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OHIO'S NEW AUTISM POLICIES WILL PROVIDE NEEDED SERVICES FOR KIDS, FINANCIAL RELIEF FOR FAMILIES & CERTAINTY FOR BUSINESSES

Decision for state employee and private sector plans protects Ohio from the uncertainty of future federal interference

COLUMBUS –Ohio children with autism and their families now will have access to needed services thanks to policy changes Governor John R. Kasich announced today for state employee health insurance, health insurance sold in the private market, and health insurance sold through the upcoming federally managed health insurance exchange.

Ohio already provides access to autism-related services to approximately 40 percent of Ohio's children through its Medicaid program.

The General Assembly has been debating legislation that would make autism services a mandated benefit in Ohio's private health insurance market, and Kasich made his decision to expand the availability of services for children with autism only after close consultation with legislative leaders and members of both chambers.

"When we have the chance to do the right thing, we better do it because we don't want to live life with any regrets. We're doing the right thing today. Helping kids with autism get the services they need, and helping their parents get the financial lifeline of insurance coverage, that's something I support—for state employees and other families as well. With early intervention, kids with autism do better at school, find employment, and become more independent, connected adults in our communities," said Kasich. "I continue to be inspired by the courage of so many committed families who work and fight to give their kids the best possible chance at success. We're not going to turn our backs on them. In fact, we're extending them our hands and are going to bring them along."

Ohio will make autism services available to state employees and their 39,900 covered children after approval by the five state employee unions. Coverage details will be negotiated with the unions. Additionally, autism services will be defined as part of the "essential health benefit" package that federal law requires in every state beginning in 2014. Ohio's coverage levels will balance the call for a robust, meaningful benefit package with the reality of job-creators' economic and financial pressures and their need to keep premium costs low.

Additionally, this action helps provide job-creators protection from the uncertainty of possible future federal interference in 2016 when all state health insurance coverage levels will be reviewed and possibly revised. It is widely expected that states with no minimum coverage levels for autism or other habilitative services would be prime targets for federal intervention.

Background

- Autism affects verbal and non-verbal communication and social interactions, generally evident before age three, in a way that adversely affects a child's educational performance.
- Autism is the fastest-growing developmental disability in the United States.
- One in 88 children is diagnosed with autism, putting both financial and emotional pressure on Ohio families as they cope with providing medical and other support for their children.
- Thirty-two other states currently guarantee the provision of autism services in health insurance.
- Research shows that early intervention helps make a significant and lifelong difference in the lives of children with autism by improving social, cognitive and communication skills, and by helping families develop the unique skills they need to raise their children.

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