



Ohio Has a Billion Extra Dollars. Why Are Families Still Being Told “There’s No Money”?

If you’ve ever called a government office looking for help, you’ve probably heard some version of the same answer:

"We'd love to help, but there's no money for that."

No money for housing.

No money for child care.

No money for schools.

No money for public transit.

No money for public health.

No money for local governments struggling to provide services.

Except now we know that simply isn't true. Ohio recently reported that it collected roughly **\$1.2 to \$1.3 billion more in tax revenue than expected** through April of Fiscal Year 2026. Revenues reached approximately **\$38.21 billion**, exceeding projections by more than a billion dollars thanks to stronger-than-expected income, sales, and business tax collections. A billion dollars. That's not a rounding error. That's not spare change found between couch cushions. That's enough money to fundamentally change lives.

And that's what makes this moment so frustrating. Across Ohio, families are sitting at their kitchen tables deciding which bill can wait until next paycheck. They're struggling with rising grocery costs, increasing property taxes, child care expenses, and housing costs. They're being told that government can't afford to solve the problems affecting their daily lives. Then they read a headline saying the state unexpectedly collected another billion dollars. How are they supposed to feel?

Because the social contract is pretty simple. Ohioans contribute part of their hard-earned money into the collective pot with the understanding that government will invest it back into the things that create opportunity, stability, and prosperity. Government is supposed to be the sturdy floor beneath us—not a vault where public dollars sit untouched while public needs go unmet.

This past budget cycle highlighted that disconnect. Despite record revenues and billions already sitting in reserves, Ohio passed a budget with some of the smallest investments in years. House Democrats voted against the budget unanimously—the first time in state history—because the gap between what Ohio could do and what Ohio chose to do had become impossible to ignore. We were told we had to prioritize. That if we wanted to invest in one thing, we had to sacrifice another. But when you have an extra \$1.3 billion on top of a Rainy Day Fund that already exceeds \$4 billion, that argument starts to fall apart. Because the question is no longer whether Ohio can afford to invest in its people. The question is whether Ohio wants to.

Let's put \$1.3 billion into perspective.

Supportive housing—which combines affordable housing with services that help people overcome barriers to stability—costs approximately **\$12,800 per person annually**. In 2024, nearly **11,800 Ohioans experienced homelessness**. Providing supportive housing for every one of those individuals would cost roughly **\$150 million per year**. The state's surplus alone could fund that effort for more than **eight years**, putting Ohio within reach of virtually ending chronic homelessness.

Or consider school meals. Legislation has been introduced to provide no-cost breakfast and lunch for every public school and charter school student in Ohio. The estimated cost is approximately **\$300 million annually**. The surplus could fund **more than four years** of universal school meals, ensuring no child tries to learn on an empty stomach. We could help families whose SNAP benefits are stolen through electronic theft. The estimated cost of replacing those stolen benefits is approximately **\$17 million per year**. The surplus could cover that cost for more than **seven decades**.

We could dramatically expand publicly funded child care, helping working parents stay in the workforce while reducing one of the largest monthly expenses many families face. We could strengthen the Thriving Families Tax Credit, putting money directly back into the pockets of parents trying to pay for diapers, school supplies, sports fees, and everyday expenses.

We could tackle Ohio's lead pipe crisis. The Ohio Environmental Council estimates replacing all lead service lines would cost approximately **\$4.9 billion**. One billion dollars wouldn't solve the problem overnight, but it would make a massive dent. And every dollar invested in lead line replacement generates an estimated **\$33 to \$45 in public health and economic benefits**.

We could clean up hundreds of abandoned industrial sites. Based on average remediation costs, the surplus could fund cleanup of approximately **724 brownfields**, turning blighted properties into economic opportunities.

Or we could do something Ohioans are demanding right now: help local governments. For years, the state has reduced support to local communities, forcing cities, villages, townships, libraries, and schools to rely increasingly on levies and property taxes to fund basic services. Ohio families are frustrated by rising property tax bills, but those taxes often rise because local governments are trying to replace funding the state stopped providing. Imagine what would happen if Ohio directed this surplus to the Local Government Fund. Communities could invest in police, fire protection, roads, parks, libraries, and infrastructure without constantly coming back to voters for another levy. We could reduce pressure on local taxpayers while strengthening essential services.

That's the choice in front of us. Not because Ohio is broke. Because Ohio isn't. The state is collecting more money than expected. The economy is producing more revenue than forecast. The treasury is healthy. Governments can generally do three things with money: save it, spend it, or return it. Reasonable people can debate the right balance. But what exactly are we debating when Ohio keeps winning the fiscal lottery while families are struggling to keep up?

Governments are not businesses. They are not supposed to maximize profits or hoard wealth. Governments exist to provide stability, public goods, and opportunity—the things markets often neglect because there is no immediate profit to be made. The purpose of government is not accumulation. It is a service. And if Ohio can collect an unexpected \$1.3 billion while continuing to tell people there is no money to address homelessness, child hunger, child care costs, lead pipes, local government funding, or property tax pressures, then taxpayers deserve an honest answer.

If we can afford all of these things, what's really stopping us?

The answer isn't money.

It's political will.

