



THE OHIO ATTORNEY GENERAL'S OFFICE

# 2024 ANNUAL HIGHLIGHTS



**DAVE YOST**  
OHIO ATTORNEY GENERAL





# LETTER FROM THE ATTORNEY GENERAL



## My Fellow Ohioans,

The people who contact my office for help are often at wit's end or desperate, facing a crisis or challenge they never could have imagined.

They seek justice, holding out hope that right will prevail.

Although the Attorney General's Office fulfills an array of duties, nothing so tangibly demonstrates what we stand for as those occasions when we come to the aid of individual Ohioans.

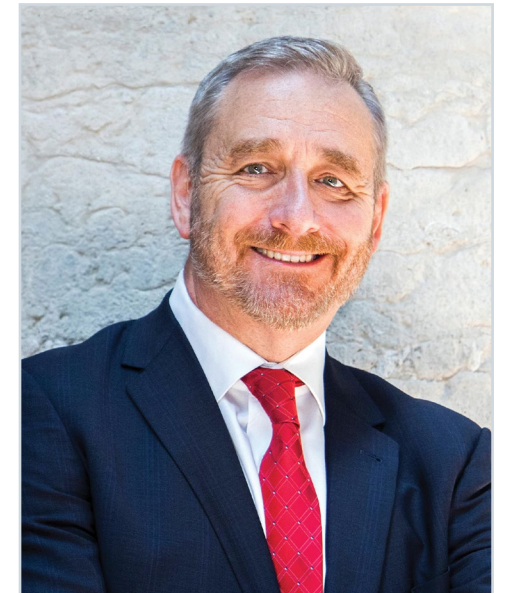
By that, I mean things such as getting answers for families of murder victims, rescuing nursing-home residents from the abuse of a caregiver, protecting patients cheated by a Medicaid fraudster, helping homeowners recoup money from shady contractors or taking up the cause of community members outraged by illegal dumpers.

The 1,500 employees in my office serve the people of Ohio. They commit to doing Big Good, often interceding when nobody else can or will.

By and large, their names and faces will never be known to the public, but the successes described on the following pages attest to the passion and expertise they bring to the job.

As their boss, I am proud of the work they do. As an Ohioan, I'm comforted in knowing that so many outstanding men and women accept the responsibility of doing it.

Our state is far better for it.



Yours,

Dave Yost  
Ohio Attorney General

## MISSION STATEMENT

THE ATTORNEY GENERAL'S OFFICE PROTECTS OHIO  
AND ITS FAMILIES.



OUR ACTIONS ARE DRIVEN BY THEIR INTERESTS,  
GUIDED BY THE RULE OF LAW  
AND THE RELENTLESS PURSUIT OF JUSTICE.



WE WORK TO CONSTRAIN EVIL AND  
EMPOWER GOOD, WITHOUT PARTISAN PREFERENCE  
OR SUBJECTIVE JUDGMENT, AS DEFINED  
BY THE LAW AND BY THE CONSTITUTIONS OF  
THE UNITED STATES AND OHIO.



2024

**'BIG GOOD' IN A BIG WAY**

**T**hroughout these first six years in office, Attorney General Dave Yost has been committed to ensuring that law enforcement officers have the best means to protect the public and themselves.

Continuing a steady stream of advances, the AG appointed a blue-ribbon task force to rethink the content, methods and continuity of police training, a move that in 2024 resulted in a new road map for the future of police instruction.

It was just one of the year's many successes within the nearly 30 sections of the Attorney General's Office that serve Ohioans.

Among the other successes, AG Yost and his team closed the book on the Columbus Zoo scandal with the sentencing of three top executives and two other employees, and interceded on behalf of families who were told by Columbus City Schools that the district would no longer bus their kids to the charter and private schools they attend.

Earlier in the year, in response to a multistate lawsuit led by AG Yost and backed by the Justice Department, the National Collegiate Athletic Association agreed to throw out an eligibility rule that sought to deter Division I athletes from transferring schools more than once.

And then there were successes that didn't necessarily make headlines across the state but were still important triumphs for the people involved — for consumers ripped off by crooked business owners, for elderly residents exploited or abused in nursing homes, for victims of crime, for neighbors frustrated by illegal dumping, for sexual-abuse survivors who found justice through the help of the Special Prosecutions Section.

In these and many other ways, AG Yost and his team work every day to defend the rights of Ohioans. The pages that follow highlight the "Big Good" done in 2024.

## Yost's team secures justice in \$2.3 million Columbus Zoo fraud

**T**he closing act of a \$2.3 million fraud scandal that stained the national reputation of the Columbus Zoo and Aquarium played out in court last year as three one-time top executives and two other former employees were sentenced for their decade-long efforts to enrich themselves.

The men "extorted, conspired, bribed and stole" for personal gain, said Attorney General Dave Yost, adding that their sentences should be "a warning to those who would dare to rip off taxpayers."

An investigation by the AG's Charitable Law and Antitrust sections, along with the Ohio Auditor's Office, found that the defendants improperly expensed goods and bartered, bribed and extorted zoo vendors for goods and services.

Tom Stalf, Greg Bell and Pete Fingerhut — who had served as the zoo's chief executive officer, chief financial officer, and marketing director, respectively — were named in a 90-count indictment on Sept. 18, 2023. Charges were later brought against two other former zoo employees who were also found to be involved.

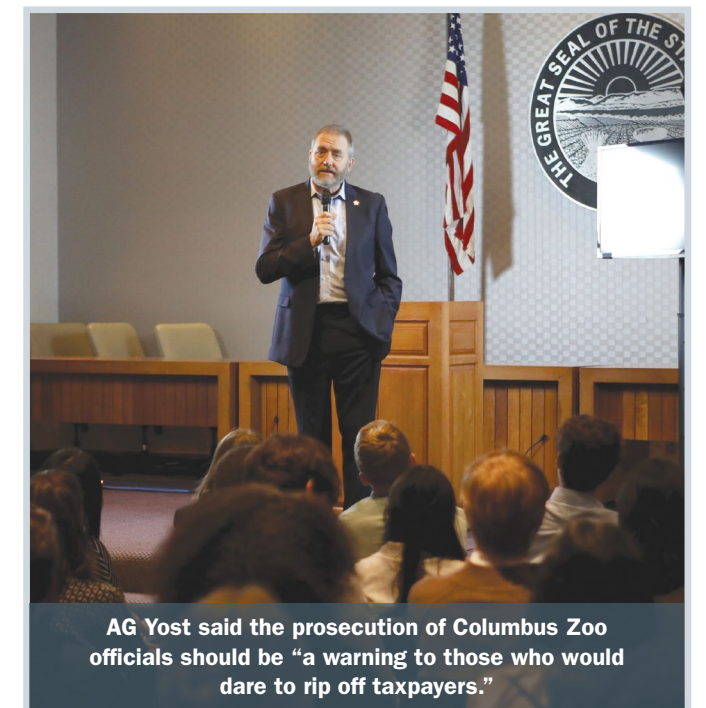
The stolen money was spent on lavish items unrelated to the zoo, including suites and tickets to concerts and sporting events; golf memberships; trips to multiple states and foreign countries; meals, beverages and alcohol; and motor vehicles. Additionally, executives allowed relatives to live in houses owned or controlled by the zoo.

The crimes took place between 2011 and 2021, resulting in the theft of about \$2.3 million.

The AG's Special Prosecutions Section, at the request of Delaware County Prosecutor Melissa Schiffel, led the legal cases against the defendants.

Regarding the three named in the indictment:

- ★ Stalf was sentenced to seven years in prison and ordered to pay \$315,572.65 in criminal restitution to the zoo, state of Ohio and Internal Revenue Service. The amount was in addition to \$400,000 in restitution that had already been paid on his behalf.
- ★ Fingerhut was sentenced to five years in prison and ordered to pay \$639,297 in criminal restitution.
- ★ Bell was sentenced to three years in prison and



AG Yost said the prosecution of Columbus Zoo officials should be "a warning to those who would dare to rip off taxpayers."

ordered to pay \$583,697.44 in criminal restitution. He previously agreed to pay civil restitution to the zoo, too.

As for the two who were charged later:

- ★ Former purchasing agent Tracy Murnane was sentenced to 60 days in jail and placed on three years' probation. He paid \$101,000 in civil and criminal restitution.
- ★ Grant Bell, a former purchasing assistant and son of CFO Greg Bell, was placed on probation for two years and ordered to pay \$8,554.61 in criminal restitution.

The Columbus Zoo and Aquarium is a nonprofit organization funded by admission fees, tax dollars, private donations and concessions revenue. It sits on city owned land and draws 20% of its annual \$92 million budget from Franklin County taxpayers.



## AG Yost goes to court to assist families stripped of bus service

Not long after the 2024-25 academic year began, Attorney General Yost came to the aid of parents who were outraged to learn that Columbus City Schools had hastily decided to stop busing their children to the charter and private schools they attend within the school district.

“Parents are being forced to quit their jobs, rearrange their lives and scramble for transportation while the school board fails to meet its legal duties,” Yost said.

By law, school districts are obligated — with some exceptions — to provide transportation for students who live within district boundaries, regardless of whether they attend public, private or charter schools.

About two weeks before school was to begin in August, however, Columbus City Schools notified parents that it was eliminating busing for 1,380 charter- and private-school students whose routes exceeded 30 minutes in travel time and would instead offer payment for alternative transportation.

Under state law, parental notification of such decisions is required at least 30 days before the first day of school.

In early September, about 150 families challenged the district’s decision, asking the Ohio Department of Education and Workforce for official timings of their bus routes.

