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Family Advocacy Program
Improves Health of Children through Innovative Collaboration
New Program Combines Efforts of Legal and Medical Institutions

Berkeley, CA, April 10, 2006 – The East Bay Community Law Center (EBCLC) is delighted to announce its participation in the Alameda County Family Advocacy Program, an innovative collaboration between EBCLC and Children’s Hospital and Research Center Oakland (CHRCO). The collaborative aims to improve health outcomes for local children living in poverty. Lawyers from EBCLC and doctors from CHRCO will work in partnership to:

- Provide direct legal services in a health care setting to strengthen the capacity of families to meet their basic needs;
- Train health care providers, medical residents, and law students on advocacy, ethical decision making, delivery of patient/client centered services, and on the laws and programs that safeguard patients’ health and welfare;
- Develop doctors and lawyers as interdisciplinary partners and caring advocates for low income families by providing a supervised, instructive experience for medical and law students to work collaboratively in health care settings; and
- Develop and influence policy around family health issues and advocate for permanent systemic improvement.

The Alameda County’s Family Advocacy Program’s medical director is Dr. Gena Lewis, Pediatric Hospitalist and Ambulatory Attending at Children’s Hospital Oakland. “A child’s social environment – including housing conditions, family income stability, and food availability – has a tremendous impact on his or her health,” explained Dr. Lewis. “Children in poverty experience more health problems than children from higher income families, including low birth-weight, asthma, lead poisoning, obesity, and infant mortality. To the extent that we can improve their social environment through access to social and legal services, we hope to improve children’s health.”

An EBCLC attorney will staff a weekly hospital-based legal clinic to serve CHRCO families in need. The legal services provided will include immigration assistance, housing advocacy, public benefits advocacy, and services to increase access to health insurance. Manel Kappagoda, of the East Bay Community Law Center, says, “This unusual partnership of law and medicine results from the understanding that lawyers and doctors working together can optimize the positive impact of medical interventions on

children's health. Public interest lawyers are in the best position to help families understand the legal remedies available to them to ensure children have their basic health needs met."

The Alameda County Family Advocacy Program is working in partnership with the Medical Legal Partnership for Children (MLPC), a national program launched today in Boston. MLPC aims to change the delivery of health care for vulnerable children and their families nationwide. "With the creation of MLPC, thanks to critical funding from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation and others, we now have the capacity to spread the knowledge and practices developed over the last 13 years here at Boston Medical Center to sites nationwide," said MLPC Founder and Advisory Board Chair Dr. Barry Zuckerman. "For years, our mission at Boston Medical Center has been to radically change health care for children in low income families by using the skills of lawyers to address the non-biologic factors that contribute to and exacerbate health problems. The Alameda County Family Advocacy Program is off to a great start and we will support these kinds of local initiatives in every way we can." The Alameda County Family Advocacy Program intends to apply for a seed grant from the MLPC. The local collaborative has already received a generous donation from the Bernard E. and Alba Witkin Charitable Foundation.

Following on a tradition of annual conferences hosted by the Family Advocacy Program at Boston Medical Center, MLPC will host a National Summit on Friday, April 28, 2006 in San Francisco, California, concurrent with the annual Pediatric Academic Societies' meeting. Over 100 attendees, primarily lawyers and pediatricians, from all over the country, including Alameda County, are expected to attend to discuss best practices in medical-legal collaboration, and learn how to create and/or enhance medical legal partnerships in their communities.

The East Bay Community Law Center is the largest provider of free civil legal assistance to the poor in Alameda County and a nationally-recognized poverty law clinic, with services including eviction defense and housing advocacy, income and employment support, HIV/AIDS and health law, community economic development, and decriminalization of poverty. Founded by law students at Boalt Hall School of Law in 1988 with the dual mission of providing high quality legal services to low-income clients in Alameda County and clinical legal education opportunities for law students, the goal of EBCLC's work is to help build a Bay Area community that is more healthy, secure, productive, and hopeful.

Children's Hospital & Research Center Oakland is a designated Level I pediatric trauma center and the largest pediatric critical care facility in the region. The hospital has 170 licensed beds and 166 hospital-based physicians in 30 specialties, two thousand employees, and an operating budget of \$200 million. With more than 300 basic and clinic investigators and an annual budget of over \$43 million, the research institute has made significant progress in areas including pediatric obesity, cancers, sickle cell disease, AIDS/HIV, hemophilia, and cystic fibrosis.

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