



Testimony of
Doug Kelly, President and CEO of Make-A-Wish® Ohio
Presented to the
House Finance Subcommittee on Health and Human Services

March 16, 2017

Chairman Romanchuck, Ranking Member Sykes, and members of the House Finance Subcommittee on Health and Human Services. It is my pleasure to testify in support of the amendment offered by Representatives Green and 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 will help foster healthier kids, stronger families, and more united communities – all of which are critical public policy outcomes.

Background on Make-A-Wish®

Make-A-Wish® is a non-profit organization that grants the wishes of children with life-threatening medical conditions. These kids are battling cancer, heart problems, and a host of other tough challenges. They often live in a climate of “no” – no friends, no sports, no playing outside, etc. But Make-A-Wish says “yes” to something they deeply want and that “yes” is very powerful.

We are **not** a “last wish” organization – in fact, the vast majority of our children go on to lead normal lives.

Make-A-Wish Ohio is headquartered right here in Columbus. Key facts about our organization include:

- Last year, we granted 450 wishes to children in Ohio and have granted more than 9,100 Ohio wishes since we were founded 35 years ago.
- Those wishes are granted by more than 1,600 community-based volunteers across Ohio.
- We grant wishes in all 88 of Ohio's counties and we have four regional offices across the state.

In your packet of information you will find these facts along with key quotes from medical professionals about the therapeutic impact of a wish. In addition, you will find county-specific information from each of your districts regarding the number and types of wishes we have granted over the last ten years.

The Lasting Power of a Wish

A wish is an essential part of a child's treatment process – this is what families say and what doctors believe. The statistics, from our national wish impact study, are compelling:

- 96% of medical referral sources observe **increases in wish kids' emotional health**
- 89% of health care professionals surveyed say they believe the wish experience can **influence wish kids' physical health**
- 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 parents said that the wish **strengthened their families**

“A wish granted is an essential part of the treatment process. Its power is real and helps many of the kids make meaningful progress.”

- Dr. Phil Thrush, MD,
Attending Cardiologist,
The Heart Center
Nationwide Children's
Hospital

There is also a lasting power to a wish. Years and even decades later, many wish kids recall how their wishes enriched their lives and helped them overcome their health challenges. A wish leaves a real and lasting impact on wish kids, their families, and their communities.

Closing Ohio's Wish Gap

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.

That means we are granting 45% of eligible wishes, leaving a “wish gap” of 555 Ohio children each year. To close this “wish gap,” we’ve developed smart, growth-focused strategies for finding more kids, reducing expenses, maximizing the use of data and analytics, and building new financial pipelines – private and public – to pay for these wishes. *We may deliver hope, but hope is not our business plan.*

The cash portion of eliminating the “Wish Gap” would require about \$3.6 million annually. That funding level would grant 555 more wishes (a 123% increase), allow Ohio to become the first state to exceed 1,000 wishes a year, and most importantly, it would help us fulfill our vision of granting every eligible wish in Ohio

Annual matching funding of \$1,000,000 – the level set in Representatives Green and LaTourette’s amendment – would be meaningful, helping us to grant 158 more wishes (a 35% increase) across the state. This would allow us to meet 60% of Ohio’s need for children who qualify for a wish. By making this funding a matching grant that we have to earn to get, it will also help us leverage additional sources of private philanthropic funding.

The Importance of this Program this Year

In a time of scarce resources, why does this amendment matter so much? Why should it be a funding priority in the budget over other items? There are three main reasons that have a combined impact on tens of thousands of Ohioans.

First, a wish is powerful medicine. The statistics I shared earlier show a wish’s powerful effect on the mind, body, and heart. The “hope right now” that a wish delivers improves the mental and physical health of a sick child, it is frequently cited by parents as a turning point in the child’s fight, and it oftentimes changes health outcomes. That’s why more and more doctors are recommending wishes as part of the treatment process.

“A wish is about hope and the future. It focuses a child on what life can be and recharges the child and strengthens their spirit.”

Dr. Anup Patel, Director of
Complex Epilepsy Clinic,
Nationwide Children’s



Second, we are *always* in a race against time. We deal with 30 different life-threatening medical conditions, and while most of our Wish kids do survive, we never know when one of them is going to run out of time. Right now, for every wish we grant, there’s a kid waiting for a wish. *But wishes can’t wait!*

Lastly, a wish transforms not just one life, but instead impacts hundreds if not thousands of lives in the local community and beyond. A look at a wish’s far-reaching impact includes:

- **Wish kid:** The promise of a wish gives our kids a booster shot of courage – to fight on, to see the next day, the next week. One Wish kid told us: *“My wish gave me hope and for the first time since my diagnosis, I’m thinking about and planning for the future.”*

- **Wish kid's family and friends:** A wish strengthens the family, reconnecting the child with their siblings, and inspiring their friends. Many parents tell us the wish experience “made them feel like a normal family for the first time in years.”
- **Volunteers & medical professionals:** A wish does not happen without medical referrals and volunteers, and each is touched by a wish. Doctors tell us prescribing a wish is often the best part of their day, and community volunteers feel a greater sense of purpose.
- **Schools and colleges:** Oftentimes, the K-12 schools and colleges of a Wish kid help grant the wish, and then remain engaged with Make-A-Wish for years to come.
- **Companies, employees, and suppliers:** Local companies frequently “Adopt-A-Wish,” helping bring joy to a child in their communities. Employees say they feel part of a larger cause because of their involvement with Make-A-Wish.

Through TV and social media, many of our wishes go viral, spreading the universal values of hope, strength, and community well beyond Ohio's borders.

With this level of impact, imagine the power of granting 158 **more** wishes each year in Ohio. Imagine the impact on our Wish kids and their families. Imagine the impact on our schools and medical facilities. Imagine the impact on our civic and community spirit. Imagine the tens of thousands of additional lives we can transform together.

In a time when so much divides us, granting more wishes and transforming more lives is something everyone can agree is a priority.

Closing Remarks

This amendment to H.B. 49 by Representatives Green and LaTourette is a smart piece of public policy with a modest price tag. It also would make Ohio the very first state to create such a program – and that is an opportunity we should embrace wholeheartedly.

By creating a matching grant program that will help us grant more wishes (and to directly transform more lives) this amendment will help foster healthier kids, stronger families, more united communities – all of which are critical public policy outcomes that we should insist on being first in.

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