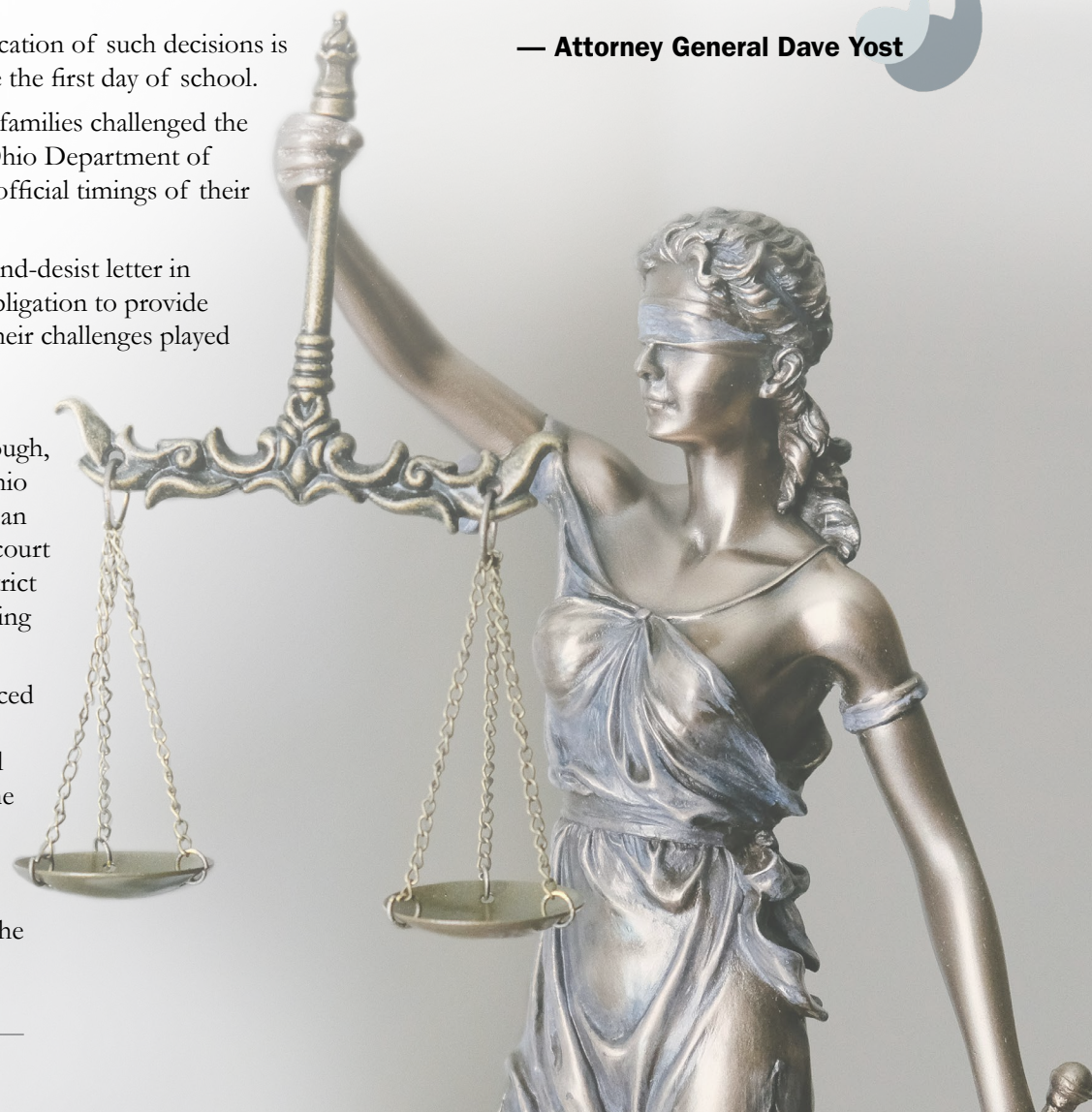
AG Yost initially sent a cease-and-desist letter in which he noted the district’s obligation to provide transportation to students as their challenges played out.

When Columbus City Schools failed to heed the directive, though, Yost sued the district in the Ohio Supreme Court, and later filed an emergency motion asking the court to immediately compel the district to bus students who were seeking mediation.

Soon after, the district announced that it would bus an additional 100 charter- and private-school students and asked the Supreme Court to dismiss the state’s lawsuit. Yost opposed the district’s motion for dismissal, arguing in a memorandum to the

**These families have a right to choose what school is best for their child, and the law is clear that transportation is to be provided. The school board needs to comply with the law whether they agree with it or not.**

— Attorney General Dave Yost



court that the matter was “far from over.”

If a district claims that a student falls within an exception to this transportation rule, the student may contest that decision, and the district must provide transportation while the challenge proceeds. Yet the district was refusing to comply even with this temporary legal duty, Yost noted.

“As a parent and grandparent, I understand the importance of making sure every child has a safe way to get to and from school,” he said. “These families have a right to choose what school is best for their child, and the law is clear that transportation is to be provided. The school board needs to comply with the law whether they agree with it or not.”

## Construction companies pay up for flawed work at Zane State

Attorney General Yost reached a \$1.6 million settlement with three construction companies and a design firm over dangerous flaws in an 11-year-old building at Zane State College.

“Accountability is not optional when it comes to the safety of our schools,” Yost said. “When you refuse to fix your shoddy work and put students and staff at risk, you will quickly find yourself at the wrong end of a lawsuit.”

The AGO sued in 2022 after mediation failed to yield a resolution in a dispute regarding the splitting and crumbling façade of the Advanced Sciences and Technology Center, completed in 2013.

The lawsuit alleged that faulty design and construction caused the hazardous conditions on the building’s south, east and west sides. Falling debris from the brick and veneer prompted the school to close one of the building’s entrances and to install overhead protection and fencing as a safety measure to protect visitors.

The AGO has received the settlement in full from Robertson Construction, SHP Leading Design, Miami Valley Synthetics, and Quandel Construction Group.

The funds will provide Zane State with all the money it needs to put up a new exterior on the Advanced Sciences building. The project is expected to take between 16 and 18 months to complete.

## Yost steps in to safeguard state employees’ pensions

Representing the Ohio Public Employees Retirement System and the State Teachers Retirement System,

AG Yost and his team filed separate lawsuits against ZoomInfo Technologies and Boeing last year to ensure the companies are accountable to their investors.

In the ZoomInfo case, Yost filed a motion in the U.S. District Court for the Western District of Washington asking that Ohio be named lead plaintiff in a securities class-action lawsuit that alleges the software and data company deliberately misled investors, fueling \$75.9 million in losses for the two Ohio pension systems.

ZoomInfo, headquartered in Vancouver, Wash., provides its business clients with contact information for potential customers through subscription-based software. According to the lawsuit, the company engaged in deceptive tactics from November 2020 to August 2024 to inflate the value of its stock while falsely crediting its growth to the strength of its product.

As part of the scheme, ZoomInfo aggressively prevented existing subscribers from canceling while at the same time it extended credit to droves of new, high-risk small-business clients, many of whom ultimately defaulted on their contracts.

The company’s stock dropped roughly 80%, causing billions of dollars in losses to shareholders.

In the Boeing case, Yost sued the company’s board members and senior management for breaching their fiduciary duties, citing a string of high-profile safety failures that “are endangering lives and threatening the financial security of shareholders.”

Yost accused Boeing leadership of failing to both implement adequate safety measures and address whistleblower concerns about the company’s production processes.

Boeing’s safety and compliance failures culminated in a near-catastrophe last year when an Alaska Airlines Boeing 737 Max 9 aircraft carrying 177 passengers was forced to make an emergency landing after a panel of the aircraft blew off soon after takeoff.

The lawsuit contends that board members and senior management knew about the ongoing unsafe practices but even today fail to address them, choosing instead to prioritize profits over safety and regulatory compliance.

Yost is seeking to compel Boeing’s board of directors to improve safety and oversight of the company. The lawsuit is pending before the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Virginia.



# Major cases have national implications

The Attorney General’s duty to protect competition in the marketplace and fend off attempts to limit states’ rights often pits his office against the nation’s biggest companies and the federal government.

Major cases in 2024 included:

- ★ A game-changing settlement with the National Collegiate Athletic Association that expanded college athletes’ ability to compete after transferring schools.
- ★ A suit filed with other state attorneys general and the U.S. Department of Justice against Ticketmaster/Live Nation alleging monopolistic practices in the live-entertainment market.
- ★ A federal court ruling affirming a lawsuit by Ohio and most other states that Google has unlawfully maintained a monopoly over search engines on the internet.
- ★ A victory for Yost and 20 other attorneys general in a ruling vacating the Federal Highway Administration’s tailpipe-emissions rule.

Here’s a closer look at each case:

## Leveling the playing field

At issue in Yost’s case against the NCAA was a rule that required athletes who transferred among Division I schools to wait one year before competing in games unless they were granted a waiver.

Although it never changed its rule, the NCAA in 2021 began automatically exempting first-time transfers from the regulation. At the same time, however, it continued to enforce the rule for subsequent transfers and to deny waivers for no legitimate reason.

In December 2023, Yost led a multistate suit against the NCAA, accusing the agency of violating antitrust laws with its “arbitrary and unfair” restrictions on second-time transfers. Furthermore, the states argued, the rule unfairly restricted athletes’ ability to market their personal brand and control their education.

The next month, the U.S. Justice Department joined the suit.

Under the settlement, announced in May, the NCAA agreed to permanently end its transfer eligibility rule and to grant an additional year of eligibility to Division I athletes who since the 2019-20 academic year had been deemed ineligible for any reason. The settlement also protects student athletes’ rights to compete during legal proceedings against the NCAA.

“We’ve leveled the playing field for college athletes to allow them to better control their destinies,” Yost said. “This long-term change is exactly what we set out to accomplish.”

The case was one of several across the country that recently challenged NCAA policies limiting college athletes’ ability to profit from their success.

## Protecting fans and artists

In May, AG Yost joined the U.S. Justice Department in a lawsuit against Live Nation Entertainment and its subsidiary, Ticketmaster, accusing them of using their dominance to monopolize live performance events.

The action follows years of criticism from consumers against Ticketmaster and its parent company, a backlash that was further inflamed by ticket problems during Taylor Swift’s Eras Tour.

