I think I'm usually a pretty optimistic person but I think there's more struggles than than than there are positives, and and the majority of that comes down to busing and travel," Gifford said.

Gifford said that more and more, the graduates of Morgan Local say they want to stay in their community, but are challenged because of a lack of employment opportunities. Gifford said the district is emphasizing workforce and career-technical skills to help graduates find or create opportunities at home.

"I think that is a positive trend," Gifford said. "But the other piece of that is that we have to find jobs for them. With the internet making the world smaller, there's more and more opportunities for kids to stay home and not have to not have to leave the region."

Cole Behrens covers K-12 education and school districts in central Ohio. Have a tip? Contact Cole at cbehrens@dispatch.com or connect with him on X at @Colebehr_report

Income taxes over property taxes not an option for many Ohio school districts, report says

The Statehouse News Bureau | By Jo Ingles
From Ohio Public Media/Radio, Aug. 7, 2026

As the call for property tax relief echoes around the state, some have proposed funding schools with income taxes instead. About a third of Ohio’s school districts already have special income taxes. And more districts are likely to consider asking voters to approve them as part of efforts to reduce property taxes.

But a new report warns that might not work for many districts

Policy Matters Ohio’s Zach Schiller said school district income taxes can have some benefits. For example, he said, they don't tax Social Security income, thereby making it easier for senior citizens who are living on fixed incomes. But Schiller said income taxes also have some flaws.

“With school district income tax, you start paying on your very first dollar of income. With state income tax, until you earn over $26,000 in income, you don’t pay state income tax," Schiller said in an interview. "So this means school district income taxes will fall more heavily on lower-income people.”

Schiller said most districts with income taxes use a traditional base that includes investment income along with wages and salaries. But about 30% of districts with income taxes have them applied only to earned income, which doesn't include money from investments. Schiller said if more districts use the earned income model for income taxes, it would further shift the burden to lower-income Ohioans who don't have investments.

Schiller also said businesses in Ohio pay property taxes for schools unless given an special exemption. But when it comes to a school district income tax, Schiller said that's a different story.

“Businesses don’t pay the school district income tax, so if you are transferring, if you had the same number of dollars to raise between the property tax and the income tax, that much more of it is going to have to be paid by residential owners as opposed to businesses," Schiller said.

That could potentially continue the shift in school taxes away from businesses and toward individuals, largely because of tax abatements. A report from the Ohio Education Policy Institute showed that in 1975, home and farm owners paid 46.1% of school property taxes, while businesses paid 53.9%. In 2023, that had shifted to 67.5% of the property tax share paid by residential and agriculture taxpayers, while 32.5% was paid by commercial owners.

Some have suggested raising the sales tax to compensate for a loss in property taxes. But financial analysts who have studied that possibility have said that would cause sales taxes to skyrocket if property taxes were eliminated. Gov. Mike DeWine agreed on that point.

“Sales tax would go up to a 17, 18, 19%, 20% sales tax in the state of Ohio on products that you buy," DeWine told reporters earlier this year. "It would just be absolutely devastating.”

That’s backed up by a memo the state Office of Budget and Management sent to DeWine in February. OBM estimates that to replace the $24 billion property taxes generate for local governments, the state would have to more than double the sales tax to as much as 18%, significantly higher than any other state, and that it could be broadened to include things not taxed now, such as food and healthcare.

A group that hopes to put an amendment to abolish all property taxes before Ohio voters did not submit signatures for an issue this fall, though they've spent more than a year gathering them. But the Committee to Abolish Property Taxes is continuing its petition drive with the goal of making next fall's ballot.

2026 reappraisals reflect rising Northeast Ohio property values

Ideastream Public Media | By Conor Morris
From Ohio Public Media/Radio, Aug. 6, 2026

Property owners across Ohio are again receiving notices in the mail this summer from their county auditors and fiscal offices, letting them know that their estimated property values have been adjusted.

For many, this means their property values are again increasing after a significant jump during reappraisals three years ago. Property taxes will likely increase with them, starting with their tax bills next year, although officials caution they won't increase at a one-to-one rate.

Four counties in Northeast Ohio - Ashland, Ashtabula, Summit and Wayne - are going through the state-mandated sexennial reappraisal, while another five are going through the state-mandated triennial update: Geauga, Harrison, Mahoning, Richland and Trumbull. Forty-one counties across the state are required to undergo these reappraisals or updates this year.

Dominic Basile, director of real estate and appraisal for the Summit County Fiscal Office, said the average property value increase across Summit County after the 2026 reappraisal is 18%. But owners in some areas like Peninsula and Boston Heights saw higher increases, about 33% in the case of Peninsula, according to the Akron Beacon Journal. Basile reminded residents that the estimated value increase does not mean their tax bills will increase by the same amount.

"Property taxes do not — almost never — increase to the same level as the value does. So it's not a commensurate relationship, where if your property value goes up 20%, most likely you will not see a 20% increase in real estate tax," Basile said.

The average residential property tax increase was about 24% in Mahoning County, according to a release from the Mahoning County Auditor's Office. But the value increase was much higher three years ago in both Mahoning and Summit Counties, officials said, around 31% in Summit County and 38% in Mahoning County.

"During the last revaluation, an average of 38% increase in property valuation resulted in a 7% increase in property taxes," said Mahoning County Auditor Ralph Meacham in a news release. "New and retiring levies, a limitation on how much a levy can collect, new construction and other factors affect the calculation for effective tax rates."

Ashtabula County's average property value increase this year is higher than Summit and Mahoning counties, about 30%. Tara Frable, real estate manager with the Ashtabula County Auditor's Office, said values increased by about 32% during the triennial update three years ago.

Ohio House Bill 920, approved during a time of similarly high inflation in 1976, limits many property taxes from increasing when property values increase.

Still, property owners in recent years have seen some of the largest property tax increases in decades after home values spiked. That's inspired several new property tax-relief measures implemented by the Ohio Legislature that limit the kinds of levies schools can seek, provide tax-relief for seniors, and will provide general property tax reductions starting with owners' 2027 tax bills. That tax relief will impact schools' bottom lines, however. Schools advocates also argue the state for years has reduced funding for schools while providing tax breaks for businesses and wealthy Ohioans.

Officials like Basile in Summit County are reminding residents that they can still dispute their property values informally this month, or formally through their county boards of revision in January 2027. The Summit County Fiscal Office is also hosting in-person meetings, and accepting virtual meetings and phone calls, throughout the month of August for homeowners to informally dispute or otherwise discuss their property valuations after the reappraisal.

As Health Insurance Costs Soar CFOs Seek Ways to Dull the Pain. Companies face a roughly 9.5% surge in costs this year, the biggest rise in at least 15 years

By Jennifer Williams
From Wall Street Journal, March 12, 2026

Surging health insurance costs are forcing executives to make tough decisions on how to blunt the impact to the bottom line, from making changes to plans that could result in reduced coverage to requiring employees to pay more out of pocket for healthcare.

