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Health Bills Could Close More Trauma Center Doors

Closings Would Leave Many Florida Residents Without Life-Saving Care

Tallahassee – Committees in the Florida House and Senate today voted on bills that would substantially weaken Florida's already financially fragile network of trauma centers. Trauma center physicians and administrators from around the state called both pieces of legislation accounting gimmicks, which if passed, would have tragic consequences for Florida residents.

“Each piece of legislation that makes it harder for Florida Trauma Centers to keep the lights-on and the doors-open, unravels a crucial safety-net for those Floridians and their families who may unfortunately experience a major life-threatening injury,” said Amy Maguire, director of the Alliance to Save Florida's Trauma Care.

Trauma Centers deal with the most severe injuries (such as auto accidents), and must treat patients regardless of ability to pay or level of reimbursement. Since 1982, nearly 30 trauma centers have closed their doors and only 21 centers remain to serve Florida residents. Trauma centers have top health care specialists on-hand 24 hours a day and have access to air emergency. Treating victims of trauma within the “gold hour” drastically increases a patient's chances of survival and can mean the difference between recovery and permanent injury.

The Alliance said the bills, SB 1880 (which passed in committee today) and HB 1513 (which did not pass, but still remains on the table), could close the doors of several more trauma centers, causing some areas not have trauma care at all. Since 1989, the state legislature and several governors have recognized that trauma centers are severely under funded, and center closings would have a dramatic impact on the mortality and recovery of those in the immediate area who suffer a serious injury. Florida's remaining Trauma Centers continue to suffer financial losses of more than \$95 million a year as funding fails to be appropriated or designated.

The Alliance supports the re-enactment of Personal Injury Protection (PIP) with significant reforms, including increasing the maximum benefit from \$10,000 to \$25,000. Of those treated at trauma centers and emergency rooms due to a motor vehicle crash in 2005, forty percent of those had no health insurance for payment – only PIP insurance. PIP payments to hospitals were at least \$350 million in 2005.

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