The suit alleges that Live Nation, which controls 265 concert venues nationwide and has its own ticket-selling platform and concert-promotion business, locks out rivals by means of a “coordinated pattern of anticompetitive conduct.”

As a result, fans pay more in fees, artists have fewer opportunities to play concerts, smaller promoters get squeezed out, and venues have fewer real choices for ticketing services.

The lawsuit aims to break up the monopolistic combination of Live Nation and Ticketmaster, terminate Ticketmaster’s exclusive contracts with venues, and stop Live Nation from coercing artists into using its promotion services.

“Ohioans deserve transparency, fair prices and vibrant

competition,” Yost said. “This lawsuit is a critical step toward dismantling the stranglehold that Live Nation and Ticketmaster have on the market and ensuring that consumers and businesses are no longer at their mercy.”

Yost was among a bipartisan coalition of 29 state attorneys general who signed onto the suit.

## Ending search engine stranglehold

In a ruling hailed by AG Yost, a federal judge in August determined that Google broke federal antitrust laws to protect the dominance of its online search engine and, by extension, the ad platform it supports.

Yost was among a bipartisan group of 38 state attorneys general who joined the Justice Department in bringing the suit, filed in 2020.

Among other things, the suit alleged that Google paid billions of dollars to be the default search engine on smartphones, such as Apple’s iPhone, and on web browsers, such as Apple’s Safari and Mozilla’s Firefox. Google’s intent, the suit says, was to defend its search business while restricting the ability of Microsoft, DuckDuckGo and other companies to compete. Google controls about 90% of the U.S. search-engine market.

To correct Google’s online search monopoly, U.S. District Court Judge Amit Mehta asked the states and Justice Department to propose remedies. Among the solutions they returned, in mid-November, was a request to force Google to sell Chrome, its popular web browser. The plaintiffs also asked the judge:

- ★ To prohibit Google from making its services mandatory on phones that use the Android operating system — or force Google to sell Android.
- ★ To stop Google from entering into paid agreements with Apple, Mozilla and others to be the de facto search engine when users open a smartphone or a new tab in a web browser.
- ★ To require Google to provide specified search-engine and advertising data to competitors.

Judge Mehta will likely hear arguments on the remedies — including Google’s proposals — in spring and is expected to rule by late summer.

## Reining in federal overreach

In a victory for AG Yost and 20 other attorneys general, a federal court in Kentucky vacated the Federal Highway Administration’s greenhouse gas emissions rule, saying that any attempt by the federal transportation infrastructure regulator to dictate vehicle policy exceeds the agency’s statutory authority.

The rule sought to require each state to set declining targets for tailpipe carbon-dioxide emissions from vehicles on the national highway system, with the long-term goal of “net-zero” emissions by 2050.

“It is my duty to defend the constitutional balance of power and ensure that the voices of Ohioans are not silenced by federal overreach,” Yost said. “This emissions rule is just one of many attempts to circumvent the legislative process and limit states’ power.”





# Police-training plan ushers in sweeping changes in vision, content

Since he took office in 2019, Attorney General Yost and his team have been working with leaders from Ohio’s policing community to overhaul law enforcement training and reimagine what it should look like in the future — an initiative dubbed Cop 2030.

Some objectives were clear from the start: The training should embrace emerging technology and be grounded in evidence-based practices. It should be consistent for all officers, regardless of the size or budget of their departments. It should be flexible in how and where it is delivered. It should be taught by experts with real-world experience. And its impact should be measured.

Last year, a blue-ribbon task force appointed by Yost recommended sweeping changes that were subsequently approved and endorsed by the Ohio Police Officer Training Commission, signaling a significant step forward in preparing the state’s 30,000 law enforcement officers and its recruits for the demands of the job.

“Today’s agencies need to be ready for today’s problems,” AG Yost said. “Police training in Ohio has been patched together, with a course added here and there to address a timely need. We took a step back so that we could move forward with a wholistic approach. We want Ohio to serve as a national model by offering the best, most relevant training available year after year.”

The changes largely focus on building communication skills, strengthening decision-making under stress, rewarding career-long education with newly established certifications, equipping patrol officers with tactical skills commonly used by SWAT teams, and revamping coursework to integrate multiple related topics and incorporate technology as an aid to learning.

Notably, 72 hours of outdated coursework have been dropped from the curriculum of police academies in favor of new courses on active-shooter and threat response,



critical decision-making, crisis mitigation and de-escalation, communications and mediation, and incident debriefing.

In addition, the changes call for a modification of the physical-fitness requirements needed to graduate from a basic peace officer academy, and enhanced requirements for annual firearms qualifications.

One change that took effect almost immediately was the addition of virtual reality training to complement existing teaching methods.

VR training activates several senses at once and accommodates various learning styles better than traditional classroom courses do. As a result, it generally improves a person’s ability to process, distill and retain key information, enabling more thorough and faster learning.

At midyear, the Ohio Peace Officer Training Academy began distributing VR headsets to training sites around the state. The headsets are loaded with six videos that focus on suicide prevention, the teen brain, mental health, domestic violence, irate families and school violence. The videos are designed to strengthen an officer’s crisis-management techniques by developing their critical thinking and communication skills.

Because the videos are filmed with 360-degree cameras — a technique that records the view in every direction at the same time — users feel as if they’re part of the action.



It’s the difference between being inside a fishbowl and on the outside looking in.

“These VR goggles are the next best thing to real-world experience because officers are immersed in split-second decision-making scenarios,” said Yost, who tested the headsets himself and acknowledged feeling “shaken and sweaty” after the experience.

Through the Attorney General’s Office, OPOTA bought 160 VR headsets. They were distributed to OPOTA’s six Close to Home regional training partners and to academies run by the Highway Patrol and by police departments in Akron, Cincinnati, Columbus, Cleveland, Dayton and Toledo.

OPOTA and its Tactical Training Center, both in London, have headsets for in-house training, and OPOTA has set aside an additional supply to lend to agencies that request them.

With such widespread distribution, all 900 law enforcement agencies in Ohio have access to VR training.

Additional videos for 2025 have been created and will be loaded on the headsets.

## BCI rolls out investigative unit targeting internet financial crimes

When a 75-year-old woman reported losing \$280,000 in a cryptocurrency scam, the Worthington Police Department sought help from the Ohio Bureau of Criminal Investigation and its newly created Electronic Fraud Investigations unit.

Attorney General Yost created the unit last year to address the burgeoning problems of cyber and financial crimes and to bridge the investigative gap between local agencies and federal law enforcement.

“Criminals are hitting cryptocurrency scams hard, which can have lasting impact on your bank account and your credit history,” Yost said. “Recovering lost electronic funds can

be a sophisticated goose chase, but our agents and analysts are getting ahead of the curve to help victims recoup their money.”

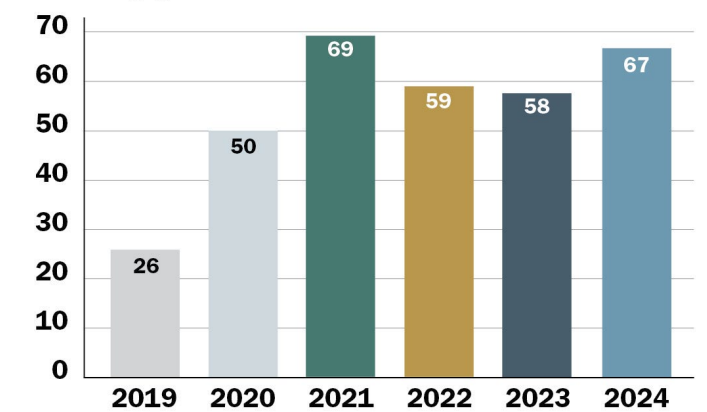
The unit uses a multidisciplinary approach focused on cryptocurrency and racketeering crimes and patterns of corrupt activity. It consists of agents and personnel from BCI’s Forensic Accounting Unit, Special Investigations Unit, Cyber Crime Unit, Special Victims Unit, Criminal Intelligence Unit and Public Official Corruption Unit.

The woman had received a pop-up message on her computer warning that she was the victim of “fraud.” The victim called the phone number provided in the warning and was told that “fraudulent activity” was observed on her husband’s bank account.

The scammers instructed the victim to withdraw \$1,000 from her accounts and deposit the money into a Bitcoin ATM machine. The scam escalated from there, as the victim continued to comply with the bad actors’ demands, making additional deposits, providing personal information, and granting access to bank accounts and a cryptocurrency wallet.

BCI agents used specialized investigative tools to trace the cryptocurrency on the blockchain, which is a digital ledger. They were then able to locate and freeze about \$130,000 of the \$280,000 — money that was returned to the victim.

## OICI by year



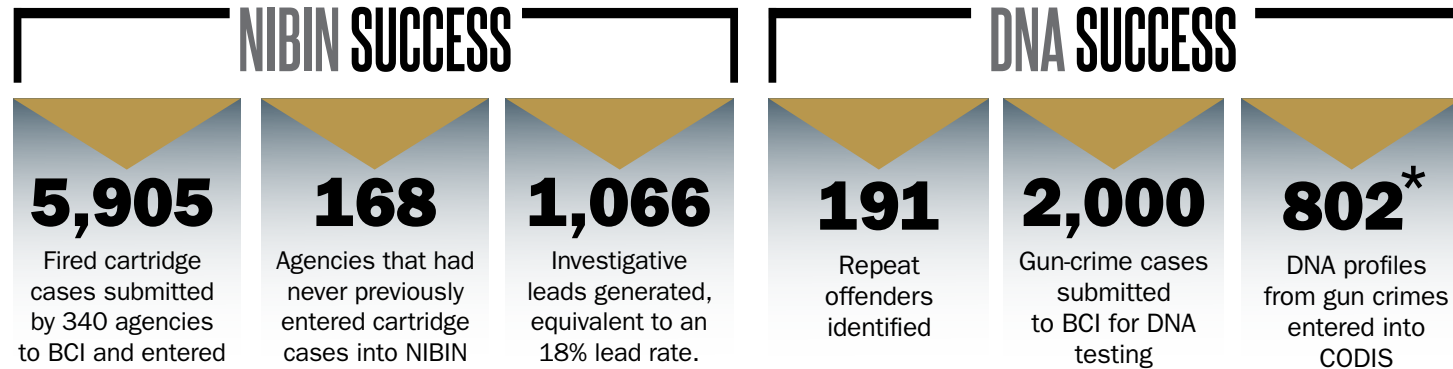
## BCI continues integral role in officer-involved shooting cases

Requests to BCI to investigate officer-involved critical incidents in 2024 remained on par with those of previous years, with local jurisdictions asking for assistance in 67 cases of officer-involved shootings or other use of force as of Dec. 17.

