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NEWS RELEASE

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PATIENTS LOSING PATIENCE

MEDICAL MALPRACTICE AND DRUG VICTIMS TRAVEL TO D.C. TO FIGHT LEGISLATION, DEMAND MEETING WITH BUSH

House Democrats Will Allow Victims to be Heard at February 8 Forum

New York – As Congress begins to move quickly on legislation to strip away injured citizens' access to the courts, 50 families from 26 states will be in Washington D.C. on February 8 and 9 to voice their strong opposition to President Bush's disastrous civil justice agenda.

The families are demanding to meet with the President, a request that has been repeatedly ignored by the White House for the past two years, although Bush has met numerous times with health care industry representatives and other corporate contributors who are lobbying to take away injured patients' legal rights. Their letter to the White House states, "We once again request some time with you to discuss the devastation your proposal will cause many families. Lives literally depend on your understanding the patients' perspective."

The effort to bring families to Washington is led by the Center for Justice & Democracy, an independent non-profit, non-partisan consumer group that focuses on protecting access to the civil justice system. (CJ&D is not affiliated with any trial lawyer or business group.)

Colorado resident Jennifer Tinsman, whose 8-year-old son Kody was severely injured at birth and is wheelchair-bound, said, "Some of us or our family members have lost limbs, suffered brain damage or blindness, or even died. It is wrong for Washington politicians to decide how much our injuries are worth. That is the role of juries, and patients should not be stripped of their constitutional rights to have a jury decide fair compensation."

The House and Senate are both moving quickly to vote on class action and medical malpractice legislation that was rejected by Congress last session. The U.S. Senate may vote on the class action bill (S.5) by February 9. A House hearing on medical malpractice legislation introduced on February 4 (H.R. 534) will take place February 10. The medical malpractice bill severely “caps” (limits) compensation to all victims of medical malpractice, nursing home abuse and drug injuries. Both bills would protect pharmaceutical companies that put unsafe drugs, like Vioxx, on the market.

Louisiana resident Cyndi Duplechain’s infant son was severely brain damaged when his esophagus was punctured during what should have been a relatively routine examination for acid reflux, after which he went into cardiac arrest and was clinically dead for 20 minutes. Duplechain said, “It is time for politicians to stop blaming patients for doctors’ high malpractice insurance rates. People who experience medical malpractice are innocent victims and should not be re-injured by damage caps.”

While in Washington D.C., the families will be participating in a forum with Democratic members of Congress on Tuesday, February 8, at 2 pm ET, 2141 Rayburn House Office Building. That hearing may be webcast live. See <http://centerjd.org> for the link to watch it. Many participants will also be available for one-on-one press interviews.

They will also be appearing at the National Press Club at 10 am ET on February 9 (National Press Building, 13th Floor, 14th & F Streets NW, Washington, DC.).

“We are making this trip to help other medical malpractice and drug victims. Many of our own legal proceedings are over, so we don’t stand to personally benefit from fighting this legislation. But having experienced what we have, we know how inadequate and harmful a one-size-fits-all damages cap would be for injured victims. We feel compelled to do what we can to prevent such a law from passing,” said Chicago, Illinois resident Donna Harnett, who son Martin was severely brain-damaged at birth.

For further information on event activities, individual participants, and other information, please see <http://centerjd.org>.

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