



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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**FOR INTERVIEWS CONTACT
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**Alaskans Say Quality Health Care Threatened by Liability Crisis
*State Residents Support Federal Reforms to Preserve Access to Care***

Local spokespersons available for interviews on the poll results, the medical liability crisis and reform proposals. Please contact Chieko Noguchi at cnoguchi@whwg.com or 202.380.0616 to schedule interviews.

Washington, DC: A poll released today by the Health Coalition on Liability and Access (HCLA) reveals that Alaskans believe the health care liability system is deeply flawed and needs reform. By an overwhelming margin (74 percent), the residents of Alaska say their ability to get the health care they need is threatened by rising medical liability costs. More than two-thirds (68 percent) of the Alaskans polled believe their representatives in Congress should address this problem by supporting comprehensive reform of the medical liability system.

Sixty-seven percent of Alaskans polled support reforms that include common-sense limits on payments for non-economic damages, while at the same time ensuring that injured patients receive full payment for lost wages and medical expenses. Sixty-eight percent support limits on the amount of money a trial lawyer can receive from a settlement or award.

Nearly two-thirds (64 percent) believe medical liability lawsuits are one of the primary reasons health care costs are rising across the board. Nearly half (47 percent) believe the number of medical liability lawsuits is higher than is justified, versus only 6 percent that say it is lower than is justified.

Christian Shalgian, Chairman of the HCLA said, "Every day in this country, patients are suffering because the medical liability lottery has forced good doctors out of the practice of medicine. The problem isn't confined to just one state – people all over the nation are facing the loss of access to affordable, quality health care as a result of the crisis. A nationwide poll conducted for the HCLA in April 2004 found the same high level of concern about the medical liability crisis – and the same overwhelming support for common-sense reforms."

"All across the country, the health care liability crisis is getting worse – and the time for action is long overdue," Shalgian said.

The poll of Alaska residents was conducted in September 2004 for the Health Coalition on Liability and Access by Mason-Dixon Polling and Research. The margin for error is plus or minus 5 percent.

The results demonstrate that most Alaskans believe:

Access to Quality Health Care is At-Risk: Nearly three quarters (74 percent) of the Alaskans surveyed believe that the availability and quality of the health care they receive is affected because doctors are being forced out of medicine by the rising cost of medical liability coverage.

Cost of Health Care Rising Due to Excessive Liability: Nearly two-thirds (64 percent) of the people surveyed said that lawsuits are one of the main reasons why health care costs are rising.

Too Many Frivolous Lawsuits: The high number of medical liability lawsuits is unjustified, according to 47 percent of the survey respondents. Only 6 percent say that the number of lawsuits against health care providers is lower than justified.

Common-Sense Reforms Are Needed: A large majority of Alaskans (68 percent) want their representatives in Congress to pass reforms to fix the medical liability crisis. Sixty-seven percent favor a law that guarantees full payment for lost wages and medical expenses but limits non-economic damages; by the same margin (68 percent), they want to limit the amount of money personal injury trial lawyers can get from settlements or awards their clients receive.

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**HEALTH CARE LIABILITY EXPERTS AVAILABLE FOR INTERVIEWS
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For more details, visit www.hcla.org. Health Coalition on Liability & Access is a national advocacy coalition of organizations representing doctors, hospitals, health care liability insurers, pharmaceutical companies, long-term care facilities, 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.