Under AG Yost’s leadership, BCI has investigated 329 officer-involved critical incidents (OICI) since 2019.



Data is from July 1, 2023 — Nov. 1, 2024



\* Some evidence samples are not CODIS-eligible due to case circumstances  
Source: BCI

Ohio law enforcement agencies have sole jurisdiction to investigate their own officer-involved critical incidents, but many communities turn to BCI to conduct an independent investigation as a means of safeguarding public trust.

BCI acts as a fact-finder only. It does not determine whether an officer's use of force was legally justified, nor does it have any role in determining whether an officer is disciplined — that's up to the officer's agency.

Once the investigation is complete, BCI delivers its findings to the presiding prosecuting attorney.

To guarantee transparency, AG Yost began posting complete investigative files to the AGO website in 2020 for all fatal officer-involved critical incidents investigated by BCI and/or prosecuted by the AG's Special Prosecutions Section.

## NIBIN and DNA firearms testing a formidable crimefighting duo

Two key decisions by Attorney General Yost beginning in mid-2023 were yielding positive results a year later in the fight against gun crime.

The first decision increased the impact of the National Integrated Ballistic Imaging Network in Ohio. Run by the U.S. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, NIBIN is an automated digital database that allows for the capture and comparison of fired cartridge cases to solve gun crimes.

At the direction of AG Yost, BCI installed a total of five additional NIBIN imaging stations at three of its crime laboratories across the state in 2023.

The second decision was a policy revision at BCI to broaden DNA firearms testing to include guns confiscated by law enforcement in weapons-under-disability cases, and gun and cartridge cases recovered in nonviolent crimes. Additionally, the BCI lab was directed to swab all guns and fired cartridge

cases to preserve biological evidence for possible DNA testing in the future.

Previously, NIBIN analysis and DNA testing were rarely used together in analyzing firearms evidence from violent crimes. When coupled with gun tracing, however, they offer the best means of determining whether a gun was used in multiple crimes and to identify who was using it.

"With NIBIN and DNA, we've doubled down on our efforts to target the worst of the worst," Yost said.

The case of Terrell Silver of Cleveland underscores the point. In September, he was sentenced to five consecutive life sentences for the 2019 executions of two men and the two women they happened to be with — one of whom was 5½ months pregnant.

The investigation was conducted by the Cleveland Homicide Initiative, a multi-agency team that includes the Ohio Attorney General's Bureau of Criminal Investigation.

Eighteen bullet casings found at the crime scene were linked through NIBIN to a 9mm gun recovered by police in July 2020, nearly a year after the murders. Silver's DNA was found on the gun. NIBIN evidence also linked Silver to another Cleveland shooting, from Oct. 1, 2019.

## Decades later, cold-case team unearths truth in Arizona grave

Thirty-four years after a teenager was raped and a 30-year-old woman was raped and killed in separate attacks in northeastern Ohio, BCI's Cold Case Unit and investigators from the Hudson and Cuyahoga Falls police departments were able to link the 1987 assaults to the same man — Thomas Collier Jordan.

"This case is yet another example of BCI working alongside local law enforcement to breathe new life into cases that



The assaults on Janice Christensen, right and above, and Michelle Puett-Howard, below, were eventually linked by DNA to Thomas Collier Jordan.

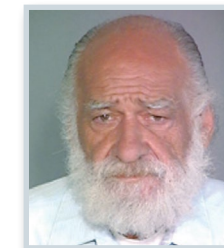
were once considered unsolvable," Attorney General Yost said.

Although police recognized similarities in the two cases, evidence conclusively connecting them proved elusive. Biological evidence had been collected, but forensic scientists at the time were unable to develop usable DNA profiles.

In 2020, that changed. Hudson detectives, buoyed by an arrest made in a decades-old cold case in a neighboring city, realized that advances in DNA technology could produce fresh insights into the rape and murder of Janice Christensen. So they turned to BCI's Cold Case Unit, newly formed at the time, for help.

BCI's team reviewed similar sexual assaults and homicides throughout northeastern Ohio to determine whether Christensen's killer was a repeat offender. That's when they hit on the case of teenager Michelle Puett-Howard of Cuyahoga Falls.

The similarities between the Puett-Howard and Christensen cases were striking: Both victims were female, attacked on walking trails, bound by shoelaces and sexually assaulted. Also in both cases, a knife was used and the



Thomas Collier Jordan

## New light on old cases

» BCI's Cold Case Unit, established in 2020, collaborates with local law enforcement agencies to initiate a fresh look at unsolved cases. In 2024, the unit reviewed 25 cases at the request of local agencies. In each case, the unit assisted the originating agency in some fashion — for example, through lab work, criminal intelligence, or investigative work, or some combination of those.

victim's car keys were taken.

The evidence from the Puett-Howard case was resubmitted to BCI's laboratory in 2022 and retested using the latest DNA technology. Thankfully, the evidence produced a full DNA profile, which was then entered into the FBI's Combined DNA Index System database, yielding a match to the offender profile of Thomas Collier Jordan.

Jordan was born in Cleveland in 1926 and is believed to have arrived in Yuma around 2003. He died under hospice care in 2009 at age 83. Indigent, he was buried on the county's dime in a barren, out-of-the-way patch of Yuma's Pioneer Cemetery.

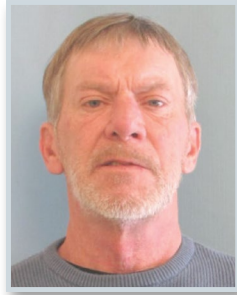


To watch a video about the case, scan the QR code or visit [https://youtu.be/PIDzmV44T\\_U](https://youtu.be/PIDzmV44T_U)



## John Doe in Stark County identified through collaboration of 3 agencies

The skeletal remains of an unidentified man found in 2020 outside Canton were identified last year and an investigation into his death was launched, thanks to the collaborative work of BCI, the Stark County Sheriff's Office and the DNA Doe Project, a nonprofit that uses genetic genealogy to identify remains.



"When an unknown person is identified, dignity is restored and there is a renewal of hope for justice," Yost said.

Investigators were able to identify the man as Michael Leach, who was born on Oct. 21, 1957, and last known to live in Dover, in Tuscarawas County. His remains were found next to an oil well in a rural area of Canton.

BCI unveiled a forensic reconstruction of the man in August 2021 and, two years later, released additional digitally created images of him.

## Advanced digital imaging unveiled in 2016 case of Akron John Doe

Under a partnership between BCI and Ohio State University, experts in forensic art and 3D imaging created

photo-realistic renderings of a John Doe in hopes of prompting leads from the public.

The man's remains were found in 2016 at an abandoned house in Akron. But burn marks suggested that the remains had been at the address since at least 2012, when a fire damaged the structure.

The digital reconstruction used in the case was created through a partnership between BCI forensic artist Samantha Reeb and OSU's Advance Computing Center for the Arts and Design.

In the past, Reeb would typically begin the facial reconstruction process with CT scans of the skull, which were then used to make a plastic model on a 3D printer. From there, she would apply clay to create a bust, adjusting for physical traits determined by an anthropological analysis of the skull.

But the time involved in printing a 3D model can take several days because of the vast amount of data created by the CT scans. At the suggestion of an Ohio State colleague, she found an easier way, one that got around using CT scans altogether: photogrammetry.

The technique creates a 3D digital image of an object — in this case, a skull — based on a series of overlapping photographs taken from multiple vantage points. Because of advances in the process, Reeb can take 50 to 60 photos of a skull on her iPhone, email them to Ohio State and have



BCI forensic artist Samantha Reeb discusses the Akron John Doe case.

a 3D model printed the same day.

Once she adds the clay to the model, she can take photos of the bust, upload them into a software program developed for the gaming community, and then generate diverse combinations of faces that reflect different ages, skin tones and facial features. The additional details, of course, increase the chances of someone recognizing the person.

## New fingerprint scanners bolster Ohio's criminal-records system

In his continuing effort to modernize Ohio's criminal-records system, Attorney General Yost used a federal grant to supply 77 LiveScan digital fingerprint devices to courts in 42 counties.



The devices will help shore up gaps in defendant fingerprinting and automate court submissions of those fingerprints to the state's Computerized Criminal History database, run by BCI.

Records are added to the database, typically by a court clerk, whenever an individual is arrested, has a court appearance in connection with a criminal case, or is sentenced in a criminal case. A defendant's fingerprints can be captured at various stages of the criminal justice process, but fingerprinting at times has fallen through the cracks due to logistical reasons.

The LiveScan devices, which cost \$898,450 each, were bought with a National Criminal History Improvement Program grant.

## Statewide body armor program continues to protect officers

In 2024, Attorney General Yost continued to make good on his commitment to enhance officer safety. Through the Ohio Law Enforcement Bulletproof Vest Program, the AGO provided more than \$2.6 million in grants so 239 agencies could further equip themselves with nearly 3,000 pieces of body armor.

Since it began in 2018, the program has paid out more than \$10.3 million to 688 agencies in all 88 Ohio counties.

