



**Testimony of**  
**Doug Kelly, President and CEO of Make-A-Wish® Ohio**  
**Presented to the House Finance Committee**

**April 27, 2017**

Chairman Smith, Ranking Member Cera, and members of the House Finance Committee. It is my pleasure to testify in support of the amendment offered by Representative LaTourette to create a \$1 million matching grant for Make-A-Wish Ohio in the State of Ohio's budget, **H.B. 49**.

This amendment is a smart piece of public policy with a modest price tag that not only will help foster healthier kids, stronger families, and more united communities, but it will actually save significantly more money than it costs.

**Background on Make-A-Wish®**

Make-A-Wish Ohio is a non-profit organization headquartered right here in Columbus. We grant the wishes of children with life-threatening medical conditions. We've granted more than 9,000 life-changing wishes to Ohio children in all 88 counties.

We are **not** a last-wish organization. In fact, the vast majority of our wish kids go on to survive and thrive. Doctors and families tell us a wish is an essential part of a child's treatment process. The statistics, from our national wish impact study, are compelling:

- 74% of wish parents observed that **the wish marked a turning point** in their children's response to treatment
- 81% of parents observe an **increased willingness by their wish kids to comply with treatment** protocols
- 96% of medical referral sources observe **increases in wish kids' emotional health**

**Closing Ohio's Wish Gap**

We support the LaTourette amendment because it will help us reduce the "wish gap" in Ohio.

Last year, Make-A-Wish Ohio granted the wishes of 450 Ohio children with life-threatening medical conditions. But CDC disease data indicate that more than 1,000 Ohio kids each year are diagnosed with medical conditions that qualify for a wish, leaving a "wish gap" of 555 Ohio children each year.

We are doing our part to close this "wish gap." Make-A-Wish Ohio has built partnerships with local hospitals to find more eligible kids and we are establishing new revenue pipelines – private and public – to pay for these wishes.

The \$1,000,000 of matching funding in the LaTourette amendment would be a game-changer. It would help us grant 150 more wishes across the state, cutting the wish gap by one-third.

By making this funding a matching grant that we have to earn to get, this amendment will also help us leverage additional sources of private philanthropic funding.

## New Study Highlights the Medical and Financial Return of a Wish

In a time of scarce resources, why should granting more wishes be a funding priority in the budget? Because it makes great fiscal sense!

A first-of-its-kind study by Nationwide Children’s Hospital shows why wishes should be prioritized in this budget: Their study found that **wishes help make kids healthier and wishes help slash healthcare costs by 50 percent in the first year.**

Dr. Anup Patel, Director of the Complex Epilepsy Clinic at Nationwide Children’s, conducted the study which compared kids at the hospital who received a wish in the last five years to a control group of kids with similar diagnosis who did not receive a wish.

The study found that

- **No wish, no change:** The children who did not get wishes had no measurable difference in the number of hospital visits or treatment cost from one year to the next.
- **Kids receiving wishes show big improvements:** Kids receiving a wish, however, had fewer unplanned hospitalizations, charges, and shorter lengths of stay in the year after their Wish. Additionally, there was a decrease in planned hospitalizations, lengths of stay, and overall charges in the one year after their Wish experience.
- **One wish cuts hospital costs by 50%:** The year before a wish, hospital charges averaged \$250,000 for each kid. In the year after the wish, these costs decreased significantly to an average of \$124,000 – a 50% reduction in healthcare costs, or a \$126,000 savings.

## Implications of this Study

The implications of Dr. Patel’s findings are compelling. By helping us grant more wishes, the State of Ohio will help:

- **Save Millions of Dollars:** Based on the study, one wish yields a first-year healthcare cost savings of \$126,000 – that’s a 20-fold return on investment compared to the average cash cost of a wish. Granting 100 additional wishes could free up \$12.6 million for other public and private priorities.
- **Healthier kids:** A child who has received a wish is healthier and hospitalized less in the first year after the wish. They miss fewer days of school; have more time with family and friends; and participate in more activities, all of which are essential to the well-being and development of a child, especially teenagers.
- **Stronger, more secure families:** Shorter hospital stays mean parents miss fewer days of work and deplete less of their income to pay medical bills. This makes families less economically vulnerable and allows them save for other important goals like home ownership, education, and retirement.

These new findings reinforce why Make-A-Wish is a “need to have” organization that transforms lives and is an integral part of a child’s fight against life-threatening medical conditions.

## **Closing Remarks**

In closing, the amendment to H.B. 49 by Representative LaTourette is a smart piece of public policy with a modest price tag that will actually save significantly more money than it costs.

However, if the current budget climate is such that no new funds are available to support this matching grant, there is an easy way Ohio lawmakers can help grant more wishes without expending any additional state money.

Two years ago, lawmakers approved the “Wishes for Sick Children Fund,” a fund in the Department of Health that helps grant wishes to children battling life-threatening medical conditions.

This fund is supported by voluntary contributions from taxpayers who are eligible for a state income tax refund, and last year it raised \$108,000 that Make-A-Wish Ohio applied for and received.

By changing the tax checkoff name from “Wishes for Sick Children” to “Make-A-Wish Ohio,” taxpayers would give more money to the fund because “Make-A-Wish” is a known entity with high brand name recognition and deep trust. There is also precedent for this in other states, with Make-A-Wish chapters in Colorado and Louisiana being specifically designated by name on their state tax forms.

In short, this name change is not a request for state funding, but it would help leverage more money through an existing grant program.

Thank you for your time and I’m happy to take any questions you might have.