**Ohio Medicaid Expansion Coalition**

NEWS RELEASE CONTACT: Deb Steele

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**Veterans Advocates Call for Ohio Medicaid Reform**

***More than 26,000 Ohio Veterans would benefit from extension of Medicaid benefits***

(Columbus, Ohio) -- Veterans advocates gathered today at the Franklin County Veterans Memorial to express their support for more than 26,000 Ohio veterans who have no reliable access to health care. As proposed by Governor John R. Kasich in the 2014-2015 state budget, the expansion of Medicaid to 275,000 Ohioans would include more than 26,000 Ohio veterans who currently have no health insurance, as well as 12,500 spouses and family members of veterans.

Speakers today included Major General Deborah A. Ashenhurst, Adjutant General of the Ohio National Guard, Colonel Tom Moe (US Air Force Retired), Director of the Ohio Department of Veterans Services, Victor Wilson from the Ohio National Guard Association, and Frank Miller, Jr., Commander of American Legion Post 315 in Cleveland, Ohio.

Currently in Ohio, there are approximately 52,000 veterans lacking options for health care. The expansion would benefit more than 26,000 veterans who served during peacetime years for which the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (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.

Colonel Tom Moe (USAF Retired), Director of the Ohio Department of Veterans Service (ODVS), noted, “Medicaid reform 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.”

Timing is critical to address extension of Medicaid benefits in Ohio. Significant provisions of the Affordable Care Act are set to being January 1 2014. The Ohio legislature is currently considering whether to accept Medicaid expansion for Ohio.

“According to the VA, 60 percent of veteran suicides in 2012 were among those who fell outside of the VA health care network. Medicaid expansion will provide vital health care coverage to childless adults under the age of 65, as well as to uninsured families below the federal poverty level, making lifesaving mental health services available to those veterans who may need it the most,” noted Victor Wilson, from the Ohio National Guard Association.

If the Ohio Legislature chooses to include Medicaid expansion in the state budget, it will continue the nationally recognized transformation of Ohio’s Medicaid program by improving care for vulnerable Ohioans, including 26,000 veterans, by reducing costs for taxpayers and businesses, and making Ohio more attractive to job creators. More information about Medicaid expansion can be found at http://ohiomedicaidalliance.org/ .

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