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Healthy Choices for Healthy Children Legislation Introduced to Fight Childhood Obesity in Ohio

COLUMBUS, Ohio, Nov. 17 /PRNewswire/ -- A bi-partisan effort to decrease and prevent childhood obesity was introduced today in the Ohio Senate and Ohio House of Representatives, with the strong support of the Healthy Choices for Healthy Children coalition. The Healthy Choices for Healthy Children legislation is co-sponsored by Senator Kevin Coughlin (R-Cuyahoga Falls) and Senator Eric H. Kearney (D-Cincinnati) in the Ohio Senate. Representatives John Patrick Carney (D-Columbus) and Lynn Wachtmann (R-Napoleon) are co-sponsoring the bill in the Ohio House.

"One in three children born in Ohio is overweight by the age of eight," said Senator Coughlin. "Ohio simply cannot afford to ignore the short- and long-term implications of this epidemic - in terms of the impact on children's health and the associated societal costs."

"This legislation will address childhood obesity in Ohio in a setting where we know we can have immediate impact - our schools - and approaches this complex problem with research-based solutions," Senator Coughlin said.

The bill contains school-based initiatives that will increase physical activity, raise the bar for physical education and improve the nutritional value of foods offered during the regular and expanded school day.

"We're going to get kids moving for at least 30 minutes per day, make sure they are developing good fitness habits by providing high-quality physical education classes and have healthy food available to them while they are at school," said Senator Kearney. "By making these simple changes in their school day, we can help our kids grow up healthy and strong."

The bill also provides for Body Mass Index (BMI) screenings upon school entry and in 3rd, 5th and 9th grades and education for parents about their child's BMI and the health risks associated with his or her results. Aggregated BMI results will be reported on local district and building report cards, using the Center for Disease Control's standards of underweight, healthy weight, overweight and obese.

"This is about educating kids and parents early on about the value of making healthy lifestyle choices," said Representative Carney. "With the tools this legislation provides, parents can work with their health provider to intervene before the child experiences long-term health issues. The earlier these kids start healthy habits, the better for their health and less expensive it will be for everyone in the long run."

"I personally know what a difference daily physical activity can make in a person's life," added Representative Wachtmann. "The fitness benefit of getting children moving every day is just the tip of the iceberg. I will not be surprised if we also see dramatically positive results in our children's mental health, self-confidence and ability to concentrate during the school day."

The legislation is supported by a newly formed group of state leaders in business, health care, education, child advocacy, fitness and nutrition - the Healthy Choices for Healthy Children coalition - led by Nationwide Children's Hospital CEO Steve Allen, M.D., and Cleveland Clinic CEO Toby Cosgrove, M.D., as co-chairs of the Ohio Business Roundtable Childhood Obesity Task Force.

"Childhood obesity is the most profound public health issue confronting

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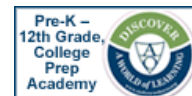
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Ohio," stated Dr. Allen, and Vice Chair of the Ohio Children's Hospital Association, "Dr. Cosgrove and I firmly believe that without dramatic action to arrest the disease burden caused by this epidemic, today's children could be the first generation of Ohioans to have shorter lives than their parents. We applaud our policymakers for joining hands with us on the most important work we can do together."

For a fact sheet detailing specific bill provisions, a document outlining the research supporting the legislation and a complete list of coalition members, please visit <http://www.healthychoiceshealthychildren.org>.

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