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NEWS RELEASE

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CONSUMER GROUP DEMANDS AMA TO DENOUNCE DOCTORS LOBBYING PATIENTS

New York - The Center for Justice & Democracy ("CJ&D"), a non-profit consumer organization that focuses on protecting citizens' access to the civil justice system, today strongly called on the American Medical Association ("AMA") to condemn doctors who are forcing patients to sign political petitions against their interests in order to receive medical care, and to denounce any state AMA chapter that supports this appalling practice.

The letter was prompted by reports that a Washington State OB/GYN physician "fired" his four-months pregnant patient when she refused to sign a petition supporting Washington State Initiative 330. Such Initiative, if passed, would limit compensation available to her family in the event the doctor committed malpractice on her or her unborn child. The Washington State AMA has indicated support for this doctor's behavior.

Laurie Beacham, Communications Director for CJ&D, stated, "It is shocking that a dedicated physician would refuse to treat a patient with different political beliefs than his own. What is next? Refusing to treat patients of different religions? Of different political parties? Such factors have no place in the doctor-physician relationship."

CJ&D's letter stated that patients should not feel pressured to support political measures that would take away their own rights in order to receive adequate medical care from their doctors. The doctor-patient relationship, said CJ&D, should have a sanctity not to be violated by the intrusion of political solicitation to help doctors with their professional challenges.

The letter went on to argue that if Washington State doctors have problems with their insurance premiums, the AMA should support them in fighting the real culprit – the insurance industry, which made record-high profits last year and is urgently in need of stricter regulation and oversight. Punishing patients is most certainly not the answer.

A full copy of the letter is attached.

For further information, see <http://centerjd.org>

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January 19, 2005

Dr. John C. Nelson
President & Executive Committee Member,
American Medical Association
515 N. State Street
Chicago, IL 60610

Dear Dr. Nelson:

We are writing to request that you publicly denounce the actions of physicians who retaliate against patients by terminating services to them due to their political beliefs.

News reports state that Washington state physician Dr. Mark E. Mulholland, an OB/GYN, “fired” his patient Jamie Chavez, a 26 year-old teacher expecting her first baby, after Ms. Chavez refused to sign a petition supporting state Initiative 330, which would place a cap on the compensation that would be available to her family in the event Dr. Mulholland committed malpractice on her or her unborn child.

Reports state that many doctors have been soliciting their patients to sign such political petitions. This practice, in and of itself, is repugnant. The reasons are manifold and seemingly obvious. Patients should not feel subtly pressured to support measures that would take away their own rights in order to receive adequate care from their doctors. Patients may not wish to engage in political dialogue with their physicians and should not be pressured to do so. Moreover, there should be a certain sanctity to the patient-physician relationship that should not be violated by the intrusion of politics or a doctor’s solicitation of the patient for help with his or her professional challenges, especially at the potential expense of his or her own rights.

The case of Ms. Chavez highlights just these issues. It is shocking that a dedicated physician would refuse medical treatment to a patient with a different political viewpoint than his. What would come next? Refusing to treat someone of a different political party? A different religious belief?

If Washington state doctors are having problems with their insurance premiums, they need to focus on the real culprit – the insurance industry, which made more money last year than ever in its history. The AMA needs to fight for better control over the business and accounting practices of the insurance industry – stricter rate regulation, public oversight and repeal of the industry’s extraordinary exemption from anti-trust laws. The medical profession needs to stop unjustly blaming patients for an insurance problem they did not cause.

We request that you immediately issue a statement denouncing Dr. Mulholland’s behavior and the broader act of doctors lobbying patients and pressuring them to take a political position on any issue, let alone one that jeopardizes their own rights, or risk losing their medical care. Moreover, we ask you to demand that the Washington AMA reconsider its dubious position supporting Dr. Mulholland’s abhorrent behavior.

We look forward to your response.

Very truly yours,

Joanne Doroshow
Executive Director