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## **THCA: Senator Lucio a Key State Leader in Effort to Preserve, Protect and Defend TX Nursing Home Residents' Medicaid Benefits**

*Senator Tours Weslaco, Harlingen Facilities; Sees First-Hand the Funding Challenges Facing Vulnerable Seniors, Facilities in Rio Grande Valley Area*

**Weslaco/Harlingen, TX** – In thanking State Sen. Eddie Lucio, Jr. for touring Valley Grande Manor and La Hacienda Health Care in Weslaco and Harlingen, respectively, the Texas Health Care Association (THCA) noted the Senator is a key leader in the effort to preserve, protect and defend Texas nursing home residents' Medicaid benefits, and said his leadership in Austin is important in the current debate concerning the need to ensure Medicaid funding cuts now being contemplated are eliminated as a policy option.

"It is essential to have an informed public discussion to ensure Austin lawmakers understand why keeping Texas' Medicaid program financially sound in the face of federal Medicare cuts from Washington is vital to protecting seniors in the Rio Grande Valley and across the entire state of Texas," stated Tim Graves, President of THCA. "Senator Lucio is engaged in this significant health policy debate, and his ongoing leadership is noted and appreciated by seniors and caregivers all across our state."

**"Ensuring that seniors get the quality care they need is a top priority. I am happy to have the opportunity to see firsthand how cuts to Medicaid and Medicare affect seniors in nursing homes. The elderly community is the backbone of our society, and we all need to work hard to ensure that they get the best care possible. They deserve nothing less."**

**"We all have a parent, grandparent, aunt or uncle in need of long-term care, and I don't have to tell you how heartbreaking decisions surrounding their care can be. That's why it is important to ensure they get the very best care, and we cannot do that without properly funding nursing home facilities."**

**"I know my colleagues and I have some tough decisions ahead of us next session, but it's important to understand the ramifications of our policy decisions. As the Chair of the Legislative Committee on Aging, I will be studying long-term care issues over the interim. Touring these facilities has been an incredibly valuable experience," said Senator Eddie Lucio, Jr.**

During Sen. Lucio's tour of Valley Grande Manor, the Administrator, Bill Lowe, said on-site events of this nature help policymakers better understand why local facilities are integral to the local economy and jobs base, how nursing homes are changing in terms of the nature of its patients, and how Medicaid and Medicare funding cuts undermine facility operations, and ultimately seniors' care itself.

"Our patients and staff are grateful Sen. Lucio has taken the time to tour our facility, and to see first-hand how nursing homes like ours are fighting daily to provide the excellent care our seniors deserve, while also facing a challenging reimbursement system that all too often falls short of actually meeting the cost of providing care," Lowe said. "The worsening financial squeeze on our facility and the funding our frail, vulnerable patients depend upon to maintain good quality of life deserves more attention and more governmental emphasis."

Ricardo Rodriguez, the Administrator of La Hacienda, stated, "Facilities like ours are highlighting the fact that meeting seniors' ongoing care needs -- as well as sustaining a strong workforce and local jobs base -- will be contingent upon sustaining appropriate Medicaid funding levels from Austin in the face of cuts to Medicare in Washington. With Medicaid cuts from Austin now a major, looming threat, it is more important than ever to warn state and federal lawmaker alike of the negative local consequences to their elderly constituents."

Rodriguez said he is thankful Sen. Lucio understands “there will always be a direct correlation between adequate Medicare and Medicaid funding, patient care quality, and the stability of the Rio Grande Valley’s long term care workforce.” He also noted the already-strained Medicare system is increasingly being used to patch the widening gaps in the long-term care financing system caused by chronic Medicaid under funding. Medicaid rates paid to providers in 2010, he noted, are approximately \$200 million short of meeting the state’s own conservative estimate of necessary funding.

In stressing the need for Austin lawmakers to eliminate Medicaid cuts as a policy option, Graves, Lowe and Rodriguez all noted that the federal Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) slashed Texas seniors’ Medicare-funded nursing home care by \$725 over ten years on October 1, 2009, and was cut another \$875 million over ten years as part of federal health care reform.