Funding for the program is provided by the Ohio Bureau of Workers' Compensation as part of its Safety Intervention Grant Program.

## School districts get \$6.7 million for safety enhancements, training

In an ongoing effort to bolster school safety, the Attorney General's Office made \$6.7 million available to Ohio school districts in 2024.

The funding, approved as part of House Bill 33 by the 135th General Assembly, is used for safety planning, training and classroom programs for public and private schools, charter schools, educational service centers, STEM schools and schools operated by county boards of developmental disabilities.

In 2023, AG Yost invested \$4 million in new school safety technology linking schools directly with local law enforcement, and an additional \$1 million to train tactical officers across the state in responding to school shootings.

## RESTORING JOHN DOE'S IDENTITY

BCI's forensic artist worked with The Ohio State University's Office of Academic Affairs Digital Learning and the Advance Computing Center for Arts and Design to generate digital images for facial reconstruction cases. The technology they used creates photo-realistic digital images to depict an individual at different ages, with different hairstyles and facial features, thereby increasing the chances that someone will come forward to assist in identification.

**STARK COUNTY JOHN DOE: MISSING DEC. 22, 2001**

**STARK COUNTY JOHN DOE: MISSING MARCH 31, 2020**



# Statewide sting continues push by AG Yost to eliminate scourge

Supported by the attorney general’s Ohio Organized Crime Investigations Commission, eight human trafficking and major crime task forces, along with a dozen other local law enforcement agencies, carried out a statewide sting operation that led to 132 arrests of people trying to buy sex, including 22 seeking sex with children.

Seventy-three trafficking survivors were offered medical assistance and social services as a step to escape their predicament.

“We have to attack this scourge by curbing the demand,” Yost said. “This operation aimed to hold accountable those who exploit survivors or fuel human trafficking by agreeing to pay for sex.”

In total, officers from more than 100 law enforcement agencies took part in the October sting, named Operation END-OHHT, a reference to the new non-emergency human trafficking hotline established by Yost’s office and run by BCI: 844-END-OHHT or 844-363-6448.

The sting focused on 19 counties, including major activities in Akron, Columbus, Cleveland, Marietta, Portsmouth, Toledo and the Mahoning Valley area.

Those arrested included 110 “johns,” who were charged with engaging in prostitution or solicitation, as well as 22 individuals charged with felonies for seeking commercial sex with a minor and/or possessing narcotics.

The suspects ranged in age from 21 to 71 and have diverse backgrounds — from laborers and government employees to students and business owners.

Also as part of the sting, the OOCIC task forces furthered several long-term investigations by raiding nine locations that had been linked to human trafficking, including several massage parlors and a motel. They seized more \$20,000 and other related evidence.

Operation END-OHHT marked the fifth time in five years that task forces and law enforcement agencies have



Law enforcement leaders collaborated on a statewide human trafficking sting in October that resulted in the arrest of 132 people, including 22 who were seeking sex with children.



collaborated on a statewide sting to bring traffickers and johns to justice.

Although the annual crackdowns attract the most media attention, individual human trafficking task forces log many other successes throughout the year.

Here are some notable cases from 2024:

### Central Ohio Human Trafficking Task Force

- ★ Marcus Carmon, 40, the leader of a human trafficking ring that operated in central Ohio, was sentenced to 14 years in prison. A task force investigation determined that Carmon targeted vulnerable women who were fighting addiction, and exploited them through prostitution for his financial gain.
- ★ Six people operating as a ring in the Linden area of Columbus were indicted on human trafficking and narcotics charges. The enterprise, led by Timotheus Graham, according to the investigation, used violence to coerce its victims.
- ★ Six members of a violent crime ring in south Columbus were indicted on murder and human trafficking charges. Combined, they face 124 felony counts.

### Mahoning Valley Human Trafficking Task Force

- ★ Ten men from three states who attempted to buy sex were arrested in Steubenville during an undercover human trafficking operation. The Steubenville Police Department, Jefferson County Sheriff’s Office, Jefferson County Prosecutor’s Office and Harriet Tubman Movement assisted with the task force’s operation.
- ★ Task force agents arrested a Pennsylvania man who traveled to Ohio to allegedly have sex with a minor and then led law enforcement on a high-speed chase across state lines.
- ★ Two child pornographers were convicted and sentenced as a result long-term task force investigations.
- ★ A Youngstown man was indicted on rape and human trafficking charges after allegedly advertising a juvenile victim for sex on multiple escort websites. The man also is accused of arranging meetups between the victim and adult males in which he facilitated forced sex and kept the proceeds for himself. The indictment also alleges that the man raped the victim after providing narcotics.

### Miami Valley Human Trafficking Task Force

- ★ Milford City Manager Michael Doss was charged with importuning after a task force investigation determined he allegedly attempted to buy sex from an individual he believed to be a 15-year-old girl. He resigned his position when confronted with the allegations.

## AG’S PROSECUTORS LEND MUSCLE TO COMPLEX CASES ACROSS THE STATE

The attorney general’s Special Prosecutions Section supports prosecutors statewide who request help in cases involving complex issues and higher-level offenses, such as capital murder, financial crimes and public corruption. The section also prosecutes sexual assault cases involving minors and cases involving sex between school employees and students.

Here are some notable cases from 2024:

- ★ **Christian Hughes** of Logan was sentenced to 20½ years to life in prison for the rape and sexual abuse of his fiancée’s 12-year-old daughter. The victim’s mother, Tanya Parker, is serving a three-year prison sentence after pleading guilty to endangering children. Investigators determined that she knew about the abuse but did nothing to stop it.
- ★ **Lawrence Fidler** of LaRue was sentenced in Morrow County Common Pleas Court to 20 years to life in prison for sex crimes involving minors, including rape, kidnapping, gross sexual imposition and sexual battery.
- ★ **Irene Marie Day** of Logan pleaded guilty in Hocking County Common Pleas Court to raping two children and was sentenced to 20 to 25 years in prison.
- ★ **Eric Dearth** of Jackson was sentenced in September to life in prison after being convicted on three counts of raping a child. His was under the age of 13.
- ★ **Isaac Pence** of Carroll was sentenced to 18 years to life in prison for stabbing to death a man during a party at a rental cabin in Sugar Grove.
- ★ **Josiah Matthews** of Urbana was sentenced to 25 years to life for murder and aggravated robbery stemming from a break-in in which he killed the 87-year-old homeowner.
- ★ **Savion McCall** was sentenced to 30 to 32 years to life in prison and Lucas Williams was sentenced to nine years for their roles in the 2019 fatal shooting of 17-year-old Jessica Baker in Elyria. A third man, Christian Marshall, is serving 34 to 38 years to life for his role in the girl’s death.
- ★ **Mason Williams**, a former Preble County deputy sheriff who served as a school resource officer at National Trail High School, was sentenced to 18 months in prison for having an inappropriate sexual relationship with a student and deleting their electronic correspondence. He was convicted on two counts of sexual battery and one count of tampering with evidence, all third-degree felonies.



**DAVE YOST**  
OHIO ATTORNEY GENERAL

**Suspect human trafficking? Call:**  
**844-END-OHHT**  
(844-363-6448)

**New hotline forwards public’s tips to Ohio law enforcement agencies**

With the cash-strapped National Human Trafficking Hotline struggling to fulfill its mission — in some cases, tips weren’t being shared with states for several months — Attorney General Yost created a hotline just for Ohio. “This is a much-needed tool,” Yost said. “Every phone call could be a lifeline to someone needing help.”

The non-emergency hotline number — 844-END-OHHT (844-363-6448) — became operational in August. It funnels incoming tips about suspected sex and labor trafficking directly to law enforcement, connecting the caller with people experienced in investigating such allegations.

The hotline is operated 24/7 by the Ohio Bureau of Criminal Investigation (BCI), whose criminal intelligence analysts assess the information and refer intelligence to local law enforcement agencies, human trafficking task forces organized under the attorney general’s Ohio Organized Crime Investigations Commission and/or BCI’s Special Victims Unit.

In 2023, Yost joined 35 other attorneys general in a letter urging Congress to increase funding to improve the national hotline after it was discovered that the nonprofit running the operation was forwarding tips about adult victims only in limited circumstances, and often months after the fact.

“It’s simple: The more we know, the more we can do to help,” Yost said. “Having a locally operated, round-the-clock resource means our officers and task forces have a better shot at rescuing victims and bringing traffickers to justice.”

**Yost backs bill allowing victims to expunge criminal records**

In May, Attorney General Yost testified before state lawmakers to support legislation expanding the eligibility of human trafficking survivors to have their criminal records expunged.

“The journey to recovery is made even tougher when survivors are barred from employment, housing or education because of their past involvement with trafficking,” Yost said.

Similar legislation was introduced in both the House and the Senate; lawmakers ultimately passed SB 214, which took effect in October.

The law allows human trafficking survivors the chance to expunge conviction records for a misdemeanor, a fourth-degree felony, or a fifth-degree felony committed while being trafficked. Expungement is not automatic; survivors must go through a hearing process.

Before the change in law, human trafficking survivors could have their records expunged only if convicted of soliciting, loitering to engage in solicitation, or prostitution.

The problem, AG Yost said, was that the old law excluded “sex trafficking victims who were never convicted of those specific crimes, as well as labor trafficking victims, who would not have solicitation charges.”

**Anti-trafficking efforts include widespread education, training**

Besides supporting law enforcement efforts to crack down on human trafficking, the attorney general’s team is helping to better educate first responders, health-care professionals, advocates and Ohioans in general.

In August, AG Yost’s Human Trafficking Initiative hosted its fifth annual summit, bringing together survivors, social workers, health-care professionals, law enforcement officers, lawyers, prosecutors, judges and other community stakeholders who are committed to ending sex and labor trafficking in Ohio. More than 700 people attended the conference.

And earlier in the year, AG Yost announced the addition of more training aids on his office’s website, OhioAttorneyGeneral.gov.

