



Assembly Member **SANDRÉ SWANSON**
News Release

For Immediate Release:
June 17, 2009

Contact: Douglas MacLean
(916) 319-2016

Assemblymember Swanson, Civil Rights Leader Dolores Huerta, And Others Announce Need For Solution To Physician Shortage In Underserved Areas

(Sacramento) – Civil rights leader Dolores Huerta, Assemblymember Sandré Swanson (D-Alameda), and other legislative and community leaders held a press conference yesterday to discuss the critical shortage of physicians in underserved rural and urban communities. Assemblymember Swanson proposes to address this need with AB 646, which recently passed the State Assembly on a bi-partisan vote of 44 to 12. The bill will aid the state's medically underserved populations in urban and rural communities by allowing California Health Care Districts to directly hire and employ physicians.

"There is a shortage of physicians in rural and low-income inner-city communities that has lingered for decades, despite numerous incentives designed to draw doctors to these areas. AB 646 will address this critical problem by enabling Health Care Districts to serve these overlooked patient populations, while incurring minimal costs to the State," Assemblymember Swanson announced.

Existing law bans the employment of physicians by corporations and other artificial entities, even though there are several exemptions to this prohibition in law and practice. Public entities, such as State and County health agencies, and teaching hospitals employ thousands of physicians statewide. Health Care Districts, however, are the only public healthcare providers in California prohibited from employing physicians.

In addition to authorizing the direct hiring of physicians, AB 646 will protect patients' and physicians' rights by barring these Districts from interfering in medical decisions. The bill also calls for the Office of Statewide Health Planning and Development, in consultation with the Medical Board of California and the state's Department of Public Health, to review the impact that direct employment of physicians has on access and quality of care.

Dolores Huerta, President and Founder of the Dolores Huerta Foundation, also strongly supports the bill. "Access to medical care is fundamental to empowering communities. Without it, I have found that communities cannot sustain themselves and cycles of poverty and low achievement continue. I urge our lawmakers to pass AB 646. Let the hospitals and clinics that serve our poorest residents hire doctors they need to care for the children, elderly and sick who have nowhere else to turn," she said.

Tom Rankin, a representative from the California Alliance for Retired Americans, also spoke to the need of AB 646. "We represent over 800,000 retired workers who have a great interest in the issue of healthcare access. Many of our members have trouble finding doctors, and the current law that bans health care districts from hiring physicians has become another barrier to access. It is time for the state to fix this out dated law."

Other legislative leaders and community groups who joined Assemblymember Swanson and Dolores Huerta in showing their support for AB 646 included legislative co-authors Joe Coto (D – San Jose), Paul Fong (D – Mountain View), Warren Furutani (D – Long Beach) and Anthony Portantino (D

-Pasadena); Peter Gambie, a representative of the Association of California Health Care Districts, which is a co-sponsor of the bill, and AARP representative Dolores Sanchez.

"Forty-five other states allow the direct employment of physicians by specified health care facilities," Assemblymember Swanson said. "It is time for California to address the growing health care needs of our medically underserved by giving the Health Care Districts that serve these communities the power to directly hire doctors," he concluded.

The bill will be heard in the Senate Committee on Business, Professions and Economic Development on Monday, June 29, 2009.

###



Assemblymember Swanson (D-Alameda), speaks on the critical shortage of doctors in underserved rural and inner-city communities. Legendary labor leader Dolores Huerta, who is helping gather support for the bill, stands left.

###

Capitol: State Capitol - P.O. Box 942849 - Sacramento, CA 94249-0016 - **Tel:** (916) 319-2016 - **Fax:** (916) 319-2116
District: 1515 Clay Street, Suite 2204 - Oakland, CA 94612 - **Tel:** (510) 286-1670 - **Fax:** (510) 286-1888