



# NEWS RELEASE

## MARK RIDLEY-THOMAS

CA Senate District 26

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### **School Health Centers Proposal Heads to the Governor** **Grant program will ensure that more children have access to health care**

Sacramento, CA — Legislation authored by Senator Mark Ridley-Thomas establishing a grant program to expand school-based health centers was approved by the State Senate and will now head to the Governor for his consideration. Senate Bill 564, the School Health Centers Expansion Act, builds upon an earlier Ridley-Thomas measure, AB 2560 of 2006 that established a Public School Health Center Support Program to sustain and advance school health centers, and provide guidance on starting new school health centers.

The grant program established by SB 564 will provide resources directly to communities to support both new and existing school health centers. California currently has more than 140 school health centers that provide a variety of care, including primary medical care, dental care, and mental health services. The Governor has pledged to expand the number of school health centers to 500, and SB 564 is intended to provide a mechanism to make this expansion possible.

“The health and well being of a child is vital to his or her ability to succeed in school,” said Senator Ridley-Thomas. “As the economic downturn continues, we have a moral obligation to ensure that children continue to get health care and come to school ready to learn.”

As families continue to struggle with affordable health care, many parents and guardians are relying on schools as their children’s health care safety net. School health centers are run by many different types of organizations including school districts, community clinics, hospitals, county health departments, and various non-profit organizations. These centers represent a powerful partnership between the health and education fields whose goal is to protect the well being of our children.

“There are an estimated 800,000 uninsured children in California,” said Ridley-Thomas. “Across the country, we are hearing calls for health care reform, and school health centers are a first step towards a more cost-effective system.”

School health centers rely on a patchwork of funding that includes some public health program funds, private donations, third-party reimbursements and in-kind support from schools and sponsors. The grant program in SB 564, in concert with the Public School Health Center Support Program which was established due to the Senator’s earlier legislation, marks the first effort to provide direct state assistance to these school health centers.

“With families losing jobs and homes, children are less likely to get health care,” said Serena Clayton, Director of the California School Health Centers Association, a sponsor of the bill. “SB 564 gives the Governor an important opportunity to support children and families during these difficult economic times at very low cost.”

California’s school health centers are located throughout the state in elementary, middle and high schools in communities where children have limited access to health care. By providing primary health care services in a setting that is convenient and trusted, school health centers serve children quickly and efficiently. They detect and treat illnesses early, thereby avoiding excessive use of emergency rooms, prolonged absences from school, or the spread of contagious diseases.

With today’s Senate vote of 24-14, SB 564 completes its legislative cycle and the Governor has until September 30th to sign the proposal into law.

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