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**COUNTY ATTORNEY REQUESTS THE LT. GOVERNOR TO
SUPPORT EXPANSION OF CHIP HEALTH INSURANCE**

El Paso County Attorney José R. Rodriguez, Chairman of the Committee on Border Health of the Texas Border Coalition ("TBC"), delivered today a letter in behalf of TBC to the Honorable David Dewhurst, Lieutenant Governor of Texas, requesting his support to expand medical coverage for children under the CHIP program. The letter was hand delivered this afternoon to his office in Austin.

Lt. Governor Dewhurst's role in the Texas Senate could be instrumental to reverse the ever increasing rate of uninsured children in the state. Last month the House of Representatives approved HB 109, a bill that simplifies the eligibility process for children who apply for the CHIP health insurance program. With 18 days left of the current legislative session, only Lt. Governor Dewhurst's strong support can assure that a similar bill filed in the Senate is brought up for a vote before the deadline.

In the past weeks Lt. Dewhurst has expressed his opposition to any bill that would allow children to apply every year instead of every 6 months as it is currently required. However that particular change is considered key to increase the number of children enrolled in the program. Since September 2003, when the 6 month re-enrollment provision was adopted, the number of children covered under the program declined more than 35 % of the total. The decrease affects particularly border communities such as El Paso, who now have the highest rates of uninsured children among all Texas counties.

Besides negatively impacting our children's health, high rates of uninsured hurts local communities in many ways. It costs counties and hospitals millions of dollars in paying for unnecessary emergency room services; it costs the school districts millions in absenteeism, and the State misses the opportunity to tap into hundreds of millions of dollars in federal funding.

During the last few days, Lt. Dewhurst has expressed his willingness to work out a compromise to allow the annual renewals if a system is set in place to ensure that only eligible children are covered. In his letter, El Paso County Attorney José R. Rodríguez requests Lt. Governor Dewhurst to “please lead the Texas Senate in passing comprehensive legislation this session that simplifies the CHIP enrollment process.”

The letter also suggest that, in exchange for the implementation of yearly renewals, a system could be set up to closely monitor those applicants with incomes near the limits imposed by the federal government, reducing the likelihood of families with earnings 200 % above the poverty level from remaining enrolled in the program.

County Attorney Rodríguez explained that expanding coverage of the Children’s Health Insurance Program (“CHIP”) is a wise decision, because “it saves local tax dollars, helps education and improves our state’s economy.”

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Please see attached copy of the letter delivered to Lt. Governor David Dewhurst.