They include two “best practices” booklets created for anti-trafficking coalitions and community leaders. The first is a guide to educating students in middle school and high school; the second is focused on raising awareness in the community.

AG Yost also unveiled two new training videos, the third and fourth in a series of videos designed to help health-care professionals and first responders identify and respond to situations involving human trafficking. The first of the new videos focuses on labor trafficking indicators, with an emphasis on trauma-informed care. The second is designed for EMS workers and is based on real-life scenarios.

**AGO safeguards Ohioans’ wallets from bad decisions, bad actors**

In pursuing justice and restitution for Ohio consumers, the AG’s team takes on all challengers.

Although the vast number of cases naturally involve in-state businesses — home-repair companies and auto dealerships among them — out-of-state companies and international corporations that wrong Ohioans may also face the fire.

In one notable case last year, a Chinese citizen who tried to cheat consumers through a gift-card scam felt the full weight of the law. Here are some others from 2024:

**Marriott settles with Ohio, other states over multiyear data breach**

For several years, cyber criminals lived in a Marriott-acquired guest-reservation system, free to access the personal information of 131.5 million hotel guests, including contact details, credit card data and, in some cases, unencrypted passport numbers.

In the face of complaints from the Federal Trade Commission and 49 states, Marriott agreed to settle the case last year for \$52 million. Ohio’s share is \$1.5 million.

According to the states, the breach began in 2014 at Starwood Hotels but wasn’t detected until September 2018. Marriott acquired Starwood in 2016.

“Marriott was supposed to be a trusted gatekeeper of millions of people’s personal information, but it failed,” AG Yost said. “We’re holding the company accountable and ensuring they put tools in place to prevent a repeat performance.”

The investigation found that Marriott violated state consumer protection laws by failing to implement reasonable security measures, despite their representations about their security practices. In addition to the monetary settlement, the company has agreed to implement stronger security measures, including enhanced employee training and multifactor authentication for loyalty accounts such as Marriott Bonvoy.

**Largest cellular providers settle lawsuit over misleading ads**

In response to a suit alleging deceptive advertising practices, the three largest wireless carriers have agreed to

a \$10.25 million settlement with AG Yost and the nation’s other attorneys general.

Ohio will receive more than \$478,000 under the three agreements with T-Mobile USA; AT&T Mobility and Cricket Wireless; and Cellco Partnership dba Verizon Wireless and TracFone Wireless.

The cellular providers were accused of using misleading ads that included offers of unlimited data plans containing hidden restrictions, offers for free devices that were saddled with unstated limiting terms and conditions, and intentionally vague offers of payments or increased savings to customers who switched providers.

The companies denied any illegal conduct, but as part of the settlement they agreed to make sure that all future ads are transparent about “unlimited” data plans, switching carriers, receiving “free” devices, and when offers involve a lease agreement.

**A bad idea, a terrible choice of days**

When Ming Xue strolled into a Coshocton Walmart in December 2023 to carry out his gift-card scam, he had no idea that sheriff deputies and area kids were also on hand that day for the annual Shop with a Cop program.

Deputies watched him stash gift cards in his clothes and arrested him. When they checked his car, they found hundreds of other gift cards inside.

In May, Xue was sentenced to four to six years in prison for engaging in a pattern of corrupt activity. The case was prosecuted by the Coshocton County prosecutor with assistance from the Economic Crimes Unit of the Consumer Protection Section, the Bureau of Criminal



Investigation, and the Ohio Organized Crime Investigation Commission (OOCIC) — all part of AG Yost’s office.

“This man was clearly on a nefarious mission to rip off as many Ohio consumers as possible,” Yost said.

Xue, a native of Hunan in the Fujian Province of China, had been in the United States for only four months when his criminal activity began. The investigation revealed that he would steal unloaded gift cards, alter them, and then return them to display racks at various stores in the area. When consumers bought the altered gift cards and money was loaded on them, Xue and his associates stole the money.

## Aggrieved car buyers prompt suit over missing vehicle titles

An Akron dealership tried to detour around the legal system by selling cars without ever obtaining title to them.

Driven by more than 100 complaints to his office, Attorney General Yost filed suit against Shane Beers and SJ Motorworks. Beers operated the dealership from April 2019 through May 2023, when it closed.

Beers was accused of violating Ohio’s Consumer Sales Practices Act and Certificate of Motor Vehicle Title Act. The Consumer Protection Section of Yost’s office made 26 of the complainants whole using \$71,687.58 from the Title Defect Recision (TDR) Fund, a program that helps used-car buyers resolve title problems.

In April 2024, Beers agreed to pay \$37,370.33 to the TDR Fund and a \$25,000 civil penalty; the latter was suspended upon compliance with the agreement. Beers also agreed not to apply for or hold an auto-dealer or a salesperson license in Ohio. The case against SJ Motorworks remains pending in Summit County Common Pleas Court.

## Home contractors face slew of suits

For most Ohioans, buying a house or condo is likely to be the single largest financial decision they make. Attorney General Yost and his team protect homeowners from shady business owners and contractors who range from unscrupulous to negligent.

As it is most years, the Consumer Protection Section was busy in 2024:

★ **7½ years to think about it:** A Marion home-improvement contractor with a history of defrauding customers was sentenced in November to 7½ years in prison for bilking more than \$500,000 from his customers. An investigation by the Consumer Protection Section found that between June 2021 and October 2022 Ryan C. Needels, owner of Clear View Construction,



accepted large down payments from 21 consumers across nine Ohio counties without completing the pole barns, garages and other projects that he promised to build. His prison sentence included 2½ years for violating probation in two previous fraud cases in Delaware County.

- ★ **Living a nightmare:** Customers of an Avon homebuilder and remodeler allegedly suffered significant financial losses when the contractor failed to fulfill promises or provided subpar workmanship, leaving some homes in worse condition than when he started working on them. AG Yost’s team filed suit in Lorain County against Jeffrey Crawford Jr. and his company, Cleveland Custom Homes. Several consumers had to hire other contractors to redo or complete work that was poorly performed or left unfinished by the defendants, including finishing new homes that were not fit to live in when the defendants abandoned the job. The customers allege combined losses exceeding \$1 million.
- ★ **Back in hot water:** For some contractors, deception seems to be their way of doing business. In October, AG Yost sued a central Ohio home-improvement contractor, Aaron Cowans, who has a history of changing business names to try to avoid accountability. The suit followed by a little more than a year a default judgment in Franklin County Common Pleas Court secured by Yost’s office against Cowans and two of his previous businesses — 1st Pick Home Improvement and Cowans Home Improvement — for failing to deliver services and providing substandard work. The previous allegations resulted in consumer damages totaling roughly \$119,000. The current lawsuit accuses Cowans and his latest business, 1st Choice Renew, of the same deceptive practices and seeks restitution for consumers and an injunction to prohibit Cowans from operating any home-improvement business in Ohio.
- ★ **New trouble, one state over:** An Indiana contractor

with multiple felony convictions continued to cement his notoriety by cheating Ohioans out of \$105,000, according to an indictment handed down in July in Hamilton County. AG Yost brought the charges against Roger Glenn Gray and All Around Concrete, a business he owns in Aurora, Ind. The indictment alleges that, between April 2022 and April 2024, Gray and his company accepted payments from 14 Ohioans for concrete work and home-improvement projects but performed no work and issued no refunds. He is charged with three felonies. Gray has an extensive criminal record, including a 2003 felony theft conviction in Indiana; 2012 felony convictions on two counts of theft from the elderly in Hamilton County, Ohio; and a 2014 misdemeanor theft conviction in Hamilton County.

- ★ **Chasing down storm chasers:** In separate cases in late summer, AG Yost sued two storm-chasing businesses that “preyed on homeowners during a highly vulnerable time and walked away with their money.” The suits are similar in nature, alleging the businesses solicited contracts for repairs in the wake of storms but often failed to deliver the promised services or provide refunds. The first suit alleges that Josh Basinger and his Columbus-based Liberty Restoration took nearly \$158,000 from homeowners and provided no services. The second suit alleges that Hilliard-based Magic Touch Exteriors and operators Joseph Slye and David Harvey harmed at least 38 homeowners from Ohio and across the Midwest by taking money and failing to perform any work, pocketing more than \$460,000.
- ★ **A bridge to Brooklyn:** Ohio consumers who filed complaints about a New York-based home-warranty company prompted action from the Attorney General’s Office. In August, AG Yost sued First Premier Home Warranty and its owner, Albert Sayegh of Brooklyn, alleging deceptive business practices spanning more than two years. During that time, 13 Ohio consumers filed complaints with the Ohio Attorney General’s Office and 18 with the Better Business Bureau in New York. Consumers expressed frustration with what they described as a one-sided contract that fails to deliver promised benefits despite annual payments of \$400 to \$650. Yost’s suit also accuses First Premier of posting false online reviews and forcing consumers to remove their negative reviews before allowing them to cancel their account.

## SCAMS TARGETING OLDER ADULTS LEAD TO A SPECIAL RESPONSE

The attorney general’s Elder Justice Unit, which moved this year to the Crime Victims Services Section, works to protect older Ohioans from exploitation.

It’s a broad area that includes physical, sexual and emotional abuse, as well as neglect and abandonment. Notably, it also includes financial exploitation.

