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Dec. 1 Medicaid Cuts Threaten Health Care Crisis, Imminent Closures

OKLAHOMA CITY – Oklahoma’s struggle to adequately fund health care services became a full-blown crisis today, with the Oklahoma Health Care Authority (OHCA) announcing it will likely be forced to cut \$169 million in state and federal matching funds from the Medicaid budget. The proposed cuts will take the form of a 9 percent Medicaid reimbursement rate cut to health care providers beginning Dec. 1.

Oklahoma Hospital Association CEO Craig Jones noted that Oklahoma hospitals have already been cut by \$489 million in annual funds since 2010, leading to several closures in rural areas, nine hospital bankruptcies and the elimination of key services and treatments at many health care centers.

“Today’s announcement is just devastating,” said Jones. “We aren’t just seeing an isolated failure to invest in our health care infrastructure, we are seeing the collapse of a budgeting process that is supposed to fund core government services. If we allow this to continue, we will be a sicker state, a less prosperous state and a less desirable place to live. We need state leaders to step up now and prevent this crisis.”

Nico Gomez, CEO of the Oklahoma Association of Health Care Providers, said that the proposed cuts would leave almost half of the state’s skilled nursing facilities in danger of closing.

“We are threatening to turn Oklahoma from a place where everyone is cared for with dignity and respect, no matter how vulnerable or elderly, into a place where some of our residents have nowhere to go,” said Gomez.

Gomez said the process was unfair and cruel to residents at Oklahoma’s nursing facilities.

“We are paying a real human price for political gridlock and budgeting incompetence in Oklahoma,” said Gomez. “Tonight, there will be nursing home residents wondering, ‘Will I have a home next year? Will I have the medical care I need?’ It is cruel and unfair to leave them in that position because lawmakers can’t find a way to balance the budget at the Capitol. We need action and we need permanent solutions that don’t leave people terrified of what the next budget cut will do to their lives.”