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Governor Signs School Health Centers Expansion Act *Ridley-Thomas bill advances health care reform for children*

Sacramento, CA — School-aged children and youth scored a victory this weekend when Governor Schwarzenegger signed Senator Ridley-Thomas' SB 564, the School Health Centers Expansion Act, which puts health care where kids are – in school.

"I applaud the Governor for seeing the wisdom of expanding school health centers to offer vital services to children, many of whom would not otherwise see a health care provider," stated Senator Ridley-Thomas. "As families lose homes and jobs and struggle with affordable health care, we have a moral obligation to ensure that children do not bear the burden of today's economic crisis."

SB 564, coupled with the Senator's prior legislation, marks the first effort to provide direct state assistance to school health centers, which provide effective, low-cost preventive services and reduce costly emergency room visits. The Governor has pledged to expand the number of school health centers to 500, and SB 564 is intended to provide a mechanism to make this expansion possible.

Serena Clayton, Executive Director of the California School Health Centers Association, sponsor of the bill, noted that, "The whole country is grappling with the cost of health care, and SB 564 is a low-cost way to provide quality health care for all students. This bill puts California in the forefront of creating a health care system that works for all children and families."

SB 564 builds upon an earlier Ridley-Thomas measure, AB 2560 of 2006, which established a Public School Health Center Support Program to collect data and provide technical assistance to support new and existing school health centers. SB 564 creates a state grant program for school health centers.

California currently has more than 150 school health centers providing a variety of care, including primary medical care, dental care, and mental health services. They rely on a patchwork of funding that includes some public health program funds, private donations, third-party reimbursements and in-kind support from schools and sponsors.

The centers are run by many different types of organizations including school districts, community clinics, hospitals, county health departments, and various non-profit organizations and represent a powerful partnership between health and education to ensure the success and well being of our children.

With an estimated 800,000 uninsured children in California, school health care centers are proving to be an efficient and cost effective method of providing care. School health centers can detect and treat illnesses early, thereby avoiding excessive use of emergency rooms, prolonged absences from school, or the spread of contagious diseases.

The bill was co-sponsored by the [California Primary Care Association](#) and the [Latino Coalition for a Healthy California](#). For more information about school health centers in California, visit the California School Health Centers Association's website, www.schoolhealthcenters.org.