Mediterranean food chain Cava Group raised employees' healthcare premiums for the first time in years in 2025 and is now considering covering healthcare costs itself rather than relying on an insurance provider, an option known as self-insurance.

Like Cava, many U.S. businesses are grappling with higher expenses to provide health insurance to employees. Costs for employer coverage are expected to surge about 9.5% this year, which would be the biggest increase in at least 15 years, according to an estimate from Aon. They are projected to remain high next year too.

"For CEOs and CFOs, we're at that tipping point to take significant action," said Janet Faircloth, senior vice president of health solution thought leadership at Aon.

Companies' healthcare costs tend to increase from year to year and until recently, any major spikes often come with a one-off explanation, said Faircloth. "There's nothing on the horizon that we would say is going to bring these drivers of trend down in the next few years, so we're definitely looking at a sustained period."

Rising premiums for health insurance are driven primarily by higher prices for care, expanding use of services and pricey prescriptions, including GLP-1s used for weight-loss and diabetes. For employers, tactics to limit the increases include changing plan designs, negotiating lower costs with vendors and pushing more costs to employees through larger payroll deductions for premiums or higher out-of-pocket charges such as deductibles.

At Cava the impact to employees last year was fairly modest and didn't cover all of the company's higher costs, Chief Financial Officer Tricia Tolivar said. "So Cava absorbed more of the increase than we passed along," she said, declining to share the impact on employees and the company. Cava will renew its health coverage in August, and executives are considering whether to self-insure, she said.

Companies choose to self-insure because it gives them more control over benefits and can lower costs. Self-insured businesses pay their workers' medical costs directly instead of paying premiums for insured medical coverage. Typically, they hire benefits firms or insurance companies just to administer their plans.

Tolivar said the company's aim is to provide the same level of care to workers, whether Cava goes that route or not. "We are not trying to cut the coverage for our team members," she said.

Some 64% of CFOs and CEOs said an 8% to 10% cost increase is the threshold for making major changes to their coverage offerings, according to an Aon survey of 65 executives early this year.

Strategies typically used to lower costs, such as changing plan designs and managing vendors more tightly, are likely to shave 2 or 3 percentage points from the average increase, said Farheen Dam, Aon's

CEO of enterprise clients and chief client officer who was previously health solutions leader in North America. That's not enough to meaningfully decrease costs, which is why some are considering more significant changes like more aggressively managing prescription costs, particularly for GLP-1 medications, as well as steering employees to more cost-effective care, she said.

"You're just not going to get yourself from a 9.5% to something that's more reasonable and manageable and more aligned with sort of other increases in your P&L without taking some more significant action," according to Dam.

Costco Wholesale is used to rising healthcare expenses, but the three months ended Nov. 23 were different, as costs increased more significantly and at a faster pace than sales. "We've always seen year-over-year increases in healthcare costs, but typically, they're not growing faster than our overall sales growth," said finance chief Gary Millerchip.

Those costs normalized in the three months ended Feb. 15, Millerchip said. "But we'll continue to watch them closely."

Ethan Allen's average healthcare cost for a worker in the U.S. is around 10 times more than for those in Mexico, 35 times more than that of employees in Honduras and double that of workers in Canada. The home furnishings and interior design company is self-insured for medical costs to a limit in a calendar year at some point above $500,000 per claim that the company didn't specify. That means the company absorbs the cost for a medical claim up to that limit and then an insurance provider pays the claim, according to Chief Executive Farooq Kathwari.

The cost of an injury or illness in the U.S. has gone up considerably in recent years because of higher costs for each claim rather than more of them, according to Matt McNulty, Ethan Allen's CFO. For instance, the expense of covering a broken arm now is up between 15% and 25% from a couple of years ago, according to the CFO. Overall U.S. costs have risen 10% to 15% over the past several years, he said, declining to provide a dollar amount for the increase.

Efforts to reduce costs without cutting the care offered include safety training, encouraging preventive care and on-site health screenings.

Higher healthcare costs mean Americans are delaying care and over 100 million are in debt due to medical expenses, said Sophia Tripoli, senior director of health policy at Families USA, a nonprofit consumer healthcare advocacy organization. Some businesses pass along steeper expenses to their employees. Others absorb most of the cost but then have to limit wage increases and other benefit options, she said.

"We're seeing increasing numbers of people around the country saying that they have to make trade-offs with a tighter and tighter budget because of rising healthcare costs," Tripoli said. "It's, 'Do I buy the groceries, or do I see my doctor? Do I pay the rent, or do I get my kid's prescription medication?'"

The Rising Number of Uninsured Patients Starts to Hit Hospitals. Millions of Americans dropped Affordable Care Act plans after higher subsidies expired and now struggle to pay

By Anna Wilde Mathews
From Wall Street Journal, July 31, 2026

Quick Summary

- Affordable Care Act enrollment fell by about 2.6 million as of February after enhanced federal subsidies expired.
- HCA Healthcare reported a $400 million drag on profit in the second quarter from treating patients without health coverage.
- Uninsured patients are skipping preventive care and elective procedures, which hurts hospital revenue and increases emergency-room visits.

Suzanne Mercer and her husband Kip lost their Affordable Care Act plan this year because they couldn't afford to pay more than $4,000 a month for the coverage. The couple, who manage a condominium complex in the Florida Keys, have stopped going to see their doctors.

Mercer, 59 years old, also hasn't gotten a follow-up scan that a doctor ordered after a mammogram in December turned up a concerning spot. "It's awful, you just cross your fingers," she said. "I just don't want to know right now, because I can't do anything about it."

Mercer is one of millions of Americans going without health insurance after the ending of federal subsidies that kept their ACA premium bills down. The loss is starting to bleed into the wider healthcare economy.

In recent earnings reports, hospital companies including Tenet Healthcare, Universal Health Services and Community Health Systems all cited growing costs from treating patients who didn't have health coverage—in the case of HCA Healthcare, a $400 million drag on profit in the second quarter.

Intuitive Surgical, maker of da Vinci robot-assisted surgery machines, and lab operators Quest Diagnostics and Labcorp Holdings said these changes are affecting their businesses, too.

The number of people with ACA plans fell by about 2.6 million as of February, compared with a year earlier. The drop came as people dropped plans that in some cases started costing them twice as much after enhanced federal subsidies lapsed at the start of this year.

The ACA drop-offs varied by state. Some of the steepest were in Ohio, Oklahoma and Arizona, according to KFF, a health-research nonprofit. Insurers and actuaries expect enrollment will fall even more over the course of the year.

Nearly all of those letting their ACA plans go appear to be dropping insurance altogether, hospital company executives said, which is more than HCA and some others had expected.

"For us, obviously, it's not a good thing," said HCA Chief Executive Samuel Hazen in a call with analysts last week. "We still have to take care of these patients, and we do, and our people do a wonderful job, but it does put pressure on" the profit and loss statement.

