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Contact: Oversight and Government Reform Press Office, (202) 225-5051 **Chairman**

Towns Announces Hearing to Examine Post-Katrina Health Care Challenges Facing New Orleans Area

Washington, DC – U.S. Representative Edolphus “Ed” Towns (D-NY), Chairman of the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, will convene a hearing on Thursday, December 3, 2009 to examine key ongoing health care concerns and challenges facing the region affected by Hurricane Katrina, and what future challenges still remain for restoring the area's health care infrastructure. The hearing will also address the Primary Care Access and Stabilization Grant (PCASG) program and how it has been used to assist in restoring health care in the post-Katrina New Orleans area.

“Four years ago, Hurricane Katrina devastated the New Orleans region including much of the city’s health care infrastructure. The effort to rebuild and provide access to critical health care services remains far from complete. We must address these issues and understand what it will take to establish a stable health care system in the New Orleans area,” said Chairman Towns.

Prior to Hurricane Katrina, the low-income population in New Orleans region relied heavily on hospital emergency rooms and outpatient clinics for primary health care. A number of the major hospitals and outpatient clinics that served this population were lost as a result of Katrina, greatly exacerbating the problems facing New Orleans’ health care delivery system. The hearing will look at the potential for rebuilding major health care institutions, including public hospitals such as Charity Hospital that was a source of health care for most of the region’s uninsured and remains closed.

Following the destruction of Charity Hospital and other key facilities such as outpatient clinics, residents found it exceedingly difficult to access care. To help ease the burden on the New Orleans area, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) provided a \$100 million PCASG to the Louisiana Department of Health and Hospitals in July 2000 to help restore and expand critical access to primary care services, including mental and dental health services, without regard to a patient’s ability to pay.

The clinics currently benefiting from PCASG funding care for more than 160,000 individuals in the New Orleans region annually, and provide services to nearly 75,000 uninsured residents every year. Funding for the program is expected to run out on September 30, 2010, and it is unclear how clinics in the area will be able to continue supporting the community if the funding ceases. The hearing will also examine this issue.

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