



May 25, 2023

Dear Members of the Ohio General Assembly,

On behalf of the **Ohio School-Based Health Alliance (Ohio Alliance)** and the **more than fifty-five undersigned organizations**, we voice our collective support for improving our children’s access to quality healthcare services through school-based health centers (SBHCs).

SBHCs are a leading, sustainable model for connecting children to health care, created through a partnership between a school/school district and a healthcare provider to increase access to, at minimum, primary healthcare services to students. Healthcare providers serve as operators and administrators of SBHCs, collaborating with schools to meet student health needs.

We have SBHCs that have been serving communities in Ohio for several decades. Ohio has led the nation in the establishment of comprehensive SBHCs that provide access to primary care, as well as behavioral, oral, and vision health services. In some rural, Appalachian, and urban regions of Ohio that are underserved, SBHCs are the **only** available healthcare provider for students and the broader community.

For the first time ever, the state budget includes funding to support the creation and expansion of SBHCs at \$15 million over the biennium. However, **we know that the need to connect children to health care throughout Ohio is much greater and that a statewide coordinated approach to support SBHCs is critical.** As such, we request:

- An increase from \$15 million to \$20 million over the biennium for SBHCs to better meet the needs of children and families statewide
- Formalizing the Ohio Alliance’s role in partnering with the Ohio Department of Health (ODH) and the Ohio Department of Education (ODE) to support SBHCs and strengthen Ohio’s SBHC infrastructure

We are experiencing the sobering reality that our children are facing increasing health and education challenges, with more children reporting anxiety and depression as well as higher rates of absenteeism than before. These challenges have only been exacerbated by the pandemic, resulting in a worsening of outcomes and widening of disparities. Even more concerning, **one in every five (21.6%) school-age children does not have a place to go or consult when they are sick.**¹

When a child is not in school, their education is negatively impacted. The consequences they face from interruptions in their education carry throughout their lifetime — including a greater risk for poor health as an adult, higher healthcare spending, and increased economic instability in their future. By investing in Ohio's SBHCs, we can:

- **Keep kids healthy and in school so their education is not interrupted**
- **Reduce high costs to the healthcare system and Medicaid**
- **Allow parents to stay at work so they are better able to support their families**

We support opportunities to scale SBHCs across Ohio and connect kids to care. Increasing SBHC funding to \$20 million over the biennium will expand the reach of SBHCs and help turn the tide on our children's health and education outcomes. As an independent, nonprofit, statewide organization, the Ohio Alliance is uniquely situated and committed to partnering with ODH and ODE to support Ohio's SBHCs and strengthen our state's SBHC infrastructure.

We applaud our state policymakers' unwavering commitment to Ohio's children and families and urge you to act on our requests. By funding the creation, expansion, and strengthening of SBHCs, together we can ensure that every child in Ohio is healthy, ready to learn, and set up for future success.

Sincerely,

Reem Aly, Executive Director
Ohio School-Based Health Alliance

Elizabeth Wilson, Senior Director of Operations
Bon Secours Mercy Health

Kelsey Bergfeld, Director
Advocates for Ohio's Future

Kelly A. Morris, Health Commissioner
Carroll County General Health District

Lisa Aurilio, COO
Akron Children's Hospital

Kim Eckhart, Interim Director
Children's Defense Fund-Ohio

Mary B. Outley, Interim Superintendent
Akron Public Schools

Dr. Mona Mansour, Medical Director, School-Based Health Centers
Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center

Randy Leite, Executive Director
Appalachian Children Coalition

Joyce Tate, Assistant Health Commissioner & CEO
City of Cincinnati Primary Care

Michelle Antulis, Executive Director
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¹ National Survey on Children's Health, 2020-2021

Dr. Roopa Thakur, Medical Director, School-Based Health Care
Cleveland Clinic

Dr. Angela Chapman, Superintendent & CEO
Columbus City Schools

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Kate Schroder, President & CEO
Interact for Health

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Jackson County Health Department

Mitch Tom, Director of Pupil Services
Licking Heights Local Schools

Stan Jefferson, Superintendent
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Mitchell Balk, President
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Muskingum Valley Health Centers

Rick Edwards, Superintendent
Nelsonville-York City School District

Joe Clark, Superintendent
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Ohio Association of Community Health Centers

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