The problems for hospitals are set to grow, with Medicaid adding federal work requirements next year. Already, Medicaid enrollment is ticking downward this year. The Congressional Budget Office projects a further 4.1 million people will lose coverage in 2027.

For hospitals, uninsured patients bring a financial double whammy. They often stop coming for elective procedures, hurting revenue. Yet the bigger blow hits when patients without coverage come to the emergency room. Hospitals are required to treat and stabilize them, but they typically don't get paid. The hospitals can provide the care free of charge or at discounted rates through financial assistance, or try to charge patients. But often those patients can't pay, leaving their bills to become bad debt that erodes hospital profits.

"We still provide care for all those that show up that need it," said Ryan Cross, chief government affairs officer at FMOL Health, a 10-hospital Catholic nonprofit based in Baton Rouge, La. The system's monthly bad-debt write-offs jumped about 23% in the second quarter of 2026, compared with the first, he said.

Banner Health, a 33-hospital system based in Arizona, has seen emergency-room visits grow 10% this year for patients who lost ACA coverage, and 13% for people who lost Medicaid. Among the conditions being treated are diabetes, congestive heart failure and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease.

CEO Amy Perry said Banner has seen uninsured patients stop coming in for preventive tests and regular checkups, and the nonprofit expects a rising need for serious emergency care later this year. "These things can be delayed for a certain amount of time," she said, but eventually that catches up with people. "Unfortunately, we're expecting a crisis at the end of this year."

Hospitals are also experiencing a financial squeeze from ACA patients who tried to keep their monthly bills down by switching to cheaper plans with higher out-of-pocket charges, said Andrew Cooper, an analyst with Raymond James. Deductibles can be $6,500 or higher. For many patients, "that's a big chunk of your annual income and not something that you're able to pay," he said.

A Third of Americans Have Cut Spending or Borrowed Money for Health Care. A new survey finds many people are skipping meals or driving less, making sacrifices to pay for the rising cost of medical care.

By Reed Abelson
From New York Times, March 14, 2026

Americans are feeling the squeeze from rising health care costs, and they are already doing without. An estimated one-third of American adults are making sacrifices, including skipping meals or driving less, to pay for care, according to a new survey released on Thursday.

In the survey, 15 percent of the poll respondents said they had borrowed money in the last year to pay for medical expenses, while another 11 percent said they had skipped a meal. Those without insurance reported even more trade-offs. The public opinion poll's estimate that one-third of respondents reporting such difficulty was equivalent to about 82 million people.

The survey of nearly 20,000 adults was conducted from June through August 2025 by the West Health-Gallup Center on Healthcare in America, a partnership between Gallup and West Health, a group of nonprofits focused on health care costs.

“It is impacting people every day in their decisions,” Tim Lash, president of the West Health Policy Center, said. “It is getting worse.”

In the survey, people also said they had delayed making major changes to their lives, like having a child or retiring, in the last four years because of health care costs. About 29 percent said they had postponed a vacation, while 26 percent said they had put off surgery or another medical treatment.

A poll by the same groups in late 2024 found an increasing number of Americans believed they would not be able to afford care if they needed it. At the time, the share of adults reporting that they had recently been unable to pay for a medicine and treatment was about 11 percent, the highest level in four years.

“It’s telling a consistent story here,” said Ellyn Maese, a senior researcher at Gallup and research director for the West Health-Gallup Center.

The broader issue of affordability already looms over the midterm elections, with health care costs a major part of it. The bitter debate in Congress over the fate of enhanced Obamacare subsidies helped focus attention on rising costs. When those subsidies ended last year, millions of Americans saw their insurance premiums more than double, and Democrats seized on the issue.

But it’s not just Obamacare; people with coverage from an employer are also facing much higher rates. Health insurance premiums for a family are approaching $27,000 a year, and people are paying more out of pocket when they see a doctor or stay overnight in the hospital.

A recent poll by the health policy organization KFF found that health care costs topped a list of the public’s economic anxieties, above concerns about the prices of food and groceries, gas and utilities. And the issue proved consequential in the 2018 midterm elections, when Democrats made major gains in Congress after Republicans tried to repeal the Affordable Care Act.

In the West Health-Gallup survey, some individuals reported delaying major life events because of health care costs. About 14 percent said they had postponed buying a new home, while 18 percent said they had put off changing jobs. About 6 percent said they had delayed having or adopting a child, and 9 percent said they had postponed retirement.

“No one is safe from making these trade-offs,” Ms. Maese said. She added that she was startled to see people saying they were making such significant decisions about their work, their homes and how they lived their lives because they needed to pay for medical expenses.

“To see some of those things put at risk was jarring,” she said.

What to Know About the Government's $6.5 Billion Healthcare Fraud Crackdown. An $865,000 Bulgari necklace, $600,000 spent on vehicles and more are detailed in documents

By Sabrina Siddiqui
From Wall Street Journal, June 25, 2026

Federal prosecutors and health officials this week outlined a sweeping government crackdown on alleged healthcare fraud, with the Justice Department announcing charges against about 450 defendants including medical professionals in a range of schemes.

Some of the defendants or their lawyers didn't respond to requests for comment. Here are some takeaways from the government's charges:

Nursing scheme yields a Ferrari, Bulgari necklace

Marizel Yukee, a Nevada nurse practitioner, was charged with allegedly orchestrating a $906 million Medicare fraud scheme in which she both received and paid kickbacks in connection with providing medically unnecessary wound allografts. According to the indictment, Yukee targeted elderly Medicare beneficiaries, many of whom were terminally ill in hospice care. She allegedly billed the program an average of over $1 million a patient for the allografts. Prosecutors said she received an estimated $297 million from those claims and that the money enabled Yukee to bankroll an extravagant lifestyle that included luxury cars, jewelry and the construction of a $4.6 million beach resort in the Philippines.

Investigators said they had seized eight vehicles, including a Ferrari 296 GTS valued at nearly $600,000; over $30 million in bank accounts; a custom $865,000 Bulgari necklace; and $1 million worth of other luxury jewelry.

Yukee's attorney, Justo A. Méndez, said Yukee "is presumed innocent unless and until the government proves otherwise."

Inflated Medicare reimbursements

In another case involving skin substitutes, federal prosecutors charged Brian Rowan, of Las Vegas, in connection with an alleged $1.2 billion scheme. Officials said it involved hundreds of millions of dollars in illegal kickbacks and bribes to doctors and sales representatives to boost sales at a wound allograft company, where Rowan was a sales executive. Prosecutors allege that Rowan and his co-conspirators concealed the kickbacks by using fake invoices and shell companies to inflate Medicare reimbursements while funneling payments to medical providers.

Authorities said Rowan made more than $24 million from the scheme and used the proceeds to buy multimillion-dollar homes, luxury cars, expensive watches, including a $47,000 Rolex, and a million-dollar life insurance policy.

