

For Immediate Release

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One Voice Scores with State/Federal Healthcare Advocacy

MERCED, Calif, June 13, 2008 – One Voice, a program of the Merced County Association of Governments, achieved success on its first step to attract more healthcare professionals to the area when the Office of Statewide Health and Planning Development approved a special healthcare shortage designation for Merced County.

Following the One Voice Washington, D.C. trip in April, Anne Cannon of Congressman Cardoza's office organized a follow-up meeting in June with representatives from Assembly Member Cathleen Galgiani's and Senator Jeff Denham's offices, and the Office of Statewide Health and Planning Development (OSHPD).

John Alexander, Executive Director of the Merced County Healthcare Consortium, requested that Merced County be given a Health Professionals Shortage Area, or HPSA, designation. OSHPD staff supported the proposal and recommended approval to the U.S. Department of Health Services.

HPSA gives the Merced County area more opportunities for grants and provides partial medical school loan repayments to attract new doctors and specialists.

“When we apply for a grant, if we have a HPSA designation, we move to top of heap,” explains John Alexander, Executive Director of the Merced County Healthcare Consortium. “Also, now we can send notices to new graduates of medical schools. The HPSA designation will let them be reimbursed for thousands of dollars in medical school costs from state and federal government. That's very enticing.”

Congressman Cardoza has urged the One Voice group to include healthcare in its advocacy efforts. This year was the first time the group did so.

In April, the One Voice group's 27 delegates met with legislators and federal agencies staff . County Supervisor Kathleen Crookham, Merced Union High School District Assistant Superintendent Sylvia Smith, and businesswoman Lynnette Gerbi from Los Banos helped

Alexander explain the state of healthcare in Merced County, pointing out that some communities don't even have one fulltime doctor.

“Despite many recent successes, Merced County continues to have a severe shortage of both primary and specialty health care providers and obtaining a county-wide HPSA designation has been a top priority of mine since being elected to Congress,” said Congressman Dennis Cardoza. “As a HPSA county, Merced will have access to more federal resources to attract health care professionals and, by increasing the number of providers in the county, we will finally be able to ensure all Merced residents have access to the health care they need and deserve. I commend the Merced County Association of Governments and its One Voice program for its attention to this issue, and I will continue work closely with them in order to obtain a HPSA designation for the entire county.”

The county is divided into several Medical Service Study Areas, each of which requires its own HPSA application. The Planada/LeGrand area submitted an application on behalf of Golden Valley Health Centers that was returned last year due to population assumptions that did not match state figures.

“OSHPD assures us that, if the application is re-submitted with corrected data, it would be approved as well,” says Alexander.

The Atwater/Winton area has been given a status of "potentially qualifies", a first step for the Castle Family Health Centers application.

“I want to thank One Voice for their support,” said Alexander. “It takes a combined effort like this to get noticed at the state and federal level. One or two communities going by themselves doesn't have the same impact.”

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About MCAG

MCAG is an association of city and county governments, with members who meet to discuss and solve problems of regional interest. More information can be found at www.mcagov.org, or by calling (209) 723-3153, ext. 308.

For more information on One Voice, contact Candice Steelman at (209) 723-3153, ext. 308 or go to www.mcagov.org.