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MEDIA STATEMENT

The following is a statement from Cathy Levine and Col Owens, Co-Chairs of Ohio Consumers for Health Coverage (OCHC), in response to ongoing budget deliberations:

“During the current budget debate, Ohio Consumers for Health Coverage has been calling for our state’s leaders to make fixing health care their highest priority. Every day more Ohioans are losing their jobs and their health coverage. More people than ever are struggling to make ends meet and pay for their health care. And, rising health care costs are undermining Ohio’s economy.

In these challenging economic times, Ohio’s leaders need to support struggling Ohioans and strengthen Ohio’s economy by lowering health care costs and providing access to affordable health care.

In his budget framework, the Governor reduces funding for Ohio’s community health centers by 80%. Ohio’s community health centers provide quality cost-effective health care services to any Ohioan regardless of insurance status or ability to pay. They save Ohio money by keeping people healthy and preventing costly hospital care. They are a national model for fixing health care so that we pay for good health rather than more services. We should be expanding them, not cutting them. These centers and Ohio’s free clinics are being stretched by increasing health care needs.

Ohio lawmakers also need to act now to make health insurance available to an additional 110,000 Ohioans, for no cost to the state. We call upon the conference committee to restore language to House Bill 1 that would:

- lower premiums in the Open Enrollment Program, a cost-effective approach that would allow 52,000 additional Ohioans with pre-existing conditions to afford health insurance in the individual market;
- allow dependents up to age 29 to be covered by family health insurance policies at no cost to employers, providing a coverage option to an age group that is generally healthy yet has the highest rate of uninsured;
- provide a mechanism for uninsured employees of small businesses to buy coverage with pre-tax dollars, saving these workers up to 30 percent of the premium cost; and
- require insurers to report what portion of a premium dollar is spent on health care compared to marketing—information that is vital to making informed policy changes in the future.

Ohio Consumers for Health Coverage will continue to work with our state's leaders until all Ohioans have access to affordable, high quality health care."

Ohio Consumers for Health Coverage is a nonpartisan coalition uniting the consumer voice with the goal of achieving affordable, high quality care for all. Our membership includes AARP, AFSCME Council 8 AFL-CIO, American Cancer Society, Cerebral Palsy Association of Ohio, Faith Community Alliance of Greater Cincinnati, Legal Aid Society of Southwest Ohio, National Alliance for Mental Illness (Ohio), National Multiple Sclerosis Society Ohio Chapters, Ohio ACORN, Ohio Council of Churches, Service Employees International Union, Toledo Area Jobs with Justice, UHCAN Ohio, We Are The Uninsured, and We Believe Ohio.