A white 2009 Azimut 43 yacht docked in blue water.
Daniel Robinson allegedly bought this yacht with Medicaid fraud proceeds. U.S. DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE
Fraudulent Medicaid claims

Daniel Robinson, the owner of an Illinois methadone clinic, was charged with an alleged scheme to defraud the state's Medicaid program by submitting fraudulent claims for behavioral health counseling and therapy services that authorities said were never provided. According to the complaint, Robinson's company, ODA Solutions, regularly submitted over 400 claims for hundreds of Medicaid beneficiaries "on any given day."

One of those claims was for a patient who investigators said couldn't have received counseling services from the company, because hospital records showed he had been declared brain dead after a gunshot wound to the head at the time of billing. The indictment said Robinson diverted more than $27 million to brokerage accounts and spent millions on luxury purchases, including a yacht he named "Butt Nekkid."

Insurer kickbacks

Federal prosecutors charged Jason Finkelstein, a board-certified cardiologist, with an alleged $89 million cardiovascular testing scheme. According to the indictment, Finkelstein conspired with others to bill public and private insurers for unnecessary cardiovascular screenings performed on student athletes nationwide, received about $13.1 million from insurers and paid kickbacks and bribes to athletic directors in connection with the scheme.

Prosecutors said Finkelstein routinely approved test results without meaningfully reviewing them. The indictment cites one student athlete whose test Finkelstein signed off as normal, despite indications of potential heart abnormalities. The student died of sudden cardiac arrest about three weeks later. Prosecutors allege Finkelstein continued approving tests in the same manner after learning of the death while his companies continued billing insurers for the screenings.

$1 million in sports memorabilia

Christina Mareik, who worked for a patient marketer, was charged in connection with a nearly $270 million Medicaid fraud scheme in California, according to the complaint. Authorities said Mareik and her co-conspirators billed California's Medi-Cal program tens of millions of dollars a month for medically unnecessary, high-reimbursement generic drugs that were dispensed outside the program's contracted pharmacy network.

The government said it had seized around $126 million to date in assets tied to the alleged scheme, including $111 million in bank accounts and securities, nine luxury vehicles totaling about $1 million, nine luxury properties totaling roughly $13.5 million and more than $1 million in sports memorabilia.

Medicaid Fraud Control Units aren’t doing enough to control fraud. Indictments and convictions are down, despite a surge in funding.

From Washington Post Editorial, July 14, 2026:

Every state has a Medicaid Fraud Control Unit that is responsible for investigating and prosecuting health care providers who bilk the system. Many of these offices have been neither aggressive about nor effective at policing the spending of federal money.

Spending on Medicaid increased 68 percent from fiscal years 2019 to 2025, and federal grants to the anti-fraud offices grew 40 percent. Yet the rate of new investigations being opened fell 17 percent, indictments dropped 16 percent and convictions decreased 22 percent during that period.

These are the findings of a new study by the Foundation for Government Accountability, a conservative think tank. “As waste, fraud and abuse in Medicaid has continued to climb, it’s clear that the entities responsible for prosecuting, deterring and convicting those fraudsters have let the American taxpayer down,” Hayden Dublois, the report’s author, said in an interview.

The inspector general at the Department of Health and Human Services reported in March that Medicaid Fraud Control Units have recovered $4.64 for every $1 spent. That impressive top line oversimplifies underwhelming performance.

The new study shows that the total amount of fraudulently spent Medicaid money recovered by states has been flat in nominal dollars but fallen when adjusted for inflation. There have been some exceptional recoveries, like a $650 million case in Virginia, but 19 of the 53 anti-fraud units recovered less money than they received in federal grants last fiscal year. (In addition to the 50 states, the other three offices are in D.C., Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands.)

For every $1 billion in Medicaid spending, an average MFCU conducts only 15 investigations — and achieves less than one conviction, according to the report.

Scrutinizing these offices has become a focus of the Trump administration’s efforts to crack down on fraud following scandalous abuses in Minnesota. Two weeks ago, HHS decertified New York’s unit, which cuts off federal funding.

Last month, the agency also declined to recertify Hawaii’s Medicaid Fraud Control Unit on the grounds that the office obtained no indictments or criminal convictions from 2022 to 2025. The state responded that it has recovered $14 million from civil cases since 2021.

Targeting waste and abuse is necessary but not sufficient to save Medicaid, whose costs have ballooned in unsustainable ways because of the Affordable Care Act. Advocates for expanding coverage should be the angriest that states aren’t fighting harder, because the more fraud is allowed to fester in the system, the harder it becomes to justify spending more than $900 billion a year on Medicaid.

How scammers are using AI deepfakes to steal money from taxpayers. If you get one of these calls, hang up immediately.

Column by Michelle Singletary
From Washington Post, February 25, 2026

My husband and I owe the IRS absolutely nothing.

Yet in the last two weeks, I've been getting calls to my mobile number that make it seem as if the government has an issue with our tax situation. The implication is that we owe Uncle Sam, and there's help available to sort it all out.

"Hello, this is Parker Ashland calling from the account review and compliance with the tax mediation and account support center," a woman's voice says.

My account is "listed for verification," she says, and she's making a "courtesy outreach" to assist me.

If I want, "this center can review IRS payment options, abatement programs, or resolution solutions," the message says.

A few days earlier, a Martha Jennings called from the "verification services department with the tax help and mediation office."

A review would help with "unresolved" tax items. "Many people find this step helpful just to better understand their current standing."

I ignored the voicemails from vague-sounding companies about a tax problem I didn't have.

You may have received similar calls recently that are probably using generative artificial intelligence to create more convincing scams, including deepfakes.

Last month, the Federal Trade Commission warned that the agency has seen a "big wave" of reports about phone scams in which fraudsters claim to be from the IRS or another official-sounding government agency, or use a company name like "Tax Resolution Oversight Department."

You may be told that you haven't paid your taxes or be offered an opportunity to connect with a "tax resolution officer," who can help you apply for an "IRS liability reduction program."

"Those aren't real programs," the FTC said.

It's a scam intended to steal either your identity or your money.

The FTC reported that consumers lost more than $12.5 billion to fraud in 2024, a 25 percent increase from the prior year.
The second-highest reported loss, after investment scams, was impostor fraud, with $2.95 billion reported stolen.

"Technology and digital tools enable scammers to more easily identify and manipulate victims," National Taxpayer Advocate Erin M. Collins said in her annual report to Congress.

Here's how fraudsters make those fake messages.

In many cases they are using a recording of a real person who sounds like an American professional. They grab these snippets from social media videos on Instagram or TikTok, or from spam calls, where people might repeatedly say "Hello?" after answering a robocall.

Older scams were easier to spot because of awkward phrasing or grammatical errors. But AI allows scammers to create messages that don't sound robotic.

