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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Terry Goddard Urges Proposed Abortion Rule Be Withdrawn

(Phoenix, Ariz. – Sept. 24, 2008) Attorney General Terry Goddard today called upon the Bush administration to withdraw a proposed regulation that he believes would infringe upon patients' rights and states' ability to enact fair and uniform health care policies.

In a letter sent to U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) earlier today, Goddard and 12 other state Attorneys General urged the department to withdraw a proposed provider conscience regulation. The rule would require health care facilities to permit care providers to deny service based on personal or moral belief or face revocation of DHHS and other federal funding.

"This proposed rule is dangerously vague and puts women's access to birth control and other health services at risk in many cases, including rape," Goddard said. "The rights of patients and of health care providers need to be carefully balanced. This rule would upset that balance and jeopardize the availability of vital health care to women."

In their letter, the Attorneys General said, "The proposed regulation completely obliterates the rights of patients to legal and medically necessary health care services in favor of a single-minded focus on protecting a health care provider's right to claim a personal moral or religious belief."

The letter also notes that the proposed rule could prevent organizations on both sides of the abortion debate from fulfilling their primary missions.

"For example, Planned Parenthood may be unable to decline to hire physicians who refuse, on moral grounds, to provide medically necessary and legal terminations of pregnancy or contraception. Similarly, a religious-based hospital may be unable to take employment action against any health care provider who, for moral or ethical reasons, prescribes certain legal medications or medical procedures that are prohibited under the hospital's basic principles."

Two leading national medical associations, the American Academy of Pediatrics and the American Psychiatric Association, have also raised objections to the proposed rule.

A copy of the letter is available on the Attorney General's Web site, www.azag.gov. For more information, contact Anne Hilby at (602) 725-2200.

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