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CONTACT: Cathy Levine, 614-313-7478
Col Owens, 513-300-3042

Health Care Crisis is Getting Worse and Ohioans Cannot Wait Any Longer For Relief

Agriculture and Development Subcommittee Hears Health Care Consumer Testimony

Columbus OH—In testimony before the House Finance, Agriculture and Development Subcommittee today, Cathy Levine, Co-chair of Ohio Consumers for Health Coverage, told lawmakers that in order to fix the economy we need to address health care reform.

In these tough economic times, each day that goes by means higher health care costs, more Ohioans joining the ranks of the uninsured, and fewer small businesses offering coverage, all while Ohioans become sicker.

“Improving access to health care will improve the health of our economy,” said Levine. “I am pleased to see that, despite Ohio’s troubled economy, the Governor’s proposed budget contains several measures that lay a foundation for achieving high quality, affordable health care for all Ohioans.”

Levine and Col Owens, Co-Chair of Ohio Consumers for Health Coverage, both highlighted one change that will allow an estimated 52,000 high-risk Ohioans get health insurance coverage. By setting a cap on premiums in Ohio’s Open Enrollment Program, health coverage will be affordable to Ohioans with pre-existing conditions.

Levine also called on the committee to support several other measures including:

- Creating the Ohio Health Coverage and Quality Council, which will undertake work necessary to implement improvements in coverage, quality, and cost effectiveness.
- Authorizing and funding a study of how health coverage programs can be financed. Ohio cannot fix health care without funding to subsidize coverage for people who either lack

employer-based coverage or need help paying their share of employer-based coverage, and to lower rates for small businesses.

- Funding health information technology to provide broad use of electronic medical records to improve quality of health care and coordination – a key to transforming delivery. Some funds will be used as state match for HIT funds in the federal stimulus package.
- Requiring insurers to file all individual and small group health insurance rates and loss ratio data with the Department of Insurance for public reporting. This will enable the public to know how much of our insurance premium dollars are being spent on health care, administration and profits. We cannot lower costs or improve quality without more transparency on spending and quality.

“Ohioans are being squeezed by skyrocketing health care costs, lack of access to care, and unfair insurance rules,” said Owens. “We call on our elected officials to work to fix our health care system now. Ohioans cannot wait any longer.”

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. For more information go to www.ohioconsumersforhealth.org.

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