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Veterans Advisory Committee Votes in Favor of Extending Medicaid Coverage
26,000 Ohio Veterans would Gain Access to Health Care under Plan

COLUMBUS – The Veterans’ Advisory Committee of the Ohio Department of Veterans Services added its voice Thursday to the chorus calling for health care coverage for Ohio’s uninsured veterans by endorsing Governor John R. Kasich’s proposed extension of Medicaid benefits.

“We’re very happy that the Advisory Committee endorsed the extension of Medicaid coverage to Ohio’s veterans,” said Tom Moe, Director of the Ohio Department of Veterans Services (ODVS). “This is the right thing to do and it will help thousands of Ohio veterans and their families who right now have no health insurance, simply due to when they served in the military, or the fact that all of their service has been in-state in the National Guard or the Reserve.”

The motion to endorse the Medicaid expansion was offered at the committee’s meeting by the Military Officers Association of America (MOAA), and seconded by AMVETS. Organizations voting in favor were MOAA, AMVETS, Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA), the Military Order of the Purple Heart, the Marine Corps League, the Korean War Veterans Association, the Catholic War Veterans, the Jewish War Veterans, ODVS’ Women’s Veterans Committee, and the representative from Ohio’s organized labor.

“As long as a bill helps one veteran, I’ll support it. I won’t support any bill that hurts veterans,” said Merle Pratt, who represented AMVETS. “My concern is that this helps the group that falls into a crack, the Guard and Reserve – this helps them.”

As proposed by Governor John R. Kasich, the full range of Medicaid coverage would be expanded to 26,000 Ohio veterans who currently have no health insurance, as well as 12,500 spouses and family members of veterans. The expansion would benefit veterans who served during peacetime years for which the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (the VA) does not provide health care, or who have a disability unrelated to their time in service. In addition,

members of the National Guard and Reserve who were not called up for federal active duty would also benefit from the expansion.

“I’m particularly happy that this coverage will allow veterans who are at risk of harming themselves to get the mental health care they need right where they live,” Director Moe said. “This could be the difference in saving someone’s life.”

Specifically, the Governor’s proposal calls for providing Medicaid coverage for single, childless persons under 65 making less than \$15,000 per year, and families at 138 percent of the federal poverty level, which for a family of four is an income of less than \$35,000 annually. All told, 275,000 Ohioans would benefit from this expansion. Costs of the expansion would be borne almost totally by the federal government for a period of four years.

“We support veterans and their widows and orphans, and people in the Guard and Reserve,” said, Bob Stewart, 1st Vice of the Buckeye State Council of VVA. “These are people who have served our country, and they need to be taken care of. We’re voting for what’s right.”

The Veterans Advisory Committee consists of representatives of the Ohio departments of most national veterans service organizations and provides input to ODVS on issues of concern to veterans.

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