

Hands Off Our Health Care Coalition

Working to STOP the Statewide Health Care Plan Mandated for Education Employees

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Coalition Questions Legal Standing of Health Care Board **Tardiness of Appointments Misses Deadline Assigned by House Bill 66**

(Jan. 19, 2006) – A broad-based coalition opposing a mandatory statewide health care plan for school employees is questioning the legal standing of late appointments to a School Employees Health Care Board. By law, the board was to have been appointed by Nov. 13, so the Hands Off Our Health Care Coalition believes the board has no legal standing.

Final appointees were named Jan. 13, two months after the deadline assigned by House Bill 66. The tardy appointments were made by Gov. Bob Taft, House Speaker Jon Husted and Senate President Bill Harris.

“Their disregard for state law that set the deadline for appointments only reinforces our concern about the potential for abuses in Ohio’s already scandal-ridden political climate,” said Mark Hatch, director of public policy and public affairs for the Ohio Association of Public School Employees, a coalition member organization.

The Hands Off Our Health Care Coalition believes the new health care plan will create a \$2 billion-plus slush fund to foster favoritism in Ohio’s ongoing pay-to-play political climate. This politically appointed health care board will decide which providers get contracts totaling some \$2 billion based on the value of health care contracts for state employees.

“The potential for corruption here is enormous,” said Tom Mooney, president of the Ohio Federation of Teachers, a coalition member organization. “Given the current climate in our state government, this plan is likely to become an extension of Ohio’s notorious pay-to-play system.”

Such concerns are evidenced by the August award of an un-bid half million dollar contract to a consultant that was, by law, to have been selected by the board. A \$500,000 contract was let to Watson Wyatt by the Department of Administrative Services (DAS) months before the board was even constituted.

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Once the statewide health care plan is designed, the legislature will vote to launch it and force school employees to enroll, eliminating local control and negotiations on health care for teachers and other school employees. All school employees will be forced to enroll when their current collective bargaining contracts expire. The board will decide whether to include faculty and staff at state colleges and universities. Comparisons of current school district health care benefits show that the mandatory plan is likely to cost more and provide fewer benefits than are typically achieved through collective bargaining, resulting in a pay cut for school employees.

The Hands Off Our Health Care Coalition opposes the plan for several reasons. Legislators conducted no feasibility study or research to determine what it would cost school districts, education employees or taxpayers before deciding to move forward with the plan, contrary to recommendations from the Governor's Blue Ribbon Task Force on School Funding. This board will determine levels of coverage, select insurance carriers and providers, and decide how much employees will pay for coverage.

Members of the Hands Off Our Health Care Coalition include the Ohio Federation of Teachers, the Ohio Association of Public School Employees, AFSCME Ohio Council 8, Service Employees International Union District 1199, the Columbus Education Association, the Akron Education Association, and the Ohio Conference American Association of University Professors.

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