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### Children's Defense Fund, Partners Announce *Finish Line Project* in Ohio

*Initiative will work statewide to improve children's access to quality health insurance and care*

COLUMBUS – Today, the Children's Defense Fund-Ohio (CDF-Ohio) announced it is joining the *Finish Line Project*, a multi-state advocacy initiative to protect and advance health coverage for children and families and improve their access to quality care. The organization unveiled its year-long action plan and invited stakeholders across Ohio to join the many partners who have committed to the work.

Ohio's health insurance coverage rates for children under 18 have seen a steep decline in recent years, according to a [report](#) released in October 2019 by the Georgetown University Center for Children and Families. Ohio was among just six states that saw the number of uninsured children increase by 25 percent or more between 2016 and 2018. This increase occurred at the same time Ohio saw an enrollment decline in Medicaid, which serves our state's most vulnerable children. Health insurance through Medicaid is vital for children because it improves their likelihood of receiving needed services and protects their families against the financial risks of being uninsured. Research shows that children with health insurance attend school more regularly, graduate at higher rates, earn higher incomes and become healthier adults.

"For years, Ohio was a national leader in ensuring children had access to the health services they needed. That's no longer the case," said Tracy Nájera, Executive Director of CDF-Ohio. "Access to care can alter the course of childhood development and shift the odds for at-risk children and families."

CDF-Ohio was selected based on its nearly 40-year history of working to give every child what they need to thrive and reach their full potential, from prenatal to age 18 and throughout their transition to adulthood. The *Finish Line Project* will examine and propose a comprehensive set of policy and regulatory solutions to Ohio's children's health insurance crisis through a four-point action plan:

- 1. Launch the Ohio *ChildWatch* tour.** CDF-Ohio will organize a series of forums around the state designed to hear from families affected by the loss of health insurance. Families, health professionals, legislators, and advocates will be invited to hear first-hand the experiences that families face in securing and keeping health coverage for their children.
- 2. Activate policy and advocacy partners.** Solving the issue of uninsured children is an effort that will require everyone's attention. CDF-Ohio will bring together a broad range of lawmakers, policy experts, and advocates to share ideas and work towards solutions to guarantee that every child in Ohio has the health coverage they need to be healthy.



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- 3. Support state policy change.** CDF-Ohio will research best practices and policies here in Ohio and in other states related to enrollment and retention of insurance benefits. Drawing upon years of experience and strong, bipartisan relationships within the legislature as well as with government agencies, CDF-Ohio will work to make it easier for families to enroll and keep their children's insurance coverage.
- 4. Conduct broad outreach and education.** CDF-Ohio will work with community partners and other advocacy groups to provide accurate and timely information about the importance of children and families having access to quality health insurance and care.

"We're ready to hit the ground running," Nájera said. "The spotlight is on Ohio. Under Governor DeWine's leadership, and in partnership with our policymaking colleagues on both sides of the aisle, we are ready to begin the work of making sure that all children in Ohio are insured."

## **Philanthropic Support and Participating Organizations**

A nationwide initiative of the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, the *Finish Line Project* supports state-based policy and advocacy organizations that are leading efforts to protect and enhance child and family health insurance coverage. Initial philanthropic support for the initiative in Ohio also comes from: [bi3](#) (Cincinnati); [CareSource Foundation](#) (Dayton); [The Cleveland Foundation](#); the [George Gund Foundation](#) (Cleveland); the [Ohio Regional Convergence Partnership](#); and the [Sisters of Charity Foundation of Cleveland](#).

"Time and again, our work has shown that collaboration is essential for advocacy and policy change, and we are proud to partner with many of our grant-making colleagues to share support in this initiative," said Susanna H. Krey, President of the Sisters of Charity Foundation of Cleveland. "An issue as urgent as child health insurance coverage will benefit from our collective time, talent and resources as we focus on making deep, meaningful change for Ohio's children and families."

"We're proud to partner with CDF-Ohio on an effort that will impact children and families across every region of the state, and further our mission to make a lasting difference by improving health and well-being," said Cathy Ponitz, Vice President of the Dayton-based CareSource Foundation.

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The Children's Defense Fund Leave No Child Behind® mission is to ensure every child a Healthy Start, a Head Start, a Fair Start, a Safe Start and a Moral Start in life and successful passage to adulthood with the help of caring families and communities.