

OhCR: Protecting Local Governments from Cyberattacks

Ohio's municipalities continue to face the threat of cyberattacks. Over the last few years, cities and villages have fallen prey to phishing attacks and ransomware designed to hold municipal data hostage until the hacker receives their ransom. In response to this ongoing threat, there is now a new initiative headed by the Ohio Adjutant General's office to ensure municipalities do not continue to fall victim to these kinds of attacks.

Last October, Gov. DeWine signed SB 52, which was sponsored by Rep. Theresa Gavarone (R – Bowling Green) and created a cyber reserve force to be overseen by the Ohio Adjutant General, who also oversees the Ohio National Guard. The force, now known as the Ohio Cyber Reserve (OhCR), will be comprised of civilian volunteers who are cybersecurity experts in the private sector. The OhCR is charged with the mission of deterring, mitigating and protecting critical infrastructure throughout Ohio's local governments.

The OhCR will work with local governments to help prevent cyber attacks before they occur by conducting vulnerability assessments of a municipality's cyber infrastructure and helping local leaders implement best practices and identify threats. If a city or village finds themselves under a cyberattack, they are to follow the same procedures as they would during a natural disaster or civil unrest by notifying the county emergency management agency. Just as the National Guard

is activated, the cyberattack will be vetted and the appropriate response determined. The Governor can then deploy the Ohio National Guard cyber teams and in more complex cases, deploy the OhCR to assist as well.

After the cyberattack has been dealt with, the OhCR then assists the local government by conducting post-incident analyses to help local leaders connect with the resources they need to identify and eliminate any future events.

SB 52 became effective last month on January 24, and the Adjutant General's office has been vetting and training civilian applicants for the OhCR. They will also create regional teams throughout Ohio to ensure municipal leaders have localized access to the resources that can help them detect and mitigate cyberattacks. The Adjutant General is looking to partner with local leaders and sheriffs through these regional teams to help strengthen cyber infrastructure throughout Ohio's political subdivisions.

The League is looking forward to helping the Adjutant General's office connect with municipal leaders throughout the state in order to ensure Ohio's cities and villages become more and more immune to cyberattacks. We encourage our members to keep an eye out for future communications from the League regarding the OhCR and the opportunities municipal leaders will have to connect with the new regional teams as they are created. We are grateful for all the work the Adjutant General's office is doing to ensure local governments can make cyberattacks a thing of the past.