As circumstances dictate, AGO team members from Consumer Protection, Health Care Fraud, Crime Victim Services, Special Prosecutions and the Bureau of Criminal Investigation are ready to respond to help older Ohioans. Here are a few notable consumer-related cases from 2024:

- ★ **Ex-lawyer headed to prison:** A former Canton-area attorney was sentenced to four to six years in prison in June and ordered to pay \$339,050 in restitution after pleading guilty to stealing from seven clients of his real estate title company, some of them elderly. William Sparks, 71, of Jackson Township, previously pleaded guilty to felony charges of theft from a protected class (his elderly clients), aggravated theft and grand theft. He admitted to using his title company, American Realty Title Assurance, to withdraw money from an escrow account for his own use. The case was investigated by the Stark County Sheriff’s Office and BCI’s Forensic Accounting Unit and was prosecuted by the AG’s Special Prosecution Section. Said AG Yost: “Robbing elderly clients behind their backs is a disgraceful betrayal of trust that warrants stiff consequences.”
- ★ **Homebuilder sentenced to prison for \$50,500 fraud:** A Clinton County homebuilder with “a troubling criminal history replete with crimes of dishonesty” will spend two years in prison for accepting a \$50,500 down payment from an elderly couple but never starting work on their house or refunding the money. Michael Foster, owner of Five 13 Properties, pleaded guilty in 2023 to theft from a person in a protected class and was sentenced in January in Clinton County Common Pleas Court. In imposing prison time for Foster, the judge cited the defendant’s dubious 10-year record of similar crimes and noted that community control hadn’t deterred him from more criminal activity. Foster was being monitored on community control from a theft in Hamilton County when he committed the Clinton County theft. The AG’s Economic Crimes Unit, part of the Consumer Protection Section, investigated and prosecuted the case.
- ★ **Developer charged with forging deeds:** A Marion real estate developer was indicted in June on 15 felony counts for allegedly forging deeds and stealing the identities of older adults, some of them deceased. The indictment says Paul Rowlen, as owner of RDM Management, forged documents to take possession of residential property without the victim’s knowledge and then rehabbed the homes for sale. The case is being handled by the Special Prosecutions Section as part of the attorney general’s Elder Justice Unit.



# Neighbors' complaints bring down tire dumpers

**D**arian Ball of Ravenna thought he had an easy way to make money. With the help of a friend, Ball would haul away tires from properties around Portage County and dump his load on his buddy's property, slipping him a few bucks for his trouble.

No fuss. No regulations. Nobody needs to know.

Over the course of seven months in 2022, Ball managed to illegally dump 3,000 tires on the site. But even though the area was rural, neighbors noticed — and they made sure officials knew what was going on.

Their action made all the difference, and it's exactly the type of citizen response that Attorney General Yost encourages so his office can crack down on the illegal dumping of tires and other waste across Ohio.

Yost's Environmental Enforcement Section has two units that deal with environmental crimes: BCI's Environmental Enforcement Unit and the Criminal Prosecution Unit. Although the units often work cases that are referred to them by the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency or the Ohio Department of Natural Resources, they also work directly with local law enforcement agencies and prosecutor's offices.

Because of the complaints against Ball, BCI and the Ohio EPA launched an investigation leading to his indictment in March.

Five months later, he pleaded guilty in Portage County Common Pleas Court to charges of open dumping, an unclassified felony, and was sentenced to 120 days in jail and fined \$25,000, with \$24,000 of that suspended. A four-year prison sentence also was suspended.

Ball's friend and co-conspirator, Sheldon Jandreau, also was indicted and a warrant has been issued for his arrest.

Attorneys from the Environmental

Enforcement Section led the prosecution.

The case is like so many others around Ohio. Earlier in the year, a Toledo couple was sentenced to three months in jail, followed by six months at a correctional drug-treatment facility, for illegally transporting scrap tires and dumping them in their backyard.

As in the Ball case, complaints from neighbors triggered an investigation involving BCI's Environmental Enforcement Unit.

In February, Chad Gatter and Amanda Wagner pleaded guilty in Lucas County Common Pleas Court to illegally hauling more than 2,000 scrap tires from Toledo tire stores without proper authorization from Ohio EPA.

Charges also were filed against Osama Al Awkati, owner of Uncle Sam's Auto Center in Toledo, for his involvement in supplying scrap tires to Gatter and Wagner. Awkati was convicted of misdemeanors in December 2023 for his role in the scheme.

The previous year, the Ohio EPA had cleaned up the Gatter and Wagner's residence because of the environmental hazard posed by the tires. More than 24 tons of scrap tires were hauled to a licensed facility at a cost of \$15,630, which Gatter and Wagner paid as restitution.

## Shine a light on DUMPERS

### AGO GRANTS HELP DEFRAY COSTS OF SITE CLEANUP

The persistent dumping of solid waste and demolition debris across Ohio prompted AG Yost to launch a multipronged initiative called "Shine a Light on Dumpers" aimed at holding accountable those who pollute the environment and create inexcusable eyesores in our communities.

The program consists of training, education, legal guidance, technical-equipment loans, and investigative and prosecutorial assistance to support the work of local law enforcement agencies and prosecutors.

In late 2024, AG Yost laid the groundwork for a \$1 million grant program to help county and local governments clean up existing dump sites or to take preventative action to deter future dumping. Grants of up to \$100,000 are available for cleanups; a maximum of \$20,000 is available for signs, gates, barriers or other structures to deter future dumping.

The AGO website has more details.

### \$1.5 million settlement secured in Baumann's 'recycling' case

In March, AG Yost concluded a five-year legal battle with Baumann's Recycling Center of Garfield Heights when the company agreed to pay \$1.5 million to settle a lawsuit over an illegal landfill it operated for nearly a decade.

The case originated in January 2019 when Yost sued the business for allegedly disposing of construction and demolition debris, dumping solid waste and violating the state fire code.

An investigation by the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency alleged that the company had been operating an unlicensed landfill for many years, illegally amassing nearly 200,000 cubic yards of waste and creating environmental and public-health hazards that threatened the surrounding communities.

Yost — representing the Ohio EPA, Cuyahoga County Board of Health and Garfield Heights Fire Department — secured a court order in June 2019 requiring Baumann's to immediately begin cleaning up the site.

Despite ongoing legal challenges by Baumann's and contempt charges imposed against the company and its owner, Bill Baumann, Yost's office continued to push for the cleanup work. To date, more than 50,000 cubic yards of decomposing debris have been removed — significant progress that has reduced the imminent fire hazard and safeguarded the neighborhood.

### Environmental crisis averted at Martins Ferry treatment plant

The Austin Master Services waste treatment plant in Martins Ferry was an environmental disaster waiting to happen.

Located 500 feet from the Ohio River and 1,000 feet from the city's drinking-water well field, the plant was found to have more than 10,000 tons of waste piling up in its building when the Ohio Department of Natural Resources inspected the site in March. Some of the waste was radioactive.

The waste, from gas and oil fracking operations, far exceeded the storage capacity allowed under a permit issued by ODNR.

In March, AG Yost went to court to force Austin Master to immediately stop storing illegal quantities of brine and drilling waste at the plant, and ODNR ordered the company to suspend operations.

"The urgency of this situation cannot be overstated," Yost said. "We are operating quickly to make sure contamination can be avoided and we protect Ohioans and the waterways we share."

Belmont County Common Pleas Court Judge John Vavra initially gave the company 14 days to clean up the waste. When it failed to do so, Yost asked the court to hold

Austin Master and Brad Domitrovitsch, the CEO of parent company American Environmental Partners, in contempt.

Domitrovitsch posted a bond to avoid being sent to jail, and the company is appealing the contempt order.

In the meantime, ODNR has taken over the cleanup, at an estimated cost of more than \$6 million. The Attorney General's Office is working to recover those funds from the defendants.

### Ringleader in poaching of trophy buck is sent to jail, ordered to pay \$43,000

A Wilmington hunter who thought he had bagged a record buck instead bagged a world of trouble when it was revealed he poached the deer on private property and then lied to authorities that it was taken on his sister's land with her permission.

Christopher J. ("CJ") Alexander, 28, was sentenced in December to 90 days in jail and five years of community control and ordered to pay \$43,000 in penalties, restitution and court costs for the unlawful harvesting last year of an 18-point white-tailed deer, a trophy animal viewed as a valuable state natural resource. In addition, his hunting license was revoked for a minimum of 10 years and he will be required to forfeit all hunting-related property seized by the Ohio Department of Natural Resources as evidence.

Another defendant in the case, Hillsboro resident Corey Haurert, 29, was sentenced just ahead of Alexander. He was sentenced to three years of community control and ordered to complete 200 hours of community service in lieu of a 90-day jail sentence.

Also aiding Alexander in his crimes were his sister, Kristina Alexander, and Haurert's brother, Zachary, both of whom have been sentenced.

Christopher Alexander initially told wildlife officials that he had hunted the deer on a 30-acre property owned by his sister and showed them what he claimed to be written permission from her.

But warranted searches of cellphone data revealed that he illegally hunted the buck on private property about 10 miles from his sister's land. In addition, officials later learned that he wrote the permission himself — after the deer was killed — to mislead authorities.

They also determined that Alexander deceptively profited from the poaching by selling antlers and receiving payments totaling \$20,000 from an antler collector, a hunting magazine and a company that sells deer products.

The cases, prosecuted in Clinton County by AG Yost's Environmental Enforcement Section, reinforce the state's commitment to protecting Ohio's natural resources.



# Johnson & Johnson suit exposes risk of talcum products

Attorney General Yost and 42 other attorneys general secured a \$700 million settlement with Johnson & Johnson in June to resolve allegations that the company intentionally misled consumers in ads related to the safety and purity of some of its talcum powder products. Ohio's share of the money is \$27.7 million.

Under the settlement, Johnson & Johnson agreed to permanently stop making, marketing, promoting, selling and distributing any talc-based baby and body powders in the United States, either directly or through a third party.

"Transparency is non-negotiable when it comes to consumer safety," Yost said. "Selling harmful products without disclosing the risks is unacceptable, and our legal action ensures companies are held accountable."

After the coalition of states began investigating in 2019, Johnson & Johnson stopped distributing and selling these products in the United States; more recently, the company ended global sales.

The investigation found that asbestos was present in the talc and that the company failed to disclose that the asbestos is harmful and could lead to cancer. Although this lawsuit targeted the deceptive marketing of these products, numerous others filed by private plaintiffs in class actions raised allegations that talc causes mesothelioma, ovarian cancer and other serious health issues.

