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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**TOP HEALTH CARE, BUSINESS GROUPS ANNOUNCE NEW
COALITION, CAMPAIGN TO ADDRESS MEDICAL LIABILITY CRISIS**

TALLAHASSEE, Fla., November 19, 2002—Alarmed that Florida's broken medical liability system is driving up health care costs and threatening patients' ability to obtain medical services, a coalition of health care and business groups announced a campaign Tuesday to seek comprehensive reforms during the 2003 legislative session.

The Coalition to Heal Health Care in Florida, working in support of Governor Jeb Bush's efforts to repair the liability system, will ask state lawmakers to restore fairness and balance to the process so that injured patients can be justly compensated while protecting health care for all Floridians.

The coalition, spearheaded by the Florida Hospital Association and the Florida Medical Association, is a broad alliance of nearly 50 of the state's top health care and business groups. Among others, it includes the Florida Chamber of Commerce, the Florida Nurses Association, Associated Industries of Florida, the National Federation of Independent Businesses, and some of the state's largest medical liability insurance companies. The coalition will announce various activities statewide in the coming weeks and months.

"Without question, the medical liability crisis is already hurting Floridians," said Wayne NeSmith, president of the Florida Hospital Association, which represents 230 hospitals, 20 professional groups and over 2,000 professional members across Florida.

"By year's end, at least six Florida hospitals will be forced to close their obstetrics units because they either can't find or can't afford liability insurance," NeSmith added. "Other hospitals are struggling to maintain their emergency rooms, mammography units, and various types of surgery. Florida's leading health care and business groups are united on this issue—the Legislature must address this crisis to ensure that our citizens can obtain these important services."

(more)

Coalition Announces Campaign On Medical Liability Crisis

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Over the past year, a growing number of Floridians have had to pay more, wait longer, and travel farther for their health care because of problems that doctors are having with their liability insurance, said Dr. Robert Cline, president of the 16,000-member Florida Medical Association.

"Florida's medical liability system is clearly in need of a legislative fix—we cannot afford to sit back, wait another year and watch health care services jeopardized for even more of our citizens," Cline said. "Fair reform is within our reach, but we have to work together to achieve it."

Several factors over the past two years have fueled the current medical liability crisis. Doctors have been hit with liability premium increases ranging from 25 to 400 percent. Hospitals have seen premiums skyrocket 140 percent in the same period. Meanwhile, the number of liability insurers in Florida has plummeted from more than 40 in 1998 to fewer than 10 in 2002, and some of the remaining insurers aren't writing new policies.

As more doctors have struggled to find or pay for coverage, many have chosen to leave the state, limit their practices or stop performing certain procedures. In turn, hospitals have faced mounting decisions about how to ensure that certain medical procedures can be handled around the clock, and whether to stop offering certain services.

The crisis is largely fueled by the high number of costly liability lawsuits and the unpredictable damages being awarded by juries, coalition members believe.

The coalition strongly supported Governor Bush's decision earlier this year to create a Select Task Force on Healthcare Professional Liability Insurance. The task force is expected to issue a report with recommendations to the Legislature on January 31.

On Friday, an official with the actuarial firm Milliman USA will appear before the task force in Orlando to present a new study on Florida's medical liability crisis on behalf of the coalition.

Meanwhile, the coalition has provided a detailed package of proposed reforms to the House Medical Liability Insurance Workgroup. The coalition's solutions center on three basic areas—defining more clearly reasonable parameters of litigation and compensation, providing for a more stable insurance market and improving patient safety. The House Workgroup will hold its first organizational meeting on Thursday in Tallahassee.

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