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JOB CREATION, COMMUNITY SECURITY AND SAFETY NET SERVICES RECEIVE INCREASED FOCUS IN 2014

Today, following several weeks of budget hearings, which began in November, Franklin County Commissioners approved the County's 2014 Annual Operating Budget.

The General Fund Budget approved this morning will grow modestly from 2013 expenditures by 5.4-percent, and is \$335,748,194. The County's All Funds Budget for 2014 is \$1.3 billion and includes more than \$15 million in additional investments for the Commissioners' core policy areas.

Commissioners noted that for several years, the County has reduced expenditures in response to declining revenues as a result of the 2008 economic downturn. However, Franklin County is now the fastest growing county in the state and that growth brings increased responsibilities, challenges and demands for services.

"I'm proud that we've gotten so much accomplished this year," said Commission President, John O'Grady. "Especially given the challenges we continue to face from the slow economy and cuts in state funding. Franklin County is in a strong financial position, and the 2014 budget sets us on a path to grow our economy, grow jobs, and provide for the social service and safety needs of our growing community."

Franklin County has absorbed a \$41 million cut in combined support from the State of Ohio and federal government, including a 50-percent decrease in its Local Government Fund allocation, and in support of family safety-net programs because of reductions and policy changes enacted by the state. In an effort to address the needs of a growing population and maintain the current levels of service, in September, Franklin County approved a permanent increase in the County's sales tax rate by one quarter of one percent, and a temporary 5-year increase of one quarter of one percent which will expire at the end of 2018.

The approved budget reflects the Commissioners' commitment to community priorities and includes additional investments to enhance job creation, economic development, and fiscal security, provide for community safety and security, support critical health and human services, and promote environmental sustainability, stewardship of natural resources and civic engagement.

Commissioners noted that 68-percent of the 2014 General Fund Budget supports public safety, justice and security programs. The Franklin County Sheriff's office is the largest General Fund agency, with an annual budget of \$100,905,443, 35-percent of the entire General Fund. Next year's budget includes an additional \$5.3 million for community safety and effective justice programs, including the creation of a full-time SWAT Team, as recommended in the Franklin

County Sheriff's office's Management Assessment Study, a move toward unified command for security personnel throughout County facilities, and the addition of 33 replacement vehicles for the Sheriff's fleet.

"We must recognize the many sacrifices our taxpayers and citizens still make, even as we move out of the Great Recession," Commissioner Brooks said. "Our future generations depend on us to be good stewards, and in passing this budget we are continuing to uphold our commitment to the public's safety and financial security. As S&P confirmed last week, we remain the only county in the state of Ohio to hold a double-AAA bond rating, which saves our taxpayers hundreds of millions of dollars. This budget assures solid footing for our Franklin County Families as we move into 2014."

Commissioners are also making an increased investment in job creation and economic development in the amount of \$5 million. Four million will be used for the creation of an Economic Development Fund, a first for Franklin County, which will foster job growth. In order to enhance the contribution that travel and tourism provide to our community, the budget includes increases of \$625 thousand for Experience Columbus and \$450 thousand for Columbus2020 to promote our region as a destination to businesses looking to locate or expand here.

Commissioners approved \$2.5 million more for health and human services in 2014, including a \$1.7 million subsidy for the Child Support Enforcement Agency which seeks to support parental engagement and ensure financial support for children in our community, initiatives like the Ohio Better Birth Outcomes program at Nationwide Children's Hospital which seeks to reduce the high preterm birth rate in Franklin County, and \$545,000 for two new programs to support early childhood learning readiness through Franklin County Kids and Supporting Partnerships to Assure Ready Kids (SPARK).

"A growing county means growing social service challenges," said Commissioner Marilyn Brown. "Many of our neighbors are still struggling, and the 2014 budget reaffirms our commitment to meeting these challenges and ensuring that these residents, often among the most vulnerable in our community, receive the help they need."

Other additional investments include a 5.4-percent increase for the Veterans Service Commission to address the increased demand for food vouchers, dental health care, housing assistance, utility payments and medical transportation for Franklin County veterans.

While the new sales tax rate will apply to all retail sales beginning January 1, 2014, the County will not receive the increased sales tax revenue until April, 2014. Therefore the County will not realize a full year of revenues from this change until 2015. Even though the new rate will not be fully realized next year, the Budget restores balance between operating revenues and expenses without reliance on General Fund cash reserves. Of the \$76.7 million in anticipated sales tax revenues, \$31.8 million will be used to fill the projected operating budget gap, \$15.4 million for additional investments, and \$6.0 for the Commissioners' contingency fund for unexpected expenses. The remaining \$23.5 million will increase the General Fund balance to address present and future capital projects, including a new County Jail and Morgue.

The entire 2014 Franklin County Budget is available on line at www.FranklinCountyOhio.gov/Commissioners

For more information on the Franklin County Board of Commissioners, log on to: www.franklincountyohio.gov/commissioners