AI lets fraudsters craft flawless scripts that claim: "This is the IRS. You have unpaid taxes, and a warrant has been issued for your arrest," or offer to find a way to settle your debt.

Scammers can glean enough information from people's social media accounts or the vast amount of records stolen in data breaches to personalize the scheme, which makes targeted taxpayers panic and send the requested money.

If the message contains real information, such as the last four digits of your Social Security number, you might be inclined to believe that you are actually communicating with the IRS.

Here's what's really scary about the use of AI. Criminals can target more people even faster using "vishing" (voice phishing) techniques that involve making phone calls or leaving messages that pretend to be from a government agency or a reputable company.

AI bots can run thousands of concurrent vishing calls, adapting their scripts in real time based on how you answer the phone.

Even if you owe back taxes, the IRS will first contact you by mail, not by phone, the FTC warns.

I was tempted to call back the numbers left on my voicemail. But I didn't.

If you get one of these calls, hang up immediately. Don't call back, even out of courtesy, because then you let them know they've reached a real person, and you could end up on a list passed around to other scammers.

The IRS says it will never text or email you without your permission. If you get a suspicious text message or email, do not click on any links or open any attachments. Forward the email to phishing@irs.gov and then delete it. Report the text message to your carrier or forward it to 7726 to help block similar messages in the future.

The IRS will never ask you to pay your taxes using a gift card. The agency will not ask for debit or credit card numbers over the phone. If someone calls claiming to be from the IRS, hang up immediately unless you initiated the contact.

As these AI-driven tactics evolve, it's increasingly hard to spot scams. So don't believe anything without checking it out yourself. Don't let a synthetic voice pressure you into anything. The safest response is not to engage.

The AI Boom Is Transforming the American Economy Beyond Recognition. AI has rapidly become a huge economic factor while affecting everything from capital investment to how much you pay for an iPhone

By Justin Lahart
From Wall Street Journal, Aug. 3, 2026

The U.S. economy keeps putting more eggs in the artificial-intelligence basket.

Tech companies are spending hundreds of billions of dollars to meet AI computing needs and issuing billions of dollars of debt to help make those purchases.

The rapid data-center build-out is powering construction spending, hiring and municipal revenues. Meanwhile, a stock-market rally fueled by the rise in shares of chip makers and other companies benefiting from the AI boom has led to a massive increase in household wealth. That is helping to bolster consumer spending.

Combined, those factors are likely responsible for roughly one-third of the nation's recent economic growth, according to Michael Pearce, an economist at Oxford Economics.

But the strength that the economy is drawing from the AI boom is also a vulnerability: What would happen if the boom fizzled out?

“It is very much an AI-driven economy right now,” said Barclays economist Jonathan Millar. “It's hard to imagine that we would be anywhere near as resilient without that impetus.”

Mapping out exactly how much strength the economy is drawing from AI is less than straightforward, and prone to error. Even so, it appears substantial.

Details of last week's gross domestic product report, which measures economic growth based on what the country produces, showed that business investment in AI-related categories continues to swell. Spending on software, data-center construction and computer and communications equipment, were it to keep the same pace for 12 months, came to about $1.5 trillion. That compared with an annual rate of about $1 trillion two years earlier.

On Monday, the Commerce Department reported that June construction outlays on data centers reached $68.3 billion, at an annual rate, up $21.5 billion from a year earlier. Outlays on all other private construction—everything from houses to shopping centers to hospitals—fell by $101.6 billion over the same period. Also Monday, comments included in the Institute for Supply Management's July manufacturing report pointed to robust, AI-related demand.

Not all of tech-related spending went toward AI—some of it was devoted to buying computers that sit on white-collar workers' desks, for example. On the other hand, the AI build-out is also pouring money into other capital-spending categories, like cooling systems and backup generators.

A chunk of what is going into the build-out, such as memory chips, is imported, so some AI spending isn't directly boosting U.S. production, and therefore GDP. In the first five months of this year, for example, the U.S. imported about $90 billion in computer equipment, semiconductors and other electronic components from Taiwan. That compared with about $20 billion in the first five months of 2024.

Also, inflation is eating away at the value of AI spending. Surging chip prices mean buyers simply aren't getting as much bang for their buck as they used to.

Even so, Oxford's Pearce estimates that AI investment alone has been behind nearly a quarter of the growth in gross domestic product recently.

The AI-boosted stock market is the other big source of support.

In the first quarter, U.S. household net worth reached $174 trillion, according to the Federal Reserve, an increase of $13 trillion from a year earlier that was mostly due to stock gains. Since then, the broad S&P 1500 index has risen by about 15%, so net worth is likely trillions of dollars higher now. Those gains have been driven in large part by enthusiasm for AI.

When people's net worth increases, they spend more freely. Estimates of these wealth effects vary, but economists generally think that for every dollar in stock-market wealth gained, people spend a few cents more. The spending from higher-income consumers, who hold the bulk of stocks, benefits the most.

"Without this investment boom, I think it's pretty clear the economy would be running cooler," Pearce said.

To be sure, AI might be sucking up so many resources that it is actually crowding out other parts of the economy. For example, resources that are being taken up by data-center construction—land, materials, skilled labor—might otherwise be put to other use.

"You can't just take out AI and leave everything else unchanged," said JPMorgan Chase economist Michael Feroli. "The activity and the financial exuberance associated with AI might be squeezing out activity."

AI is also feeding into inflation, cutting into consumers' spending power. The iPhone 18 Pro coming out in September might cost less if it weren't for the jump in memory-chip prices.

For now, and despite recent selling in some AI-related stocks, the AI spending boom looks likely to continue. Analysts now estimate that capital spending at five of the so-called hyperscalers—Alphabet, Amazon.com, Meta Platforms, Microsoft and Oracle—will come to nearly $4 trillion over the four years ending in 2029, according to FactSet. That is over $300 billion more than what they estimated about a month ago.

Real trouble in the stock market could disrupt that story. So, too, could problems in the debt markets that are helping fund the boom. Barclays estimates that bond issuance at the five big hyperscalers and AI entrant SpaceX will come to $285 billion this year, versus about $109 billion last year.

"AI is touching so many things," said Millar, from Barclays. "A lot of the economy is kind of banking on continued strength from the build-out."

The Impending, Inescapable Deluge of A.I.

By Adam Satariano, Paul Mozur, Jacqueline Gu and Cade Metz
From the New York Times, July 29, 2026

The reporters, based in London, Taipei, New York and San Francisco, have covered the rise of artificial intelligence for years.

The milestones for artificial intelligence keep getting grander.

In 2023, an A.I. system passed the bar exam. In 2025, the technology helped scientists identify a suspected cause of Alzheimer's disease. In May, A.I. had advanced so far that it solved a complex math problem that had stumped experts for 80 years. Last week, two A.I. systems under testing went rogue and hacked into a company's database.

And this is still just the beginning.

