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Texas Seniors Advocates, State Lawmakers Urge Legislature To Boost Investment in Medicaid

Reps. Rose, Herrero, Lucio Join Silver-Haired Legislature, AARP, Catholic Conference, Heart Association, Others to Say More Funds Needed to Care for Long Term Care Patients

AUSTIN, TX (March 24, 2009) – In joining Reps. Patrick Rose (D-Dist. 45), Abel Herrero (D-Dist. 34) and Eddie Lucio III (D-Dist. 38) at a news conference to support greater investment in Texas' 49th-ranked Medicaid program, the Texas Silver-Haired Legislature, AARP, Texas Catholic Conference, American Heart Association, American Diabetes Association and other groups said meeting the growing care needs of Texas' oldest, sickest seniors must be a priority for the 2009 legislative session.

"Beyond the simple fact that it is finally time to address the fact Texas ranks 49th nationally in terms of Medicaid funding, investing in this key program will protect seniors' access to quality nursing home care, maintain a strong local jobs base, and strengthen our capacity to care for a growing number of seniors in the Austin area and across the state," said Rep. Rose, Chairman of the House Human Services Committee (HHSC). Rose noted the Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) Consolidated Budget target estimates \$368 million in new General Revenue spending is needed in the 2010-2011 biennium to address the operating and staffing needs of Texas nursing homes – which serve 60,000 Medicaid nursing home residents twenty-four hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year.

Noting the fact that facilities throughout the state are struggling to hire, train and retain staff due to the low Texas Medicaid reimbursement rate of \$112.79 per patient per day, Rep. Herrero, Vice-Chair of the House Human Services Committee, said, "The basis for the provision of quality nursing home care is an investment in staff – and the exceptionally low state Medicaid reimbursement rate is an enormous impediment to boosting care quality and protecting the care needs of our state's most vulnerable population of seniors."

Rep. Lucio commended the assembled patient advocate organizations for showing their support in Austin for boosting state investment in Medicaid, and said lawmakers need to hear the message that nursing home patients with a variety of complicated health problems deserve to be a funding priority. "We hear, understand and support your efforts to ensure every senior who requires assistance gets it," Lucio, D-San Benito, said. "We join you in the push to make top quality, responsible nursing home care available for every Texan."

Carlos Higgins, Chairman of the Silver-Haired Legislature's, Legislative Action Committee, said that since 1999, the Texas Legislature has not adequately funded the sharply rising costs of caring for nursing home residents. "Among our key resolutions for the 2009 session is, 'Increase Medicaid funding that supports a rate for Texas seniors equal to costs reported to the state by

long term care providers’,” said Higgins. “Until the state begins to pay the actual cost associated with providing seniors’ care, we will continue to put patients at risk, and continue to under-finance the long term care system we will depend upon in the years and decades to come.”

While Amanda Fredriksen, Director of Advocacy for Texas AARP, noted that, “Adequately financing Texas seniors’ care needs must be a priority for the 2009 legislative session, not an afterthought,” Jennifer Carr Allmon, Associate Director of the Texas Catholic Conference, said, “Our public officials have a moral obligation to ensure our mothers, fathers, grandparents and neighbors in every neighborhood and community throughout Texas are protected and taken care of in a dignified, compassionate manner.”

Veronica De La Garza, Advocacy Director of the Texas Diabetes Association and Joel Romo, Regional VP-Texas of the South Central affiliate of the American Heart Association, both noted the prevalence of greater numbers of seniors in Texas nursing homes with complex care needs, and encouraged lawmakers of both parties to look closely at the needs of their frail, elderly constituents when deciding how to allocate health funds in the weeks ahead.

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Founded in 1950, the Texas Health Care Association (THCA) is the largest long term care association in Texas. THCA represents a broad spectrum of long term care providers and professionals offering long term, rehabilitative and specialized health care services. Member facilities, owned by both for-profit and non-profit entities, include nursing facilities, specialized rehabilitation facilities, and assisted living facilities.