



PRESS RELEASE

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ASHTABULA COUNTY COMMISSIONERS TO ANNOUNCE INITIATIVE TO PROMOTE LAW AND ORDER IN ASHTABULA COUNTY

ASHTABULA COUNTY, OHIO, June 1, 2021 – The Ashtabula County Commissioners, along with area law enforcement, will hold a press conference at 1:30 p.m. on Tuesday, June 1, 2021, where they are expected to announce a county-wide initiative to promote law and order in Ashtabula County by funding law enforcement and constructing a new corrections facility. This initiative will include posing a question to voters to approve a half a percentage point modification to the county's sales tax, currently one of the lowest in the state. The funds generated will be used exclusively to fund criminal and administrative justice, including hiring and training additional law enforcement and corrections officers, construction of a community corrections, rehabilitation, and detention facility, and programming to address the problems of addiction, mental illness, and recidivism among those entering the county's criminal justice system. If approved, the county's sales tax rate would remain lower or the same as that of fifty-nine of Ohio's eighty-eight counties' sales tax rates.

“As Sheriff, my number one priority is public safety. I campaigned on ‘Time for Change’ and the reality is that safety requires funding, and we’re at a point where if we want to dramatically increase public safety, then we need to increase funding for law enforcement and corrections,” said Sheriff Bill Niemi. “This initiative is important because we need to make the people of Ashtabula County aware of the issues and the solutions needed to make our community safer and let them decide.”

One issue the initiative seeks to address is the lack of law enforcement officers, particularly in more rural areas of the county. “I know that the people of Ashtabula County support our police, and this is an opportunity for us to express that support and provide resources to them that are desperately needed at the ground level,” said Commissioner Casey Kozlowski. “That is precisely what we as a county need to do to increase the number of officers on our roads and to build a corrections facility that will allow law enforcement to keep offenders off the streets and promote law and order in Ashtabula County.”

Another problem the Commissioners are seeking to solve with this initiative is the county's jail. The current jail fails to meet minimum standards for security and safety and does not have enough capacity to meet demand according to the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation & Corrections and the state legislature. With not enough capacity, some offenders are put back out on the streets to offend again. “Like too many residents of Ashtabula County, my family and I have been victimized by crime. Due to lack

of funding for law enforcement and corrections, I had to fight to ensure that those people who invaded my home and traumatized my family were held accountable,” said Commissioner Kathryn Whittington. “We as a community have the opportunity to choose to fund the police, so we can have enough law enforcement officers to keep us safe, provide the rehabilitation needed to reduce recidivism, and enough jail space to incarcerate those who should be incarcerated,” she said.

Funds from the initiative would also be allocated to implement programs to reduce recidivism and address the problems of addiction and mental illness among the jail population. “We are struggling to address the addiction and mental illness crises gripping our communities,” said J.P. Ducro IV. “This can make a real difference by providing resources for intervention services to low-level offenders struggling when they enter the criminal justice system. We have to do something different to help address this public safety and economic development issue in our county.”

The Commissioners will hold two public hearings on resolutions that, if passed, will place the initiative on the ballot for the November 2, 2021 general election. The first of these hearings is scheduled for July 7, 2021 at 1:00 p.m. and the second will be on July 14, 2021 at 6:00 p.m., both to be held in the conference room of the Board of County in the Commissioners. The Commissioners will also be regularly updating their website and attending events with local law enforcement to educate the public about the initiative through election day.