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PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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**County Attorney and Texas Border Coalition will
request the Texas legislature to solve serious health
care problems along the border**

Members of the Texas Border Coalition approved this morning in San Antonio the 2007-2008 Border Health Legislative Agenda drafted by El Paso County Attorney José R. Rodríguez, as Chair of the TBC's Border Health Committee.

The legislative agenda includes dozens of recommendations for solving the most serious health care problems along the Texas/Mexico border. A document that includes all the recommendations will be presented to the Texas Governor and leaders of the legislature during a special meeting in December.

The 2007-2008 Border Health Legislative Agenda requests the State to restore CHIP and Medicaid funding to the levels that existed in 2003, prior to the cuts approved by the State Legislature. It also asks the legislature to do away with the changes implemented the same year that make it difficult for citizens to receive services, like the 90-day waiting period for new CHIP enrollments and the reduction of the coverage period from 12 months to six.

To solve the shortage of health care professionals in the border area, the legislative agenda asks, among other things, to increase the number of guaranteed admissions of border applicants to state supported medical schools, to provide scholarships to financially disadvantaged border students, and to fix the Medicaid and CHIP reimbursement rate disparities.

“The shortage of doctors and nurses in the border area is in reality a serious problem of access to health care. In most cases, patients need to wait weeks to see a doctor, and frequently they have to go to other cities to consult a specialist. Border residents have the most limited health care services in the state of Texas, and to a certain extent, the problem exists because the Medicaid and CHIP reimbursement rates in the border area are much lower than in the rest of the state,” said County Attorney José Rodríguez.

With regard to mental health crisis services, the agenda calls for the legislature to appropriate \$222.13 million dollars per biennium as recommended by DSHS Crisis Services Redesign Committee. The proposed agenda also calls for the creation of a housing program for the mentally ill.

“With its current funding, the Department of State Health Services has only been able to serve about 28% of the adults and children with serious mental problems in the state of Texas. The mental health crisis is even worse in the border area, because those communities lack the resources and health care institutions to close the gap in services not offered by the state. As a result, in border communities like El Paso, most mental patients are not receiving the appropriate services, and many end up in the emergency rooms of local hospitals or in jail after suffering a mental crisis,” Rodríguez explained.

The Texas Border Coalition is comprised of mayors, county judges, and Chambers of Commerce from all the communities along the Texas/Mexico border, from El Paso to Brownsville. Its mission is to make legislative recommendations to help the Texas border region grow and prosper economically. The current Chairman of the Coalition is Eagle Pass Mayor Chad Foster.

WHO: Texas Border Coalition

WHAT: Border Health Legislative Agenda

WHEN: Monday October 23, 2006 at 9:00 AM

WHERE: IBC Bank Community Suite (5th Floor)

**130 E. Travis Street, Suite 300
San Antonio, TX**