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Austin Welcomes National “Driving for Quality Care” RV Tour Highlighting Need to Protect Texas Seniors’ Access to Quality Care, Preserve Local Caregiver Jobs

Cross-Country Grassroots Effort Urges Governor Perry, Texas Legislature to Use Portion of Just-Passed Emergency Federal Medicaid Relief To Help Soften Blow From New \$25.6 Million State Medicaid Cuts

AUSTIN, TX – With vulnerable seniors’ continued access to quality rehabilitative, skilled nursing and assisted living care relying heavily upon the collective funding adequacy of state Medicaid and federal Medicare funding, the American Health Care Association and National Center for Assisted Living’s (AHCA/NCAL) nationwide *Driving for Quality Care* petition-signing initiative arrived at the tour’s 39th stop in Austin today to urge President Obama, Congress and Governor Rick Perry to help resolve the chronic underfunding of Texas’ and the nation’s rehabilitative and long term care services. The petition event was held at West Oaks Rehabilitation and Healthcare Center in Austin.

“Our facility is pleased to be a part of this national RV tour and to help share the message that high-quality skilled nursing and rehab care depends upon adequate, stable Medicaid funding,” said Steven Aichlmayr, the Administrator of West Oaks. “With the \$858 million in federal emergency Medicaid relief now potentially available for Texas, we urge Governor Perry and our state legislature to help ensure that a portion of this funding is appropriately allocated toward protecting seniors’ access to quality care and maintaining local caregiver jobs vital to Austin and communities across Texas.”

The organizers of *Driving for Quality Care* said the nationwide RV tour helps empower seniors, family members, and caregivers by inviting them to sign the initiative’s actual or online national petition, reach out to local legislators, recruit supporters via social media outlets like Facebook and Twitter, and follow the tour’s progress from Washington, DC to Long Beach, CA on its interactive website, www.drivingforqualitycare.com.

“The viability of many quality care facilities and caregiving jobs throughout Texas depends upon adequate Medicaid reimbursement – and with \$25.6 million in state Medicaid cuts set to go into effect on September 1, we are facing an ever-challenging fiscal environment,” said Tim Graves, President of the Texas Health Care Association (THCA), who appeared at the Austin event. “We thank the members of Congress who voted in favor of expanded Medicaid funding relief, and we will continue to strive to educate our lawmakers on the critical link between funding stability, continued quality of care and maintained staffing levels.”

Aichlmayr and Graves pointed out that with approximately 60 to 70 percent of facility costs in Texas directly related to staffing, the lack of stable, adequate Medicaid funding -- and cumulative federal Medicare cuts of nearly \$27 billion in just the past nine months -- will continue to place vulnerable seniors’ ongoing care needs in direct jeopardy, and puts key facility jobs at substantial risk.

Graves noted that Texas’ long term care sector delivers a significant contribution to the state’s economy, providing \$13.1 billion annually in Texas economic activity, and helping employ more than 100,000 workers. “As represented by the dedicated caregivers who have turned out for the national RV tour today, we hope to remind our elected officials that in many communities, skilled nursing facilities are the largest local employer – particularly in rural areas. These facilities provide a variety of skilled and complex rehabilitative services that seniors depend upon to recover and return home – which is a central objective of long term care here in Texas and nationwide.”

The THCA President said a recently commissioned public opinion survey from Baselice & Associates to assess Texans' attitude towards Medicaid cuts – and specifically towards the \$25 million cuts scheduled to go into effect September 1, finds Republicans, Democrats and Independents alike strongly opposed to the \$25 million state cuts to seniors' rehabilitation and skilled nursing care. Specifically, the survey found, 79 percent of all Texans oppose the recently announced cuts, with a full 70 percent of Republicans opposing them; 80 percent of Independents in opposition; and 88 percent of Democrats in opposition. (*Poll details are available at www.txhca.org*).

“These poll findings should provide a powerful message to Texas lawmakers that the \$25 million in cuts to our seniors' rehabilitative and skilled nursing care face strong opposition, and that our elected officials who vote to cut seniors' Medicaid funding moving forward will have a challenging task in explaining this action to Texas seniors themselves,” Graves concluded.

The assembled group of eldercare advocates also noted a newly released 2010 Quality Report finding ongoing quality improvements are paying off with positive trends in many areas of quality and patient outcomes. Between 2008 and 2009, they noted, Texas' nursing facilities made measureable improvements in several quality measures including reductions in resident weight loss, patient pain and pressure ulcers.

“Our facility has realized significant quality gains – and we were even recognized nationally with an AHCA/NCAL Bronze Commitment to Excellence award for our quality achievements this year – but without stable funding support, our ability to maintain and expand upon our ongoing quality improvements is greatly hindered,” said Aichlmayr. “We hope that our state and federal leaders alike will recognize the essential role Medicare and Medicaid funding have in continued quality advancements, and in helping facilities like ours sustain the positive quality trends we have successfully accomplished.”

Specific RV Tour Itinerary and Additional Information Available at www.drivingforqualitycare.com

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