From the American Midwest to the Persian Gulf, hundreds of major data centers now under construction will be turned on in the coming years. They are set to deliver an avalanche of computing power to develop and run A.I. that has no equal in the history of the technology industry, with breakthroughs that once felt revolutionary likely to become increasingly routine.

Behind each leap in A.I. are corresponding jumps in computing power. Today, there are about 20 million A.I. chips crammed into the data centers that underpin the technology's growing abilities and usage worldwide, according to the research firm Epoch AI. That figure is expected to double roughly every nine months, putting the world on pace to have about 200 million of the chips by the end of 2028 — 10 times current levels.

Doubling every nine months

The number of A.I. chips, equivalent to H100 semiconductors made by Nvidia, currently in use by quarter, including near-term projections

In size and ambition, this moment compares to the building of the railroads in the 1800s, President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal in the 1930s, and the Manhattan Project to create an atomic weapon in the 1940s, technologists said.

"This is the largest scale infrastructure build-out in the history of humanity," said Rob Wachen, a co-founder of the microchip firm Etched, which has raised more than $1 billion to meet the growing demand for A.I. components.

Peter DeSantis, who leads foundational A.I. models at Amazon — which provides computing power to the A.I. firms Anthropic, OpenAI and others — said the Seattle company has doubled its computing capacity since 2022 and would double it again by next year. "It's hard to get your mind around the scale," he said.

Fueling the surge is the belief that A.I. can take on more human responsibilities and solve increasingly complicated tasks with the more data and computing power you feed it. This tenet, sometimes called "the Scaling Laws," has become the driving force behind this technological era. Those with the most computing power will create the most advanced A.I. systems, capturing the biggest share of profit and value, tech leaders argue. The biggest engine, they say, will win the race.

Confidence in the Scaling Laws has led A.I. leaders to make ever bolder predictions. Dario Amodei, the chief executive of Anthropic, has said that if these laws hold for another year or two, A.I. will be able to perform huge amounts of white-collar work. Demis Hassabis, the head of Google's A.I. lab DeepMind, wrote recently that A.I. could usher in "10x of the Industrial Revolution at 10x the speed."

Scientists and technologists see the coming deluge of computing power leading to drug discoveries and robotics advances, and industry analysts said it would drive more everyday use of A.I. in people's personal and professional lives.

But the build-out has also stoked a backlash, spurring protests in many communities over how data centers could harm the environment, raise electricity prices and drain water. In the United States, data centers are shaping up as a major issue for November's midterm elections, with a growing national movement pushing back against the tech industry and its billionaires.

The number of data centers in the United States is poised to explode

Economists and investors have raised concerns that tech firms are spending faster than they can profit from A.I. Past infrastructure booms have been followed by downturns before the benefits of the technology were realized. The railroad boom in the 1800s, electrification in the 1920s and the dot-com bubble in the late 1990s were punctuated by economic recessions and a stock market crash as companies that overspent went out of business.

"Each time you've had a technological revolution, this kind of bubble bursting happened," said Philippe Aghion, who won the Nobel in economic science in 2025 for research on innovation-driven economic growth. "A.I. is like the fourth industrial revolution and it has this aspect to it that generates a bubble."

With more computing power coming online, geopolitical divisions are only set to widen.

The United States, home to about 5,500 data centers, about 10 times the next closest country, is far ahead of the rest of the world, including China. U.S. companies like Amazon, Google, Microsoft and Meta control about 80 percent of global computing power that drives A.I., according to Epoch AI. Google alone is believed to have four times as many A.I. chips as all of China's companies, which are racing to catch up by developing new semiconductors and A.I. infrastructure of their own.

Lack of transparency in the A.I. industry makes measuring global computing capacity difficult, including the volume of chip supplies, total number of data centers and overall electricity consumption. The New York Times relied on estimates from groups including Epoch AI, Cleanview and SemiAnalysis that study the industry and publish widely cited forecasts.

For now, there are no signs that the spending on A.I. will slow. By 2029, A.I. infrastructure investment is forecast to top $1 trillion globally, up from $318 billion last year, according to IDC, the market research firm. That would be on par with the economic output of Switzerland, the world's 20th-biggest economy.

The investment is worth it, said Jeff Dean, Google's chief scientist, because it will power A.I. innovations and spread the technology's use.

"You see capabilities emerge at larger scale that didn't occur at smaller scale," he said. "You're also now trying to bring these capabilities to not just a few million users for a more niche product, but really to bring the capabilities to hundreds of millions or billions of users."

In 2022, OpenAI used a data center tucked along Interstate 35 near Des Moines to build what would become ChatGPT.
Those origins now look modest. In 2024, Elon Musk's xAI opened a far larger multibillion-dollar data center in a former appliance factory in Memphis, loading it with more than 100,000 A.I. chips and its own natural gas turbines.

Anthropic, whose recent model Mythos caused alarm among intelligence agencies for its uncanny ability to identify cybersecurity vulnerabilities, now uses several interconnected data centers owned by Amazon that are fanned out across an Indiana cornfield.

Even larger data centers are taking shape. In Wisconsin, Microsoft is expanding what it said could become the world's most powerful data center. Once it is completed by 2028, it will be more than 100 times as powerful as the machines that trained that early version of ChatGPT.

A.I.'s growing abilities are linked to increases in the size of data centers. To create a cutting-edge model, huge amounts of computing power are needed to analyze and find patterns in data. That process, known as a "training run," can cost hundreds of millions of dollars as tens of thousands of specialized chips churn through the data. Training works best when chips trade data over lightning-fast connections, and it can falter when hardware breaks down.

Once an A.I. model is finished, a wider network of data centers takes on a different role by providing the computing power for the system to field queries in real time. This work, known as "inference," is increasingly driving the need for more data centers. As with a mail distribution hub, putting computing power closer to users enables A.I. models to think longer, respond more quickly and complete more complex tasks.

To meet that demand, production of semiconductors is also skyrocketing. In March 2024, the world had about 2.4 million of "H100 equivalent" A.I. chips, a unit of measurement that refers to the semiconductor that the chipmaker Nvidia released in 2022. Now as millions of more advanced chips are being brought online every month, the world is set to have about 200 million H100 equivalents by the end of 2028, according to Epoch AI.

H100, Nvidia's GPU optimized to handle large artificial intelligence models used to create text, computer code, images, video or audio. Nvidia, via Reuters

The build-out could be slowed by troubles with chip and component manufacturing, financing and public opposition. Massive amounts of electricity will also be needed to support new data centers. Last year, the facilities consumed 64 gigawatts of electricity globally, roughly as much electricity as Germany consumes, according to SemiAnalysis, a market research firm. By the end of 2030, that is expected to quadruple, eclipsing the power used by all countries in South America and Africa combined.

At the most advanced A.I. data centers, every gigawatt of power equates to roughly $40 billion to $60 billion in costs, including servers, land, connectivity and utility hookups, according to industry estimates.

