



For more information, contact:

Todd Schimpf
The Alliance to Save Florida's Trauma Care
(888) 536-7806
todds@moore-pr.com

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

**Alliance Seeks to Increase Fines On Dangerous Motor Vehicle Violations
Funds Would Help Save Florida's Trauma System**

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. (February 8, 2005) – Today, The Alliance to Save Florida's Trauma Care—a collaboration of the state's 21 regional trauma care centers and statewide healthcare advocate groups—announced its recommended solutions to the trauma care crisis in Florida. This crisis is due, in part, to the rising readiness costs and the increasing amount of uncompensated and/or under-compensated care provided by trauma centers.

“We have worked diligently with the legislative and executive branches of government to identify alternative funding streams to help keep our state's trauma centers open without creating a budget impact on other healthcare organizations,” said Amy Maguire, director of the Alliance to Save Florida's Trauma Care. “Additionally, we believe that our recommendations will not only help save Florida's trauma system, but will also help protect Florida's drivers and visiting travelers by making our roads safer.”

Rising readiness costs may force many of the state's trauma centers to close their doors or stop providing specialized trauma services. In 2003, the cost for Florida's trauma centers to be “prepared” totaled more than **\$96 million**, with a net loss of **\$93 million**, including reimbursement, according to a recent study. This study was mandated by the 2004 Florida Legislature and was conducted by the University of Florida and the University of South Florida on behalf the Florida Department of Health.

These staggering numbers have led the Alliance and Florida's legislators to seek long-term funding solutions for the state's trauma centers. Because motor vehicle crashes comprise more than 50 percent of trauma incidents in Florida, the Alliance recommends legislation that will increase fines on dangerous motor vehicle violations and distribute the funds raised into Florida's trauma system. Examples of motor vehicle violations that will be targeted include:

- Running red lights
- Speeding
- Driving without insurance
- Driving under the influence
- Driving without wearing a seatbelt

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Several of Florida's legislators, including Representative Andy Gardiner, Senator Burt Saunders, Senator Jim Sebesta, Representative Dean Cannon and Representative Anna "Holly" Benson, have pledged to help solve this crisis. Senator Cannon has already submitted SB 497 (Relating to the Velez Memorial Traffic Safety Act –2005), which increases the fees on red light violations from \$65 to \$125 and distributes these fees to Florida's trauma centers.

"Trauma centers are a vital service for Florida's citizens," said Representative Andy Gardiner. "We are all working to ensure that Florida does not lose this important healthcare resource."

Florida currently has 21 trauma centers located throughout the state, including seven Level 1 centers, 12 Level 2 centers and two Pediatric centers. The funding for trauma centers and services has been inadequate and unpredictable in Florida since the standards were established in 1982. The legislature has recognized that "many hospitals which provide services to trauma victims are not adequately compensated for such treatment" (Florida Senate Interim Project Report 2004-108, "Review of Trauma Care Planning and Funding in Florida"). Nearly 30 trauma centers have permanently closed in Florida since 1982, and the cost to operate our state's remaining 21 trauma centers continues to grow. Trauma center revenues do not meet the mounting expenses associated with clinical expertise, administrative expenditures and outreach and education programs.

Additionally, the current trauma system network has significant gaps in North Florida and North Central Florida—particularly in Leon, Bay and their surrounding counties. Injury victims in these underserved areas must be transferred to trauma centers located up to several hours away. The body can only survive a short time with severe, untreated injuries. Medical personnel refer to the first hour after an injury as the "golden hour." If a patient receives treatment within the golden hour, their chance of survival increases drastically. Every four seconds someone is injured, and every six minutes someone dies from a trauma injury in the United States. After heart disease, cancer, stroke and lung disease, trauma is the fifth leading cause of death in the country.

The Alliance to Save Florida's Trauma Care is comprised of trauma centers, advocacy organizations, patients, medical personnel, providers and concerned citizens. Our goal is to inform and educate Floridians and our legislators about the trauma crisis and to help find solutions to this problem.

For additional information, access www.SaveFloridaTrauma.org, or call (888) 536-7806.

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