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Patient Advocates From Across Georgia Visit the State Capitol to Urge Lawmakers to Protect Vital Funding for State's Medicaid Program

*Patient Advocates Encourage State Legislators to Reconsider Medicaid Cuts that Threaten
Patient Access to Affordable, Quality Healthcare for More Than 1.4 Million Georgians*

ATLANTA, GA (March 31, 2010) – Patient advocates from across Georgia descended on the Capitol in Atlanta today as part of the National Patient Advocate Foundation's (NPAF) Georgia State Advocacy Day to ask state legislators to reconsider cuts to the state's Medicaid program with particular attention to the impact proposed cuts to physician reimbursement rates would have on patient access to affordable, high-quality healthcare.

"I am excited and honored to be part of NPAF's Georgia State Advocacy Day," said Becky Smith, a NPAF patient ambassador from Marietta. "Educating our state legislators about the importance of stable Medicaid funding is essential because for more than a million Medicaid patients throughout Georgia, life depends on the availability of quality healthcare. Medicaid coverage is crucial to allowing patients access to needed care following a diagnosis."

The Georgia Medicaid program provides a vital safety net to Georgians who can't afford healthcare coverage; however, funding for this essential program is at risk of being cut because of state budget deficits. Further punctuating proposed Medicaid cuts are harsh economic realities and increased unemployment, which drive more people into the program. For many unemployed individuals and their families, Medicaid allows them to access needed healthcare without cost or financial status being a barrier to care.

In Georgia, Medicaid is projected to experience a shortfall of \$608 million in fiscal year 2011. The governor has proposed a two percent cut to physician reimbursement rates under Medicaid, which would threaten access to health care for low income families and children, and a 1.6 percent fee on all hospital and managed care providers participating in the Medicaid program. An alternative proposal to this fee is a 16.5 percent cut to provider payments under Medicaid, which would drastically hinder the ability of providers to deliver high quality healthcare services. Healthcare providers across the state project that cuts, and especially deep ones, could potentially devastate the Medicaid system, forcing doctors and hospitals away from the program and limiting Medicaid enrollees access to needed healthcare.

There are 1.4 million Georgians currently enrolled in the Medicaid program. In recent years, there has been a sizeable increase in Medicaid enrollees, particularly among younger populations. Between June 2007 and June 2009, state enrollment for children in the Medicaid program rose by 19.4 percent, compared to a 12.1 percent increase nationally.

“Medicaid is undoubtedly one of Georgia’s most valuable programs, and we will continue to work with Georgia state leaders to ensure that this program is funded to meet the growing needs of the state’s citizens,” said Nancy Davenport-Ennis, President and CEO of NPAF.

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NPAF and its companion organization, the Patient Advocate Foundation (PAF), were established in 1996 on the principle that health care is a basic human need and shared social responsibility. NPAF is dedicated to working with Congress and all levels of government to overcome challenges and create solutions that will allow for high-quality, affordable health care for all. In 2009, PAF case managers assisted 55,384 patients, each with chronic, life-threatening or debilitating conditions struggling to access health care. Additionally, PAF responds to millions of online requests for information or chat line support. For more information see www.npaf.org.