

## City, County and Berger Announce Historic Action Berger to Become Full Member of OhioHealth

**For Immediate Release | Berger Health System**

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(Circleville, Ohio) - After more than a year of ongoing discussions, an agreement has been reached for Berger Health System to formally join one of the country's largest and most successful not-for-profit hospital systems, Columbus-based OhioHealth. The lease agreement with OhioHealth includes commitments to strengthen Berger and healthcare in Pickaway County and ensures the continued use of the Berger name.

The Berger Board of Governors, Circleville City Council and Pickaway County Commissioners conducted meetings this evening to approve resolutions and legislation authorizing a lease to make Berger Health System a full member of OhioHealth. Circleville City Council's approval of the lease caps a November 2017 ballot initiative which authorized Berger to change its ownership structure and enter into a lease with a larger healthcare system. The initiative was approved by an overwhelming 82% of Circleville voters.

With an effective date planned for the spring of 2019, this lease agreement makes Berger the 12<sup>th</sup> member hospital of OhioHealth's growing regional network. As a result of this agreement, \$46 million will be invested locally over five-years for new capital projects, assumption of outstanding debt, commitments for physician recruitment, and employee investments including education, training plus the opportunity for Berger Hospital employees to retain their Public Employees Retirement System (OPERS) benefits.

The physicians and staff of Berger Health Partners will be integrated into the OhioHealth Physician Group and continue to see patients locally. Similarly, healthcare philanthropy for Berger Hospital will become part of the OhioHealth Foundation. Berger Health Foundation will continue to operate, will rename itself, and will dedicate itself to other community initiatives.

Over the past several years, the Berger Board, City Council and the County Commissioners have studied local, state and national trends of the healthcare industry. The reality is smaller hospitals, particularly stand-alone ones, are experiencing lower inpatient volumes, more competition, less reimbursement, and overall less profitability. The increasing pace and number of changes in the healthcare industry confirms the need to align and officials say this historic lease with OhioHealth offers the best, long-term chance to secure healthcare in Pickaway County for years to come.

David M. Crawford, Circleville City Council president, said representatives from the City, County and Hospital Board worked towards developing the lease for more than a year, at times visiting OhioHealth sites in other cities and interviewing public officials in those communities. "OhioHealth has a strong, national reputation for business and health care innovation in addition to being community-minded," said Crawford. "We anticipate OhioHealth to be the city's largest employer and we are looking forward to a great partnership in the years to come," added President Crawford.

The lease agreement with OhioHealth is the culmination of years of planning, collaboration, and communication between all parties and the community. Berger and OhioHealth started partnering in 2008 to bring cardiology services to the community. Partnering efforts intensified in 2015 after the organizations signed an exclusive agreement. Since 2015, Berger and OhioHealth have added specialty services including, neurology, cancer, intensive care and more.

President of the Pickaway County Commissioners, Jay Wippel sees this alignment as another success for our County. "With the Sofidel plant starting operations, the expanding Rickenbacker intermodal area, and the new Pickaway Agriculture and Event Center project ramping up, it is critical we have strong local healthcare supporting our vibrant community," said Commissioner Wippel. "We welcome OhioHealth to the community and appreciate their commitment to Pickaway County. OhioHealth's investment will strengthen economic growth in our area for years to come," added Commissioner Wippel.

"OhioHealth and Berger share a vision to keep high-quality, affordable and accessible healthcare in Pickaway County for decades to come," said Michael Louge, executive vice president and chief operating officer for OhioHealth. "Becoming a full member hospital gives Berger access to the resources and expertise of a large health system and enables them to keep advanced care and treatments in the communities they serve."

John Edgar, Vice Chair of the Berger Board observed key stakeholders come together for a bigger purpose. "This partnership journey with OhioHealth has taken years of hard work, site visits and planning. The Circleville City Council, County Commissioners, Berger Board and community have all worked together to make this day a reality," Edgar noted. "It shows the strong leadership and collaboration in our county," Edgar added.

At the end of the evening's meetings, Tim Colburn, president and CEO of Berger Health System took time to express gratitude to everyone involved. "Thank you all for your hard work and commitment to strengthen local healthcare. You should be proud of your efforts and the investments being made in our community," said Colburn. "I am impressed with how well received this partnership has been by our employees, physicians, advanced practice providers, and volunteers. We are optimistic about the future of healthcare in our community. In short, we are excited about becoming part of OhioHealth," Colburn added.

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