



October 4, 2023

Chairman Jay Edwards
Finance Committee
Ohio House of Representatives

Chairman Edwards, Vice Chair LaRe, Ranking Member Sweeney, and members of the Finance Committee,

Thank you for allowing me to submit testimony in support of the appropriation for Medical Legal Partnership in HB 7. My name is Callie Query, and I am the Managing Attorney of NCH's medical legal partnership known as Lawyers for Kids (LFK).

Lawyers for Kids is one of numerous evidence-based interventions that Nationwide Children's Hospital has implemented to address population health and health inequities in the pediatric population. LFK, currently funded solely by the hospital and free to NCH patients, provides legal representation to families to address their health harming legal needs. LFK provides this assistance with hospital employed attorneys as well as a contract with The Legal Aid Society of Columbus.

The classic medical legal partnership case is that of an asthma patient, who, despite following his treatment plan, is frequently admitted to the hospital. When the doctor talks to his mother, she determines that the conditions within the family's rental unit - specifically mold and mice droppings - are exacerbating the child's breathing difficulties. A doctor in an institution without a medical legal partnership feels stuck. A doctor who has access to a program like LFK can inform the patient that they will be referred to someone who can help. At NCH, the LFK lawyer would attempt to negotiate with the property owner a remediation of the conditions that are making the child sicker.

Housing is just one legal issue that impacts child health. LFK helps families appeal when insurance denies their child's doctor's request for durable medical equipment or home health care hours. We represent families when their child is not getting the educational supports they need to be successful at school. We assist grandparents in filing for custody of the grandchildren left in their care. We advise domestic violence victims who have recently left abusive relationships and need to file for civil protection orders.

Since 2019, Nationwide Children's front line clinicians have made over 6,000 referrals to Lawyers for Kids to help with legal problems that impact child health. In 2022 alone, LFK's outcomes included:

- 41 families avoided being evicted from their homes.
- 59 parents received assistance in filing for guardianship of their disabled adult children.
- 63 children obtained a new or improved Individualized Education Plan or 504 Plan at school.
- \$753,283 was returned to families in Social Security benefits, child support, medical equipment, home health care hours and food stamps.

Medical legal partnerships like Lawyers for Kids are an evidence-based intervention that have been shown to contribute to reduced caregiver stress, improved medical outcomes and monetary gains for children and families who receive legal advice and advocacy¹. MLPs like LFK also support medical staff and help them practice at the top of their license. In a time when health care institutions are struggling with staffing, it is important to note that studies have shown that access to MLPs increases clinician job satisfaction.

The need is great. In 2022, LFK handled 1866 referrals from NCH providers - a 23% increase from 2021. Based on the number of referrals we have received so far in 2023, we project ending the year with 2400 – a 28% increase from 2022. LFK can only continue to meet this need with increased funding for staffing.

I urge you to support HB 7 which will provide needed funding for the further expansion and implementation of medical legal partnerships like Lawyers for Kids throughout Ohio in order to improve the health of all Ohio's children.

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¹ <https://medical-legalpartnership.org/impact/>