



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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HEALTH ACT BENEFITS ALL AMERICANS

COALITION HAILS HOUSE PASSAGE; CALLS ON SENATE TO BREAK LOGJAM AND PRESERVE ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE

Washington, D.C.: The Health Coalition on Liability and Access (HCLA), a nationwide coalition of more than fifty organizations, today hailed the bipartisan passage of H.R. 4280, the HEALTH Act of 2004 and called on the Senate to break the logjam on medical liability reform by passing the bill as soon as possible.

“Too many Americans are left without the quality health care they need because an out-of-control medical liability system is forcing good doctors out of the practice of medicine and causing hospitals to drop vital services,” said Christian Shalgian, HCLA’s chairman. “The HEALTH Act contains common sense reforms that have the strong support of the American people. We applaud today’s House action, and call on the Senate pass the HEALTH Act without further delay.”

As a result of meritless lawsuits and jackpot jury awards, medical liability insurance is unaffordable and even unavailable in many states. A nationwide poll of 1,000 Americans conducted by Wirthlin Worldwide found that by overwhelming margins the American people believe the medical liability crisis is putting quality care at risk. Nearly three-quarters believe that the rising cost of medical liability lawsuits is pushing health care costs up for everyone. According to the Congressional Budget Office, medical liability reform would save the federal government just under \$15 billion in lower health care expenditures over a ten year period.

“The American people know that this crisis must be resolved, and they strongly support reforms like those included in the HEALTH Act – reforms that guarantee injured patients full payment for lost wages and medical care, but place a reasonable limit on “non-economic” damages,” said Shalgian. The HEALTH Act also reduces the incentives for personal injury trial lawyers to bring meritless lawsuits by limiting the amount these lawyers can collect from a jury award.

“Today’s action by the House is a big step forward in the effort to preserve access to quality, affordable health care for all Americans. But the House has passed the medical liability reform legislation eight times since 1995, only to see the issue stall in the Senate,” Shalgian said. “It’s time for the Senate to break the logjam and get something accomplished before more patients are denied the care they need.”

**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 more than fifty 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.