

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

**May 3, 2019**

Chairman Oelslager, Ranking Member Cera, and members of the House Finance Committee. It is my pleasure to testify in support of an amendment to create a \$1 million matching grant for the *Children's Wish Program* in the State of Ohio's budget, H.B. 166. This amendment was submitted by Representative Romanchuk and Representative Cera.

## **Background on Make-A-Wish**

Make-A-Wish is a non-profit organization that grants the wishes of children battling critical illnesses. 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 long, meaningful lives.

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

- On average we grant 450 wishes each year to children in Ohio and have granted nearly 10,000 Ohio wishes since we were founded more than 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 county-specific information from each of your districts regarding the number and types of wishes we have granted over the last fifteen years.

## **The Lasting Power of a Wish and Its Impact on Healthcare Costs**

A wish is an essential part of a child's treatment process – this is what families say and what doctors believe according to our national wish impact study:

- 96% of medical referral sources observe **increases in wish kids' emotional 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**

**A New Transformational Study:** Dr. Anup Patel Section Chief of Pediatric Neurology at Nationwide Children's Hospital took the power of a wish one step further. He conducted a first-of-its-kind study that compared 496 kids at the hospital who received a wish in the last five years to a control group of 496 kids with a similar diagnosis who did not receive a wish

Some of the key findings included:

- Wish kids were **2.5 times** more likely to have a drop in unplanned hospital admissions in the year after a wish
- Wish kids were nearly **2 times** more likely to have fewer ER visits after their wish

**Since nearly half of the children in the study utilized Medicaid, this research demonstrates the value and benefits of a wish not just for a wish child and their family, but also for the entire state.**



In short what Dr. Patel found is reportable data to support the positive medical and financial return of a wish. His research demonstrates the healthcare value and cost benefits of a wish.

## Closing Ohio's Wish Gap

Last year, Make-A-Wish Ohio granted the wishes of 450 Ohio children with critical illnesses. 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 only granting 45% of eligible wishes, leaving a "wish gap" of 555 Ohio children each year.**

Eliminating the "wish gap" would require about \$4.4 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 would be very meaningful, helping us to grant 135 more wishes (a 30% 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

Why does this amendment matter so much? There are three primary reasons that combined have an impact on thousands of Ohioans.

**First, the opportunity to reduce Medicaid spending and improve outcomes.** Dr. Patel's study shows a wish to be a positive, innovative intervention that could potentially reduce state-supported healthcare costs as well as private insurance.

**Second, a wish is powerful medicine.** A wish's powerful effect on wish kids and their families. 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.

**Lastly, we are *always* in a race against time.** We work with wish kids battling hundreds of types of critical illnesses, 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!*

**Wishes transform not just the life of a wish child, but instead impacts thousands of lives in the local community and beyond.** With this level of impact, imagine the power of granting **135 more** wishes each year in Ohio.

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. 166 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.



Dr. Anup Patel  
Section Chief  
Pediatric Neurology

“Wishes build emotional strength, physical strength. They build hope. They build energy and keep kids out of the hospital.”

## FIRST-OF-ITS-KIND STUDY LINKS WISHES TO MEDICAL AND FINANCIAL BENEFIT

A new study by Nationwide Children's Hospital examined quality of life and healthcare utilization among patients who received a wish and a control group who did not.

NCH's Dr. Anup Patel found children who were granted a *Make-A-Wish* wish were **2.5 times** more likely to have fewer unplanned hospital admissions in the year after a wish. Wish kids were also nearly **2 times** more likely to have fewer emergency room visits after their wish.

## WHY IT MATTERS

Nearly half of the children in the study utilized Medicaid. Dr. Patel's research demonstrates the positive healthcare value and cost benefits of a wish.

To learn more about Dr. Patel's study visit [okiwish.me/impact](http://okiwish.me/impact)

Cimone is one of the inspiring children included in Dr. Patel's study. Dozens of seizures a day limited her independence and left her feeling hopeless. When her heartfelt wish to visit Paris, France, was granted, it restored her hope, transformed her spirit and led to an improvement of her physical and mental health. Today, she has fewer seizures and is back in school full-time as a high school student.



