

**Testimony of**  
**Doug Kelly, President and CEO of Make-A-Wish® Ohio**  
**Presented to the**  
**Senate Finance Subcommittee on Health and Medicaid**  
**May 14, 2019**

Chairman Hackett, Vice Chairman Huffman, Ranking Member Thomas, and members of the Senate Finance Subcommittee on Health and Medicaid. 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**.

## **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 including examples of 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 was so inspired by the impact a *Make-A-Wish* wish had on one of his patients he decided to conduct a first-of-its-kind study. His study compared 496 kids at the hospital who received a *Make-A-Wish* wish in the last five years to a control group of 496 kids with a similar diagnosis who did not receive a *Make-A-Wish* wish.

Some of the key findings included:

- Make-A-Wish wish kids were **2.5 times** more likely to have a drop in unplanned hospital admissions in the year after a wish
- Make-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 *Make-A-Wish* 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 *Make-A-Wish* 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, there is real opportunity to reduce Medicaid spending and improve outcomes.** Dr. Patel studied *Make-A-Wish* wish recipients and found that these individual wish experiences show a positive, innovative intervention that could potentially reduce state-supported healthcare costs as well as private insurance. A Make-A-Wish heartfelt wish is unique to the individual wish child and is a customized experience for them and their family.

**Second, a *Make-A-Wish* wish is powerful medicine.** A wish's powerful effect on wish kids and their families is frequently cited by parents as a turning point in their 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. Our wish journey is specific to each child's medical and personal needs. A wish from Make-A-Wish has been shown to have outcomes that recharge a child and create positive health benefits.

**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!*

***Make-A-Wish* 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.

We'd like to ask the Senate to do two things:

- Support H.B. 166 to add in the \$1M matching grant amendment that will help Make-A-Wish Ohio grant 135 more life-changing wishes, wishes that were studied for their benefits and impact on healthcare utilization.
- To ensure funding is directed to granting impactful Make-A-Wish wishes in every legislative district across the state, we are also requesting the removal of House language that weakens the eligibility criteria of which groups can receive the funding from the *Wishes for Sick Children* fund. Removing this language will help allocate funds statewide to those wishes that best utilize, and show a return on, taxpayer dollars. If unchanged, the effect of this language can take all funds allocated statewide and send them to a few regional organizations.

## 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. Make-A-Wish Ohio has granted nearly 10,000 wishes, that's thousands of families in Ohio who know the transformational power of a *Make-A-Wish* wish. We want to ensure that every child in Ohio who battles a critical illness will have the opportunity to spend more time with family and friends and less time in the hospital.

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.