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Senate of Pennsylvania

June 1, 2009

Everette James, Secretary
Department of Health
Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
8th Floor West – Health and Welfare Building
Harrisburg, PA 17108

Dear Secretary James:

In a recent Department of Health press release, I was surprised to read the claim that Senate Bill 850 would threaten the health of millions of Pennsylvanians. Such alarmist and inaccurate comments are a disservice to our citizens and impede the budget process.

As you may know, Pennsylvania currently faces a \$3 *Billion* shortfall *this* fiscal year. As you know, the Commonwealth cannot spend money that it does not have. Senate Bill 850 was crafted to ensure that essential services are provided to our citizens given our available resources.

Contrary to your press release, Senate Bill 850 continues to ensure vital access to health care and services that protect the health of Pennsylvanians. For example, the Senate-passed budget contains an *increase* in funding over prior year levels for newborn screenings and *makes no cuts* to the Governor's recommended funding levels for such vital programs as school health, local health departments, drug and alcohol programs, TB screening and treatment, sickle cell anemia, and services for children with special needs. Senate Bill 850 also maintains the Governor's funding for essential programs such as the Regional Poison Control Centers.

The programs that were not funded in SB 850 include many of the Governor's proposed health care reform programs, which have not been approved by the General Assembly and for which the Governor has not provided a funding stream. Senate Republicans welcome the opportunity to discuss the merits of these programs, and how these programs will be funded without levying increased taxes on our citizens.

I agree with the statement in your press release that we must ensure that primary care is available for working Pennsylvanians and those living in areas with few hospitals, clinics and necessary medical staff. That is why I introduced Senate Bill 5 a year ago and asked for your support of the proposal. This legislation would provide grants to establish or expand primary

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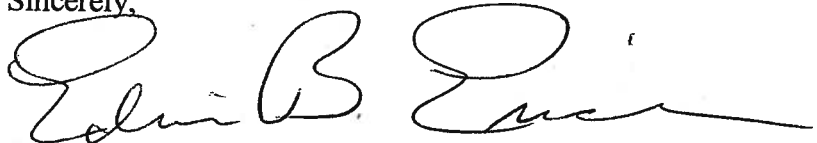
health care clinics in those in areas of Pennsylvania without access to such services. But, the Administration has refused to consider this legislation, even though experts agree that providing primary health care through voluntary and non-profit health care clinics will address the needs of our uninsured and underinsured.

As mentioned earlier, in times of fiscal distress, hard choices must be made in allocating scarce state taxpayer dollars. While the Breast and Cervical Cancer Screening programs in the Department of Health were reduced by \$103,000 from the Governor's proposed funding level for 2009-10, the funding provided in Senate Bill 850 actually *equals* the funding for the current fiscal year after the Governor's freeze is applied. Additionally, funding for Breast Cancer Screening was maintained in the Department of Public Welfare's Budget, ensuring that almost \$4 million in state tax dollars will continue to be allocated for screening. Similarly, while AIDS funding was reduced in the Department of Health budget, over \$16 million continues to be available in the Department of Public Welfare for pharmaceutical services for those with AIDS.

Finally, I would like to correct your assertion that Senate Bill 850 would eliminate Pennsylvania's innovative program to detect, report and prevent health care acquired infections, or HAIs, established by the legislation that I authored and shepherded through the General Assembly, Act 52 of 2007. Senate Bill 850 *does not eliminate this program*. The Patient Safety Authority, the independent state agency which collects the infection data, is funded through assessments on hospitals, nursing homes, and other health care facilities in the Commonwealth. The Authority will continue to publish HAI-related Pennsylvania Patient Safety Advisory articles, Patient Safety Tools, and Consumer Tips to aid in efforts to improve infection control.

Senate Bill 850 makes some of the hard choices required to enact a balanced budget as required by the Constitution. And, in making these choices, the health and safety of our citizens were paramount concerns. Although we are facing a \$3 billion shortfall, this budget will continue to protect the health and safety of our citizens. To imply otherwise is simply disingenuous.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Edwin B. Erickson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "E" and "B".

Edwin B. Erickson, Chairman
Senate Public Health and Welfare Committee