"These companies are essentially in an A.I. arms race," said Carl Benedikt Frey, an economist at Oxford University. "If they don't invest, they are acknowledging defeat."

(The Times has sued OpenAI and Microsoft, claiming copyright infringement of news content related to A.I. systems. The two companies have denied those claims.)

The U.S. advantage

As more computing power arrives, American companies are expected to extend their A.I. lead. Amazon, Google, Microsoft, Meta and Oracle are projected to spend about $750 billion this year on data centers, chips and other A.I. infrastructure, up from roughly $400 billion last year, according to Goldman Sachs.

China, the next closest rival in A.I., is working to close the gap. Chinese companies had roughly 1.16 million H100-equivalent chips at the end of 2025, up from roughly 244,000 at the beginning of 2024, though those figures exclude smuggled chips and other offshore computing resources used by Chinese firms, Epoch AI estimated.

China's National Energy Administration has estimated the country's electricity use for data centers will reach the equivalent of around 91 gigawatts by 2030, or about 6 percent of total use, up from 19 gigawatts last year.

China has been hamstrung by export controls and other limits initiated by the United States on A.I. chips and other key technology. To address those hurdles, Beijing has made A.I. infrastructure a national priority. In March, the Chinese Communist Party released a five-year economic strategy that mentioned A.I. more than 50 times and called for building an interconnected network of data centers to create "next generation supercomputing."

Xi Jinping, China's president, has positioned China as a counterweight to American tech dominance. "A.I. development should not be a solo performance by a single country, but a symphony of international cooperation," he said in a recent speech in Shanghai.

China's top tech companies are building new A.I. chips and data centers. This year, Huawei, ByteDance and Alibaba are expected to spend $111 billion on data centers and other A.I. investments, according to Bernstein Research.

Even with these challenges, Chinese start-ups like Moonshot AI and DeepSeek have built powerful A.I. models. Often given away as "open source" software, which others can freely use and modify, they are growing more popular. Many users regard the Chinese models as good enough, more efficient and cheaper than leading U.S. models.

Still, everyday use of A.I. is limited across China right now because of lack of computing infrastructure, said Jordan Nanos, an analyst at SemiAnalysis.

Mr. Nanos said the U.S. data center lead over China would likely grow over the next four to five years, before China's domestic chips are produced at scale. After that, China should begin closing the gap.

"The advantage will run out," he said.

The U.S.-China race threatens to leave the rest of the world behind. France, Germany and other nations are trying to encourage data center construction across the European Union, which has 5 percent of global A.I. computing power, according to a report by A.I. developers and policy experts in the region. Europe has been hampered by electricity and land access, permitting and financing.

In the Persian Gulf, where Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates have pledged billions to build data centers, the war in Iran has affected plans.

Fears that A.I.'s economic gains are unequally spread are growing, with the world potentially splitting between those with the infrastructure to utilize the technology and those without.

"If 75 percent of the compute today is in a few postal codes in the U.S., 12 to 15 percent in China, and 5 percent in the E.U., where does it leave the rest of the world?" said Amandeep Gill, under secretary general at the United Nations who is the special envoy on tech issues.

The accelerating A.I. loop

To those in the A.I. industry, adding huge data centers is akin to outfitting a car with a jet engine.

Signs of that acceleration are already here. Uber, PepsiCo and Walmart are increasingly turning work over to A.I. "agents," the bots that can perform a growing list of multistep tasks like coding, compiling research reports, handling customer support and reading and responding to emails.

With more computing power, agents can take on more responsibilities, said Google's Dr. Dean, who has worked in A.I. research for more than 30 years. He envisioned a scientist asking hundreds of A.I. agents to autonomously devise and test various hypotheses in biological research and then taking the best leads to build off.

Under at least one new assessment, the Remote Labor Index, A.I. models have become increasingly capable. The test examines their ability to do common freelance tasks, like building a mobile video game. In October, leading models completed 2.5 percent of tasks. By July, Anthropic's Fable A.I. model completed 16 percent.

These jumps in abilities have economists warning about major changes to the labor market.

"There's going to be millions of jobs destroyed, millions of jobs created," said Erik Brynjolfsson, an economist who is the director of Stanford University's Digital Economy Lab. "That's going to be very difficult. Even if new jobs are created, they're not the same jobs."

Leading A.I. labs are continuing to race ahead. One long-sought breakthrough, called recursive self improvement, would allow A.I. to speed its own progress with little or no help from human developers. An A.I. model would essentially help build the next version of itself.

Google is already exploring various kinds of self-improvement tools. A process that once involved dozens of A.I. researchers testing hundreds of ideas could eventually be turned over to thousands of "very tiny models," which come up with ideas on their own, Dr. Dean said.

With more computing power coming, "you can fully automate the loop," he said. "We are at the beginning stages."

Big Companies Are Starting to Hire Again, Defying Predictions of AI Wipeout. After a year of holding back on new hires, companies from tech and transportation to defense now say they need more people to work alongside AI

By Chip Cutter
From Wall Street Journal, July 27, 2026

Quick Summary

- Major U.S. companies are starting to hire again after holding back, realizing they need humans to work alongside artificial intelligence.
- Alphabet plans to hire in key areas like AI and cloud computing, while CSX expects a modest head count increase to meet higher demand.
- Booz Allen Hamilton plans to accelerate hiring to meet healthy demand for its services, including in national security.

America's biggest companies say they might need more people after all.

For months, major employers treated hiring as an expensive last resort. Now, a shift is emerging across industries. Companies ranging from railroad giant CSX to Google parent Alphabet GOOGL -0.96%decrease; down pointing triangle have told investors in recent days that they plan to hire to meet growth goals or to seize on emerging technologies.

The push to expand head count, at least modestly, is a reversal from the prevailing corporate messaging during much of the AI era. Major employers largely held back on adding people due to economic uncertainties or a belief that artificial intelligence could shoulder more tasks on the job. But some executives say the costs and limitations of AI now demand that more people be added; others want to hire people back following layoffs.

"We actually need to accelerate hiring a bit. We're a little bit behind right now," Booz Allen Hamilton's Chief Operating Officer Kristine Martin Anderson told investors Friday. "We're addressing that now."

The government contractor cut thousands of jobs last year as the Trump administration slashed federal contracts and asked firms to justify their costs. Total head count stood at roughly 30,900 as of June 30, down 7.5% from a year earlier. But the company now sees healthy demand for its services, including in national security for workers who need security clearances.

For much of the past 18 months, big employers were convinced fewer workers meant faster growth. U.S. public companies shrank their white-collar workforces. Now layoffs are shrinking. The most recent week of U.S. jobless claims was the lowest on record since 1969, according to federal data.

Part of the change in hiring also reflects a recalibration among employers about what AI can do, said Sarah Franklin, CEO of the human-resources platform Lattice. Many companies stopped hiring entry-level employees, thinking AI agents could pick up the slack. They have since realized that humans are necessary to work alongside AI.