**Dr. Patel's study about the medical impact of a wish has received a multitude of local and national coverage.**

*Study finds that a 'Make-A-Wish' gift can transform a sick child's health*



*Make-A-Wish program tied to lower hospital costs for sick kids*



*'Make-A-Wish' wishes decrease trips to hospital for sick children: Study*



*Granting wishes gives sick kids hope and can have lasting health-care gains, study finds*

*The Columbus Dispatch*

*"Study found that twice as many wish recipients had reduced health costs compared with people who didn't receive them."*



*Ohio Teen Gets Fewer Seizures After Make-A-Wish Grants Paris Trip*



**"We're able to say for the first time, a wish is more than just a nice thing to do. A wish is something that potentially can help the health of a child get better over time."**

*-Dr. Anup Patel, Nationwide Children's Hospital*



*I wish to go to Hawaii*  
**Adrian, 9**  
blood disorder



# OHIO FACT SHEET

## The Lasting Power of a Local Wish

Since we started, Make-A-Wish® Ohio has granted **9,906** wishes for children battling critical illnesses in the state of Ohio, including:

Year	First Name	City	Medical Condition	Child's Wish
2010	Sierra	Medina	autoimmune disease	To go to Walt Disney World® Resort
2011	Brandon	Steubenville	tumor	To have a "Kid Cave" at home
2012	Victoria	Youngstown	nervous system disorder	To have a yard with a fence
2013	Grace	Zanesville	uncontrolled seizure disorder	To have a hot tub
2014	DeAngelo	Cleveland	end-stage kidney disease	To go on a shopping spree
2015	Jeffrey	Toledo	muscular dystrophy	To have a computer
2016	Aaron	Cincinnati	leukemia	To go to London
2017	Jeremiah	Dayton	heart failure	To meet a celebrity
2018	Timberly	Columbus	hematologic disorder	To have a book published
2019	Bronson	Mansfield	Ewing's sarcoma	To go to Hawaii

A first-of-its-kind new study by Nationwide Children's Hospital links wishes to powerful medical and financial benefits. NCH's Dr. Anup Patel found children who were granted a Make-A-Wish wish saw a decrease in healthcare utilization. Since nearly half of the children in the study utilized Medicaid, this research demonstrates the value and benefits of a wish not just for a wish child and their family, but also for the entire state.



**"Wishes build emotional strength, physical strength. They build hope. They build energy and keep kids out of the hospital."**

*Dr. Anup Patel, MD  
Section Chief of Pediatric Neurology  
Nationwide Children's Hospital*

### KEY FINDINGS

**2.5 times**

Wish kids were 2.5 times more likely to have fewer unplanned hospital admissions in the year after a wish.

**1.9 times**

They were also nearly twice as likely to have fewer emergency room visits after their wish.

# REDUCING OHIO'S "WISH GAP"

## *The Impact of Additional Funding*

Wishes give Ohio kids something that medicine can't – **hope and courage**. As one parent told us, *"the doctor cured our son's cancer, but Make-A-Wish healed his soul."* In fact, 74% of parents say the wish marked the turning point in their child's fight against their illness. That's why more and more doctors are utilizing wishes as an essential part of the treatment process.

As doctors and families better understand the power of a wish, we've seen a sharp increase in the number of local children seeking wishes. This is creating a **"wish gap"** between the number of wishes needed (1,005 annually) and the number for which we have funding (450 wishes each year).

**But wishes can't wait.** These kids are fighting critical illnesses and are racing against time. Below are four funding scenarios that illustrate the impact additional funding would have on changing the lives of these Ohio children.



### Eliminate the "Wish Gap"

*\$4.4 Million*

- Grants **555** more wishes (123% increase)
- Ohio becomes **1<sup>st</sup> state** to exceed 1,000 wishes granted
- Fulfills vision of granting every eligible wish in Ohio

### Cut "Wish Gap" in Half

*\$2.2 Million*

- Grants **278** more wishes (62% increase)
- 728 total wishes **meet 72% of Ohio's need**
- Helps us leverage additional private & institutional funding

### 30% More Wishes

*\$1.1 Million*

- Grants **135** more wishes (30% increase)
- 585 total wishes **meet nearly 60% of Ohio's need**
- Helps us leverage additional private & institutional funding

### 15% More Wishes

*\$540,000*

- Grants **68** more wishes (15% increase)
- 518 total wishes **meet 51% of Ohio's need**
- Jumpstarts additional scaling of wish granting efforts