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CONTACT:

Tammy Reasoner

Georgia Academy of Family Physicians

Office: (404) 321- 7445

Fax: (404) 321-7450

Email: treasoner@gafp.org

Georgia's Children at Risk:

Is there a Doctor in the House, Office or Community?

Georgia is failing your child... in healthcare accessibility. A new report from the Journal of Pediatrics ranks Georgia at 38th for lacking adequate coverage of family physicians and pediatricians for children. By failing to have adequate primary care workforce in Georgian communities the health of our children and families are at risk.

We have a serious deficiency in our health care system, with one in seven children in the United States not having access to a family physician or pediatrician in their community. The sobering reality is that without a physician to schedule preventative exams, children are less likely to receive recommended services; and many are forced to go without healthcare.

Where you live, grow, and work impacts your health. The report reveals that rural communities in Georgia, and across the United States, are significantly burdened by the family physician shortage. "The family physician is a healthcare safety net in rural communities and is often the only health care provider for miles. Unfortunately this safety net is in jeopardy in many communities," says Harry Strothers, III, MD, President of the Georgia Academy of Family Physicians.

The distribution of doctors and the need for more primary care providers is the crux of the issue. Even with incentives like the loan repayment programs from the State Medical Education Board of Georgia and the National Health Service Corps it is difficult to move doctors to rural communities that need family physicians. Physicians are more apt to move to areas with higher population according to the report.

Dr. Strothers added, "We are concerned that this signifies a much larger problem for Georgia. Today many primary care practices are struggling to stay open from the financial crisis and reduction in insurance payments. If we lose those who are currently practicing in these communities many more families, children and elderly will go without access to care."

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Established in 1947, the GAFP is a member chapter of the American Academy of Family Physicians. GAFP strives to promote the specialty of family medicine through the education of and service to Family Physicians in Georgia. Boasting a membership of 2,500 family physicians, family medicine residents, and medical students, the organization supports those who aspire to achieve excellence and who are committed to delivering it. For more information, please visit us on the web at www.gafp.org or call (404) 321-7445.