

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
February 14, 2008

CONTACT:
Rebecca Reid: (410) 212-3843, rreid@txhca.org

As State and National Primaries Near, Long Term Care Leaders Urge State Representative Valinda Bolton and Texas Congressional Delegation to Protect Critical State Medicaid Funding

Texas Ranks 49th in the Nation in Medicaid Reimbursement and Faces Proposed Federal Budget Cuts; West Oaks Rehabilitation and Healthcare Center Caregivers Ask Rep. Bolton, Texas State Delegates to Help Strengthen and Protect Texas' Strained Long Term Care System

Austin, TX (February 14, 2008) – In a facility tour and briefing today with State Representative Valinda Bolton (D-Austin) at West Oaks Rehabilitation and Healthcare Center nursing home, front-line caregivers explained that if the funding cuts to Medicare and Medicaid recently proposed in President Bush's budget were to pass, Texas seniors' nursing home care would be severely undermined. In order to protect current and future long term care for Texas seniors, caregivers asked Rep. Bolton and her fellow representatives to help fight these potential funding cuts in Texas, where seniors are already particularly vulnerable due to the state's Medicaid rates for nursing homes ranking 49th in the nation.

During the tour – provided to help examine how to improve Texas' standing in delivering quality long term care – caregivers, elderly residents and their family members stressed that greater investment in Texas' Medicaid program is urgently needed to protect residents, strengthen staffing efforts and enhance ongoing quality improvement efforts in facilities throughout the state. According to recent data, Texas seniors receive only \$106.59 on average per patient per day, while the national daily average is \$153.83 per patient. Caregivers explained that this difference, over time, can make a major impact in patient care programs and services.

“We appreciate Rep. Bolton's joining us today to discuss and examine our state's long term care status,” said West Oaks Rehabilitation and Healthcare Center administrator Steven Aichlmayr. “Many citizens and policymakers right here in Austin do not fully realize the dire funding situation facing Texas nursing home care – particularly taking into account the President's proposed cuts to Medicare and Medicaid – and we hope to discuss ideas with our state's political candidates for how we can create additional care improvements and greater long-term security for our patients.”

Caregivers pointed out that as presidential candidates are in Texas to compete for the increasingly important March 4 primary, a dialogue on Texas' long term care status is needed to make the issue a broader part of the state and national health care policy debate. At the national level, the National Commission for Quality Long Term Care, headed by former U.S. Senator Bob Kerrey (D-NE) and former

House Speaker Newt Gingrich (R-GA), recently found that most Americans do not understand the nature of long term care funding – with 34 percent believing that most long term care is paid for by Medicare, 20 percent thinking it is paid for by Medicaid, 22 percent believing that individuals and their families pay for most long term care and 13 percent saying they do not know at all how long term care is financed.

“As Texas' population continues to grow older and require more specialized health care services, it is important that caregivers, residents and their families, and policymakers collaborate to produce meaningful, patient-focused solutions for maintaining highest-quality care delivery – particularly in light of Texas slipping to 49th in the nation for Medicaid reimbursement rates for nursing homes,” said Rep. Bolton. “I hope to work with Texas' caregivers on the front line, such as the dedicated professionals at West Oaks Rehabilitation and Healthcare Center, to create lasting improvements to long term care programs and services for our state’s seniors.”

Aichlmayr noted the visit with Rep. Bolton does not constitute a political endorsement, but rather is an effort to help Texas’ office-seekers better understand the plight of their most vulnerable local citizens in long term care.

Representative Bolton, elected to the 80th State Legislature in 2006, is seeking re-election to the Texas House of Representatives in House District 47 – Southwest Travis County including the City of Austin, Briarcliff, The Hills, Bee Cave, Lakeway, Sunset Valley and San Leanna. Rep. Valinda Bolton (D) is running unopposed in the Democratic Primary, but Rep. Bolton (D) and Donna Keel (R) will appear on the ballot in the November General Election. For more information on Rep. Bolton and her platform, visit www.valindabolton.org.

#