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Ohio Dialysis Caregivers, Patient Advocates and Physicians Oppose Proposed Constitutional Amendment by California Special Interest Group

(Columbus) – Describing it as “deceptive and unnecessary,” the Ohio Renal Association, representing more than 300 neighborhood clinics offering Ohioans life-saving kidney dialysis services, and other Ohio dialysis caregivers and patient advocates expressed their opposition to a proposed constitutional amendment on dialysis filed today with the Ohio Secretary of State by the SEIU-UHW, a California special interest group seeking to pass a similar ballot issue in California this fall.

Ohio Renal Association president Diane Wish said, “This proposed Ohio Constitutional Amendment is deceptive and unnecessary, and carelessly puts the health of Ohio’s kidney dialysis patients at great risk. If passed, this proposal would force some dialysis clinics to cut back, consolidate or close, reducing access to care for Ohioans, especially those in disadvantaged, underserved or sparsely populated areas of Ohio.

“We strongly oppose this amendment and are pleased to be joined in opposition by other Ohio dialysis experts such as the Kidney Foundation of Ohio, and others who serve Ohio dialysis patients,” Wish said. Wish, a registered nurse with more than 40 years of experience providing dialysis treatment, has served since 1983 as CEO of the nonprofit Centers for Dialysis Care, which operates 17 facilities in the Cleveland area.

“This ballot issue leaves me dumbfounded and incredulous,” added nephrologist Dr. Chris Saunders of Columbus, “The sponsors of this amendment demonstrated an obvious lack of understanding of the needs of dialysis patients and the comprehensive set of medical protocols and regulations that already govern the delivery of dialysis in Ohio.”

Dr. Saunders was joined in that assessment by Dr. Henry Wehrum, also a nephrologist (kidney specialist), who serves on the board of the Ohio Osteopathic Association. “This out-of-state special interest group is proposing a constitutional amendment to lock in place an unnecessary and flawed set of regulations that will actually harm the very patients the paid petitioners say they want to protect.”

Dr. Saunders and Dr. Wehrum each have about 30 years of experience treating patients with kidney disease in Ohio.

Those most familiar with dialysis care in Ohio are beginning to develop a non-partisan coalition to oppose the amendment, should it qualify for the fall Ohio ballot. In addition to the Ohio Renal Association and the Kidney Foundation of Ohio, opponents include the Ohio State Medical Association, the Ohio Osteopathic Association, Dialysis Patient Citizens and the Ohio Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics.

The proposed Constitutional Amendment would mandate arbitrary revenue limits for Ohio dialysis clinics and require rebates to private health insurance companies should revenues exceed those arbitrary limits.

While nearly nine out of every ten Ohio dialysis patients receive coverage from Medicare, Medicaid or some other government program such as the Veterans Health Administration, none of those programs would receive rebates directed by the amendment.

Furthermore, the amendment does not require private insurers receiving these rebates to pass any savings on to patients.

The estimated 18,000 Ohioans suffering from end stage renal disease (ESRD) typically receive life-preserving dialysis treatments in a clinic three times a week, with each visit taking three to four hours. Ohio's 326 community dialysis clinics are already governed by strict, thorough regulations enforced by state and federal healthcare agencies. According to national research, missing even one dialysis treatment increases the patient's risk of death by 30 per cent. (For more information on ESRD in Ohio, [see here.](#))

ORA spokesperson Gene Pierce said their organization, other caregivers and patient advocates plan to mount a statewide campaign to educate voters on the amendment, should the proposal have enough valid signatures to qualify for the November 6 statewide ballot.

"In recent weeks we have seen hundreds of paid circulators, many of them from out of state, gathering signatures on petitions. We've heard these hired circulators distorting the facts, and we expect the sponsors to keep doing that.

"From our side, you will hear from Ohioans who have real experience with the high quality of dialysis care in our state," Pierce said.

Reports show that the national SEIU and an affiliated ballot PAC in California have spent at least \$1.3 million in recent months for the paid petition drive in Ohio. The treasurer for the Ohio PAC associated with the petition drive is an SEIU official based in Los Angeles.

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