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For Immediate Release

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MEDICAL COALITION RELEASES POLLING DATA STRONGLY SUPPORTING MEDICAL LIABILITY REFORM IN MAINE

Manchester (ME): Maine Legislators today received the results of a public opinion poll conducted in late January demonstrating very strong support for medical liability reform in Maine.

Four hundred Maine citizens were asked the following questions:

1. Maine's healthcare costs are among the highest in the nation. Medical liability, or lawsuits against doctors, is one factor driving up costs. Do you support or oppose limiting the level of jury awards in such lawsuits if that would lower healthcare costs? Is that strongly or somewhat support/oppose?

Nearly three-fourths (73.8%) of the 400 Maine residents surveyed indicated that they support limiting the level of jury awards in medical liability lawsuits in order to lower healthcare costs. Significantly, more than 50% of respondents expressed "strong support" for the increase – an unusually high percentage according to pollster Patrick Murphy. Less than seven percent (6.5%) of respondents were undecided.

2. In a medical liability case, damages awarded are for either economic loss (such as medical expenses and lost wages) or non-economic loss (such as pain and suffering). In order to preserve access to medical care, would you support placing a limit of \$250,000 on non-economic damages, as long as all economic loss was recoverable?

Just over three-fourths (76.5%) of respondents would support placing a limit of \$250,000 on non-economic damages in medical liability

cases as long as economic losses were fully recoverable. Only 16.8% of respondents would not support this limit, and 6.8% were undecided.

The poll was sponsored by the Coalition for Health Care Access and Liability Reform and conducted by Strategic Marketing Services (SMS) in Portland, Maine. SMS is the marketing research division of Pan Atlantic Consultants, Maine's largest independent marketing and business consulting firm.

The Coalition is chaired by Portland neurosurgeon Lee L. Thibodeau, MD and consists of twenty-one medical organizations all based in Maine.

The Coalition is supporting legislation to be introduced by Senator Karl Turner (R, Cumberland) that would further reform the medical liability laws in Maine by capping awards for non-economic damages at \$250,000 by abolishing the legal doctrine of joint and several liability, and protecting from admissibility at trial any comments offered by physicians expressing sympathy or remorse.

"Maine citizens overwhelmingly support these legislative proposals because people correctly believe that medical care is at risk if this problem is not fixed," said Gordon Smith, Executive Vice President of the Maine Medical Association. "These types of reforms take several years to kick in so it is important to act now to prevent another liability crisis a short distance down the road," noted Smith.

"We must ensure that all Maine Citizens have access to affordable and quality health care when they need it. Our osteopathic physicians are confronted by decisions that adversely impact their professional careers and patient access to care. Many are forced to limit the services they offer their patients in an attempt to secure affordable medical liability coverage," states Tom Deluca, DO, President-Elect of the Maine Osteopathic Association and an osteopathic physician practicing internal medicine in Rumford, Maine.

Kellie Miller, Executive Director of the Maine Osteopathic Association, indicated that "more and frequently people aren't getting the care they need when they need it because our legal system has turned into an unfair system where a few win and the rest lose. The "disappearing doctor" phenomenon is getting progressively worse. It is an increasingly serious threat to everyone's ability to get the care they need."

The Legislature is expected to consider the proposal during the current legislative session.