

September 30, 2005

The Honorable Arnold Schwarzenegger
Governor of California
State Capitol Building
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Governor,

Hospitals and their Emergency Departments are an essential public service. Hospitals function as a 'safety net' for all Californians in times of health care crisis, ensuring treatment and access for all. I am an ER physician who practices in the State of California. In the county I practice in, problems in the Emergency Departments have multiplied dramatically in the last 5 years.

Many Hospitals and Emergency Departments have closed; sixty five in the last 10 years. The pace of closures continues to accelerate and 9 have closed in the last year alone. These hospital closures have had a devastating impact on the communities that they served. Not only was access to quality care lost but in many communities these Hospitals were the primary employers in their neighborhoods. These closures make it self evident that the reimbursement offered by Medicare, Medi-Cal, HMO's and commercial insurance payments is not sufficient to overcome the lack of reimbursement from California's 7 million uninsured patients.

ER backup is eroding because on-call specialists cannot get adequately reimbursed for services to the uninsured and MediCal patients, and the numbers of uninsured ER patients continues to rise.

I am writing to ask you to sign SB 57 (Alarcon). SB 57 would raise approximately \$50 million to be placed into the Maddy Emergency Medical Services (EMS) Fund to reimburse physicians and hospitals for treating uninsured patients.

Working in a California hospital that treats uninsured patients, I can personally attest to the need for these funds. This year in Los Angeles County the EMS fund ran out of money after 9 months and there were no funds to pay ED physicians and the on call doctors for their vital work. Such interruptions in payments undermine the on call panels further and once an on call physician loses his/her motivation to participate the on call panel is likely to be weakened permanently. If there is no physician on call all citizens suffer.

The California Medical Association has reported that losses sustained by hospitals and physicians for the year 2001-2002 were over \$635,000,000. As the losses continue to grow the Maddy EMS Fund becomes even more vital.

Although the passage of SB 57 will not fix the entire emergency care crisis, it does help the already fragile emergency care system from further deterioration. SB 57 will help keep specialists on the on-call panels to treat all patients, not just the uninsured. SB 57 will help keep board certified emergency physicians from moving to other states where emergency care provider reimbursement is substantially higher than in CA.

For these reasons, I respectfully request you to sign SB 57.

Thank you for your consideration.