## Medicaid fraud felon brought back to Ohio to face new charges

A Dayton woman who was convicted of Medicaid fraud in 2019 and indicted earlier this year in another Medicaid scheme was tracked down in Texas after months on the lam and brought back to Ohio to stand trial.



Janay Corbitt was arrested in August at a bus station in Dallas. Ohio's Medicaid Fraud Control Unit, part of Attorney General Yost's Health

Care Fraud Section, coordinated with Texas' Medicaid Fraud Control Unit, the Dallas Police Department and the U.S. Marshals Service to take her into custody.

Corbitt's arrest stemmed from her indictment in May by a Franklin County grand jury on eight felony counts: engaging in a pattern of corrupt activity; aggravated theft of \$1.5 million or more; identity fraud against a person in a protected class; Medicaid fraud; and two counts each of identity fraud and forgery.

An investigation by Yost's Health Care Fraud Section had found that Corbitt allegedly stole the identities of multiple people so she could open and operate two sham behavioral health counseling agencies in the Dayton area. Further, Corbitt is believed to have stolen the identities of several licensed counselors, using their credentials to bill Medicaid for services that were never provided.

Her trial is pending.

In a previous fraud case, Corbitt was convicted of theft in 2019 and ordered to pay \$204,412 to the Medicaid program; to date, she has paid only \$6,255. The conviction banned her from the Medicaid program.

## Doctor convicted of billing Medicaid for \$1.5 million in phantom equipment

A Columbus doctor who billed the Ohio Department of Medicaid for equipment he never purchased pleaded guilty in October to bilking the department of \$1.5 million.

Investigators with Yost's Medicaid Fraud Control Unit determined that Dr. Robert Florea, through his clinic Buckeye Health and Research, billed Medicaid over a three-year period for more than 5,100 pieces of equipment,

including braces for joint and back pain. Records revealed he bought only 460 of the items.

A Franklin County jury convicted Florea and his company of one count each of Medicaid fraud, a third-degree felony. His sentencing is scheduled for January.

## Fraudulent time sheets trip up health-care agency's owner

Dorreetha Irby contracted with the Ohio Department of Medicaid and the Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities to provide in-home care to Medicaid recipients with developmental disabilities.

She called her agency Loving Hearts.

In July, she was convicted of Medicaid fraud and forgery, both fifth-degree felonies.

An investigation by Yost's Ohio Medicaid Fraud Control Unit found that Irby created false time sheets and routinely billed for the maximum allotted care hours, regardless of whether the services were provided.

"Facilitating fraud under the guise of a business named 'Loving Hearts' is a sick and twisted irony," Yost said. "Those who rely on Medicaid — and the taxpayers who fund Medicaid — deserve honest providers with kind hearts, not thieves in the night."

Until 2023, Irby was an employee of the Department of Developmental Disabilities, where she worked as a residential care supervisor.

She was placed on five years of probation and given a suspended prison term of 10 months. She also was ordered to pay \$13,261.06 in restitution.

## AG cracks down on sales of illegal vapes to protect youth

In a move to stanch the flow of illegal vaping devices flooding Ohio communities, Attorney General Yost filed complaints against three Ohio smoke shops for selling flavored vapes not approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration.

The goal, Yost said, is to protect young people from addiction, respiratory problems and other severe health risks associated with these products.

"You don't have any idea what is in those vape cartridges," Yost said. "These unregulated, unauthorized vapes are a real danger."

Undercover investigations by the AGO revealed that Orrville Tobacco and Vape Shop in Orrville, Central Tobacco in Delaware, and Elev8 Smoke Shop in Cincinnati were selling

# KARRASCH SELECTED TO LEAD NATIONAL ORGANIZATION TARGETING MEDICAID FRAUD

Year after year, the Ohio Medicaid Fraud Control Unit (MFCU) is recognized as one of the most effective in the nation in investigating and prosecuting Medicaid fraud and protecting the elderly and disabled from abuse, neglect and exploitation in long-term-care facilities.



So it seemed fitting when the National Association of Medicaid Fraud Control Units unanimously selected **Ben Karrasch** — who oversees the Ohio MFCU as head of AG Yost's Health Care Fraud Section — to lead the organization in 2025. The mission of the national group is to support and promote interstate cooperation among the country's 53 MFCUs.

"Under Ben's leadership, our Medicaid Fraud Control Unit continues to set the gold standard for shielding the vulnerable from harm and safeguarding Medicaid dollars for those in need," Yost said. "His expertise in the complex world of health-care fraud makes him an excellent choice to advance this important work on the national stage."

Like other units across the country, the Ohio MFCU collaborates with federal, state and local partners to carry out its work.

The success of the 102-member team consistently puts it in the top three in indictments and convictions among MFCUs nationwide. In 1994, 2010 and 2022, Ohio's MFCU was recognized as the top unit in the country and honored with the U.S. inspector general's annual Award for Excellence in Fighting Fraud, Waste and Abuse.

The Ohio MFCU receives 75% of its funding from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, with \$15,343,488 allocated for federal fiscal year 2025. The Ohio Attorney General's Office provides additional funding totaling \$5,114,493.



# PROTECTING OHIOANS' HEALTH

illegal flavored vapes in defiance of a warning letter sent April 5, 2024, from Yost's office.

Vapes, also known as electronic cigarettes, are battery-powered devices that heat a liquid, typically containing nicotine, to create an aerosol that is inhaled. One study found that 25% of e-liquids contained formaldehyde, a known carcinogen.

The number of different electronic cigarette devices sold in the U.S. has nearly tripled to more than 9,000 since 2020, according to the Associated Press. The influx has been driven almost entirely by a tsunami of unauthorized disposable vapes from China, many of them flavored and marketed to children.

The only vapes allowed for sale by the FDA come in tobacco and menthol flavors.

Vapes are the most-used tobacco product among U.S. middle- and high-school students. In 2023, 9% of Ohio middle-school students and 20% of high-school students reported using them.

## Drug dropoff program continues to rid state of unused meds

Beginning in July 2021, in the face of the state's opioid epidemic, Attorney General Yost launched a drug dropoff program to safely collect and discard unused or expired prescription medications.

The initiative was based on studies showing that patients often have opioid pills left over from a prescription and store them in unsecured locations in the home.

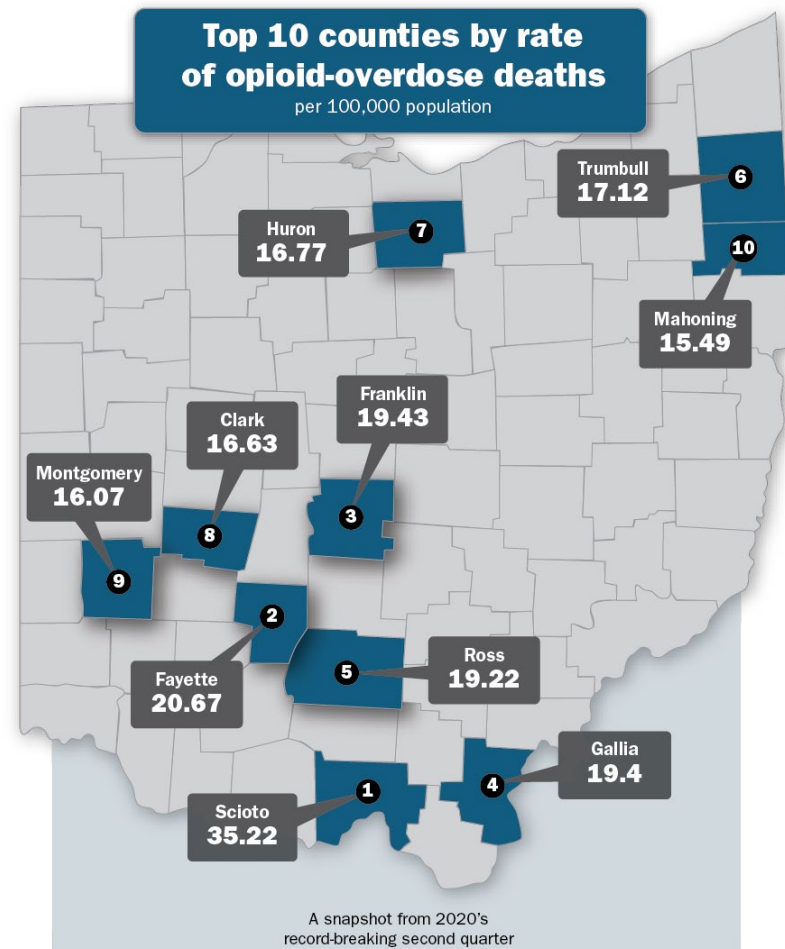
Led by his Scientific Committee on Opioid Prevention & Education (SCOPE), the AGO partners twice a year with county sheriffs, and retail and media outlets to organize these events.

To date, Drug Dropoff Days have been held in 11 Ohio counties and have yielded a combined 2,600+ pounds of unwanted leftover prescription drugs.

Two dropoff events were held in 2024, in Huron and Allen counties, with a combined 665 pounds of drugs collected.

Huron County ranks seventh among Ohio's 88 counties in rate of opioid-overdose deaths — at 16.77 deaths per 100,000. More than 200 Huron County residents have died of an opioid overdose since 2007.

Allen County, meanwhile, recorded a 27% increase in overdoses from 2021 to 2022.



## Drug Dropoff Day collection numbers

COUNTIES	POUNDS COLLECTED
Scioto, Fayette, Franklin	466
Clark, Montgomery	710
Trumbull, Mahoning	300
Hamilton	210
Ross	262
Allen	601
Huron	64
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,613</b>





**DAVE YOST**

OHIO ATTORNEY GENERAL

# HIGHLIGHTS OF 2024

## OHIO ATTORNEY GENERAL'S OFFICE

30 E. Broad St. 17th Floor  
Columbus, OH 43215  
800-282-0515

[www.OhioAttorneyGeneral.gov](http://www.OhioAttorneyGeneral.gov)

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