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PROPOSED STATE MEDICAID HOSPICE CUTS WILL INCREASE COSTS AND TARGET THE MOST VULNERABLE

Many programs will face cuts as State lawmakers meet on Monday to reduce the Florida budget by an estimated \$2.3 billion. Under consideration is eliminating the Medicaid Hospice benefit that provides hospice care to some of our most fragile citizens. Actually, cutting the Medicaid benefit will increase the cost of end-of-life care.

Florida's hospices provide medical, spiritual, psychological, and social support to more than 16,000 Floridians receiving Medicaid benefits annually. An array of services are provided in a home setting or facility that provide stability and avoid more costly hospitalizations, treatments and emergency room visits.

A recent study conducted by the Washington based Moran Company which was commissioned by Florida Hospices and Palliative Care (FHPC), states that eliminating the hospice benefit for Medicaid may leave the state's most needy individuals with no choice but to continue to use expensive curative care as they approach the end of life – care that *must* be provided as part of the Medicaid program. The result, Florida will actually increase its spending on care for the state's terminally ill. The study estimates that increased cost would have been \$3.7 million in 2007 alone – clearly, not the cost savings lawmakers hope to achieve with the proposed hospice benefit cut.

The real tragedy is the quality of care that Florida's most vulnerable citizens stand to lose. Hospice care is all inclusive: every home visit by nurses, hospice aides, social workers, chaplains, physicians and community-based volunteers is covered by one daily fee. That fee also covers prescription drugs, over-the-counter medications, medical equipment and medical supplies associated with the patient's primary diagnosis. Medicaid patients residing in nursing homes receive the same, all-inclusive care for a fixed fee. Family members receive grief support and resource information from hospice social workers. Families of patients receiving Medicaid's hospice benefit often face concurrent non-medical crises: poverty, estrangement, homelessness. Those issues likely will become crushing burdens for families who also must navigate the complexities of traditional medical care if their loved one loses the safety of the Medicaid hospice benefit. Other, equally financially stressed social service programs will face increased demands on their dwindling resources from patients and families that, until now, have been able to rely upon the Medicaid hospice benefit and Florida's 42 quality hospice providers.

Hospice care is the proven high-quality, low-cost, patient-focused approach for those with a limited time to live – a benefit that should remain available to all Floridians.