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January 29, 2003

MEDIA CONTACT
Aimee Welch - 202.380.0616

President Bush Makes Medical Liability Reform a Top Priority, Broad Coalition Says Plan Would Safeguard Patients' Access to Care

HCLA Members Applaud State of the Union's Call for Congress to Take Action
to Help Patients who are Left Without Care Due to Runaway Litigation

WASHINGTON, DC — The Health Care Liability Alliance (HCLA) praised President Bush's call in his State of the Union address to fix our nation's broken medical liability system.

"Patients across America are facing a health care access crisis caused by a broken liability system," said Christian Shalgian, Chairman of HCLA. "President Bush's plan would safeguard access to health care and help doctors do what they do best – treat patients, not fight meritless litigation. It is up to Congress to take action quickly to forge a national solution to this problem"

Runaway litigation has made medical liability insurance unaffordable and even unavailable in many states. As a result, health care providers who deliver babies, perform life-saving surgeries, treat trauma victims and provide other vital services have been forced to limit services, retire early, or flee litigious regions altogether.

Reports of access-to-care problems resulting from the liability crisis have increased dramatically in recent months. Nevada faced the closing of a key trauma center. Pennsylvania reports neurosurgeons fleeing the state. One in 11 obstetricians nationwide has scaled back their practices to gynecology only. Patients at four West Virginia hospitals had to be transferred out of state after surgeries were canceled by doctors who could no longer afford liability insurance.

Such victims of the crisis are not alone. An independent poll conducted for HCLA found four out of five Americans (78%) express concern that skyrocketing medical liability costs could limit their access to care, and more than seven out of 10 Americans (71%) agree that medical liability litigation is one of the primary forces driving up health care costs. A significant majority of Americans favor reforms similar to those outlined by the President, including 73% who support a law that would guarantee injured patients full payment for lost wages and medical costs, while placing reasonable limits on awards for "pain and suffering" in medical liability cases.

HEALTH CARE LIABILITY EXPERTS AVAILABLE FOR INTERVIEWS CONTACT AIMEE WELCH, 202.380.0616

For more details, visit www.hcla.org. Health Care Liability Alliance is a national advocacy coalition of more than fifty organizations representing doctors, hospitals, health care liability insurers, pharmaceutical companies, health care insurers, employers and health care consumers. HCLA believes federal legislation is needed to bring fairness, timeliness and cost-efficiency to America's medical liability system.