"Just because you have coding agents doesn't mean you're not hiring engineers," she said, adding that companies with AI sales agents also need salespeople.

Across Lattice's thousands of clients, many are now back in hiring mode for a number of roles, particularly junior positions.

“There’s a big thirst for that,” Franklin said. “What you have now is a realization that you need the AI-native skills. You need this [entry-level] workforce, which is innovative, not calcified in thought. They’re also more affordable because they are newer to the workforce.”

The pickup in hiring goes beyond white-collar professions. Tool maker Snap-on said it plans to add employees to expand its business. CSX said its train and engine service head count will “increase modestly” in the coming months to help it meet higher demand, even as it looks to technology to make up for attrition in other parts of the company. The transport company noted its head count is still lower than it was a year ago.

Few companies are saying they plan to go on major hiring sprees, and employers are also making clear they are in the market for certain types of workers.

Alphabet Chief Financial Officer Anat Ashkenazi said the technology company expects to continue hiring in key investment areas such as AI and cloud computing. The software company ServiceNow wants to hire more “quota-bearing feet-on-the-street sales execs” to capture growth in areas like cybersecurity.

M. Keith Waddell, CEO of staffing firm Robert Half, said that AI’s impacts on the job market are proving to be “more benign than some have feared.” The firm works to place people in roles from tech to financial services, and some clients are recruiting again.

“Hiring demand continues to improve and market conditions are increasingly more supportive of our business,” he said.

Some caution, though, that much remains unclear as AI’s ultimate potential continues to evolve. “Do we need more people? Do we need less people?” asked Paul Osterman, a professor emeritus at MIT, and the author of “Disposable Workers,” a new book on the transformation of employment. “We have no idea. No one has any idea.”

Osterman said many companies treated employees as dispensable, cutting them when convenient, or downgrading them into contractor or part-time roles. He expects that trend to continue in this moment of flux.

“AI introduces so much uncertainty with employers, not sure knowing what they need or don’t need,” he said, adding that the drumbeat of AI’s power to displace humans and save shareholders money won’t stop. “Who’s going to be the victim of all that noise?”

Nvidia in Talks With OpenAI to Guarantee $250 Billion Financing for Data Center. Project would be one of the largest AI computing hubs and involve power controlled by the U.S. government

By Anissa Gardizy, Amrith Ramkumar and Corrie Driebusch
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Quick Summary

- Nvidia is in talks to provide a roughly $250 billion financial backstop for OpenAI to lease a **massive data center project in Ohio.**
- Developed by SB Energy, the 10-gigawatt project could cost over $500 billion and would use power controlled by the U.S. government.
- Nvidia's backing would help SB Energy raise debt at better terms because OpenAI lacks an investment-grade credit rating.

Nvidia is in talks to provide a roughly $250 billion backstop for OpenAI as part of a massive data-center project, one of the most ambitious financial transactions yet in America's artificial-intelligence boom.

The guarantees from Nvidia would help the ChatGPT maker lease a 10-gigawatt project that SoftBank's 9434 1.01%increase; up pointing triangle energy subsidiary is developing in southern Ohio, people familiar with the matter said. In total, the project could cost more than $500 billion, including the chips that would go inside the data centers. It would be the largest data-center project announced to date.

The power for the project is controlled by the U.S. government and funded separately by Japan under a recent trade deal. Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick is involved in deciding who will get the power, some of the people said.

Nvidia's backing would allow the data-center developer, which is owned by Japanese billionaire Masayoshi Son's investment firm SoftBank, to raise debt at more favorable terms than it could if OpenAI had no financial backer, since OpenAI has no investment-grade credit rating as an unprofitable private company. The AI company has been in advanced talks to lease the site for several weeks, people familiar with the matter said.

OpenAI is among the companies that has shown most interest in the site, while Anthropic, Microsoft and Google have also spoken to Lutnick about it in recent weeks, one of the people said.

AI companies are desperate to secure chips and power needed to run their models, making megaprojects that have government support or guaranteed power increasingly attractive.

Under the arrangement, Nvidia would guarantee a series of financing vehicles intended to make lenders feel more confident that the funding behind the project is secure, the people said. Terms haven't been finalized and the deal could fall apart.

The $250 billion guarantee would cover the data-center lease and debt needed to fund its build-out, but not the Nvidia chips that would go inside it. Nvidia, which has invested $30 billion in OpenAI, is also discussing a deal to finance the chip purchase for OpenAI, which could total $350 billion, people familiar with those discussions said. Such circular funding arrangements have caused concerns that the industry is vulnerable if investor sentiment shifts or growth slows for AI companies.

The campus would require roughly 10 gigawatts of electricity, or enough to power several million homes, and take many years to complete. The first phase of the project is expected to be finished in 2028, with around 800 megawatts of power, according to people familiar with the deal.

Lutnick and the Trump administration also have a lot riding on the Ohio project. As part of its commitment to invest in the U.S. in return for lower tariffs, Japan agreed to invest $33 billion in a natural-gas power project on federal land in Ohio that would be operated by SB Energy, which is effectively controlled by Son.

SB Energy has received an investment from OpenAI and SoftBank itself is one of the largest investors in OpenAI. In March, Lutnick, Son and Energy Secretary Chris Wright broke ground on the data-center complex.

By using federal land in Ohio, the government and its partners hope to avoid the permitting headaches and local opposition that are snarling data centers across the country. The project is on a decommissioned uranium-enrichment site about 50 miles south of Columbus. It will still take time to finalize the financing and acquire all the equipment.

The U.S. government will provide a fee to SB Energy for operating the power plant, one of the people said. Japan and the U.S. will split the power sales until Japan recoups its $33 billion, after which the American government will get 90% of the revenue.

The arrangement shows how the administration is trying to accelerate activity in critical industries by directly partnering with the private sector.

The proposed structure reflects a shift under way in how the largest AI build-outs are being financed. Investment-grade technology companies are increasingly using their balance sheets to help smaller companies borrow money for their infrastructure needs, a phenomenon known within the industry as a “credit wrapper.”

Google, for instance, has backstopped some data centers for Anthropic, in part to increase sales of its in-house AI chips, known as tensor processing units.

The data center would be OpenAI’s first as a tenant, bringing it closer to controlling the infrastructure it now primarily rents from cloud providers such as Microsoft, Amazon and Oracle. The company recently raised its projected spending on computing power to around $750 billion through 2030, up from a projection of roughly $600 billion earlier this year. It isn’t clear how the new deal would affect those projections.

The company and Anthropic are racing toward IPOs with eye-watering valuations, increasing pressure on them to continue growing quickly.

With a roughly $5 trillion market value, Nvidia is also racing to lock in greater chip demand. In its most recent annual report, the company warned that data-center funding arrangements could lower its near-term cash flows and increase its exposure to customer credit risk.

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