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VISION the
VOICE of Today's Family Physician

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Statement with U.S. Senator Dick Durbin
August 2, 2009

It is a privilege to stand here today with Sen. Durbin. I am so honored to be the president of the Illinois Academy of Family Physicians in such a monumental year for health care. This is the year, when all the stakeholders are finally coming together with a promise to fix our health care system.

As a family physician, I see the effects of our broken health care system every day. It is truly heartbreaking and frustrating to treat patients who can't afford coverage or are denied private insurance coverage due to their age or pre-existing conditions. Something is fundamentally wrong when my patients must choose between the health care they need and deserve - or food on the table. It is painful to see patients at the end of life, knowing that we have a system focused on disease instead of a system designed to keep patients healthy in order to avoid their suffering wherever possible.

True and lasting health care reform is possible and it should not, cannot wait any longer.

First, we need health care legislation that really includes everyone. This legislation must require insurance companies to sell plans to all applicants, regardless of family history and pre-existing conditions. Patients must be able to renew their health coverage even if they've become ill. We support a public option that will bring fairness to the system, for patients and physicians alike. At the same time, people will always have the option to keep the coverage they already have.

Second, health care legislation must ensure that everyone has access to a primary care physician. Although this may sound simple, it really isn't. Right now we have a looming shortage of primary care physicians. This reformed system we envision must reward primary care physicians for all of our work if we want medical students to choose careers as primary care physicians. Primary care physicians are needed to provide and coordinate comprehensive quality care that is affordable for patients and is focused on wellness and prevention of disease.

There are proposals now in Congress that can bring the health care system we need. We are grateful for the leadership that Senator Dick Durbin has shown in supporting reform. We thank him for seeking our family medicine input locally and nationally to ensure the plan that emerges from Congress is one that will work in practice for EVERYONE – our doctors and our patients everywhere.

Congress must act now! Any legislation passed this year will still take years to truly make an impact. It's time to solve the health care crisis. Lives have been lost. People are sick who should be healthy. We absolutely must build a uniquely American solution that controls skyrocketing preventable health care costs and gives our patients peace of mind with a family/primary care physician as a partner in their health care. We are ready and eager to work with Congress and President Obama in building a healthier America.

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