

Joe Moss Promised a New Direction. What Did Ottawa County Families Actually Get?

Two years of sweeping changes brought political battles, lawsuits and major controversy to Ottawa County. The harder question is what the average family received in return.

OTTAWA COUNTY, Mich. — When Joe Moss became chairman of the Ottawa County Board of Commissioners in January 2023, there was little doubt that county government was about to change.

And it did.

The new board majority fired the county administrator.

It dismantled the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion office.

It changed the county's vision statement.

It replaced corporate counsel.

It moved to demote the county health officer.

It fought over the health department budget.

It passed a series of politically charged resolutions.

And county government became the subject of lawsuits, court hearings and repeated controversy.

Two years later, however, there is a simpler question worth asking:

What did Joe Moss's leadership actually accomplish for the average Ottawa County family?

Moss Has an Accomplishment List

To be fair, Moss can point to legitimate accomplishments.

Veterans Affairs was expanded and a full-time director was added.

Funding was approved for Sheriff's Department body cameras.

Sheriff's Department compensation was increased.

The DEI department was eliminated, which Moss said saved approximately \$286,000 annually.

The board also changed portions of the county's budget process and supported rural broadband development.

Those are real actions.

But compare that relatively short list of practical accomplishments with the amount of attention, government time and taxpayer resources consumed by the political battles that dominated the same two years.

The Health Officer Fight Became a Year-Long Legal Battle

One of the board's first major actions in January 2023 involved Ottawa County Health Officer Adeline Hambley.

The new majority attempted to demote her.

Hambley sued.

What followed was more than a year of litigation, court proceedings, a removal hearing and settlement negotiations.

The Michigan Court of Appeals ruled against the county's argument that Hambley had not been properly appointed.

The board then pursued formal charges against her alleging incompetence, misconduct and neglect of duty.

Eventually, however, the dispute ended with a remarkably straightforward result:

Adeline Hambley kept her job.

And taxpayers were left with legal bills.

A judge ordered Ottawa County to pay approximately **\$188,000 toward Hambley's attorney fees.**

County records also showed Kallman Legal Group billed the Ottawa County Insurance Authority nearly

\$225,000 between February 2023 and April 2024 for Hambley's lawsuit and related proceedings.

After all of the hearings, lawyers, court filings and political conflict, the person the board had attempted to remove remained Ottawa County's Health Officer.

Then There Was the \$4 Million Settlement

The Hambley controversy became even more significant when previously closed meeting minutes were eventually released.

Those minutes showed commissioners discussing a proposed multimillion-dollar settlement that would result in Hambley leaving county government.

According to the minutes, Moss said he preferred a **flat \$4 million settlement without severance or benefits**.

The minutes recorded Moss explaining that commissioners were determining the cost to get the matter over with.

The \$4 million was never ultimately paid.

A judge found that board members had reached a general agreement on settlement terms but that Moss's subsequent public motion was too ambiguous to legally ratify that agreement.

Eventually, Hambley stayed.

That raises an obvious question:

What did Ottawa County taxpayers gain from the entire fight?

Legal Spending Increased

The Hambley dispute wasn't the only legal expense during this period.

The Moss-led board replaced the county's longtime corporate counsel with Kallman Legal Group shortly after taking office.

The firm was hired without a competitive bidding process.

By early 2024, FOX 17 calculated that Kallman had billed Ottawa County approximately **\$426,000**, roughly \$100,000 more than the previous corporate counsel billed in 2022.

The board also transferred another **\$110,000 from the county's General Fund** to cover legal expenses.

Later reporting found Kallman billed the county **more than \$1 million for day-to-day legal services during 2023 and 2024 combined**.

Whatever voters think about the political disputes involved, those are taxpayer dollars that could not be spent twice.

The Health Department Budget Fight Consumed Months

Another major battle involved funding the Ottawa County Department of Public Health.

Moss initially suggested reducing the county's General Fund contribution to approximately \$2.5 million and eliminating COVID-related grants.

Health Officer Hambley warned that reductions of that magnitude would severely affect department operations.

Months of public meetings, protests, arguments and negotiations followed.

Ultimately, the county did not adopt the level of funding Moss initially proposed.

The final Public Health budget was substantially higher.

In other words, another major political fight consumed months of county government attention before ending considerably closer to the existing level of services than the original proposal.

Meanwhile, What Changed at the Kitchen Table?

This is where Moss's record deserves particularly close examination.

During two years as chairman, what major initiative made housing more affordable for an Ottawa County family?

What county initiative materially lowered the cost of living?

What major new economic-development accomplishment increased opportunity for working families?

What measurable reduction did the average homeowner see in the cost of county government because of Moss's new direction?

What transformative infrastructure accomplishment originated with the new board?

There may be answers Moss and his supporters would offer.

Voters should hear them.

But they should also compare those answers with the extraordinary amount of political energy spent on resolutions, personnel battles, lawsuits and ideological disputes.

Lots of Change. Lots of Conflict. A Shorter List of Everyday Results.

Joe Moss unquestionably changed Ottawa County government.

That's different from saying county government produced equally dramatic improvements in the everyday lives of Ottawa County families.

Veterans services were expanded.

Sheriff's Department investments were made.

The DEI office was eliminated.

Those are legitimate accomplishments and should be acknowledged.

But Moss's chairmanship was also characterized by leadership turnover, contentious public meetings, battles over public health, litigation and increased legal expenses.

So perhaps the most important question isn't whether Joe Moss changed Ottawa County government.

He clearly did.

The question is:

After two years of controversy, lawsuits, political fights and taxpayer-funded legal expenses, how much better off was the average Ottawa County family?

For someone asking voters to send him to Lansing based on his record in county government, that's a question worth answering.

Sources

FOX 17 reporting corresponding to the source references in the original article. Select a title to open the report.

1. [Board accomplishments and public-health budget debate](#) | FOX 17
2. [Ottawa County overhaul: One year later](#) | FOX 17
3. [Attorney firm ending contract as county legal counsel](#) | FOX 17
4. [Judge: County on the hook for \\$188K in legal fees](#) | FOX 17
5. [Closed meeting minutes detail proposed \\$4M settlement](#) | FOX 17