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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

HOSPITALS IN FLORIDA FACING “MELTDOWN” WITHOUT LEGISLATIVE SOLUTION TO MEDICAL LIABILITY CRISIS

JACKSONVILLE, Fla., December 17, 2002¾ Florida’s medical system is in danger of a meltdown due to the liability insurance crisis, according to one hospital executive who testified at today’s town hall meeting hosted by U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Secretary Tommy Thompson.

A. Hugh Greene, President and CEO of Jacksonville-based Baptist Health and member of the Coalition to Heal Healthcare in Florida, stressed to the panel that without a legislative fix, the dramatic cost increases would affect the ability of hospitals and physicians to provide quality medical services to Florida citizens. He stated that hospitals themselves have experienced a 140% increase in premiums on average across the state, but costs are not the only issue facing Florida hospitals.

“Those of us in the hospital leadership hear physicians daily discussing the options of retiring or leaving the state,” Greene testified. “As physicians leave and as hospitals and their medical staffs curtail certain services, it is extremely difficult to recruit high quality physicians to our state because of the medical liability problem here.”

Greene and other members of the Coalition to Heal Healthcare in Florida took part in the two-part panel session, including Robert E. White, Jr., President of FPIC Insurance Company and three physicians who are members of the Florida Medical Association (FMA). The coalition, which is spearheaded by the Florida Hospital Association and the FMA, is a broad alliance of more than 50 of the state’s top health care and business groups and is seeking comprehensive reforms during the 2003 legislative session.

The public meeting, which took place at the Omni Jacksonville Hotel, consisted of two panel sessions, one examining the problems the state is now facing and the other exploring possible solutions.

“A legislative solution is needed now to avert a real meltdown in our state which will even more dramatically affect patients,” Greene testified to the panel. “We believe that a fair reform is achievable which addresses this crisis while protecting the public’s ability to be fairly compensated for real economic damages. There can be no delay in addressing this very real problem.”

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Greene, along with the members of the Coalition to Heal Healthcare in Florida, have 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.

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