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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

## FLORIDA RECEIVES 'C-' OVERALL GRADE IN NATIONAL REPORT CARD ON EMERGENCY CARE

*Grade Not Improved since 2006; FCEP Pledges Assistance to Improve State's Grade*

ORLANDO, FL – The American College of Emergency Physicians (ACEP) has released its **2009 National Report Card on the State of Emergency Medicine**, giving Florida a 'C-' grade for the second time. Florida ranks 30<sup>th</sup> out of the 50 states plus the District of Columbia. The National Report Card is an assessment of the support that each state provides for its emergency medicine system. ACEP prepared this report to underscore the challenges facing patients who need access to emergency care, as well as to recognize efforts being made to address their needs. Florida's C- reflects the overall C- grade that the United States received as a whole.

"We are disappointed that Florida's grade has not improved since the release of the 2006 Report Card," said **FCEP President Ernest Page II, MD, FACEP**. "We're very pleased that Florida is one of the nation's leaders in disaster preparedness, but it is disappointing to see a grade of 'F' on access to emergency care. As an organization, we are committed to finding ways to improve access to emergency care for our patients, and we offer our assistance to the Governor's office and the Florida Legislature in helping to find solutions to our challenges, which continue to be uninsured using the ER as primary care, overcrowding, uncompensated care, a shortage of medical specialists and a lack of inpatient beds."

Florida fell below the national median largely due to poor scores in the categories of *Public Health & Injury Prevention* (D-), *Medical Liability Environment* (C-), and the most heavily weighted of the five categories, *Access to Emergency Care* (F). Florida was one of only 12 states to receive an 'F' in that category, and ranked 50<sup>th</sup> nationally, finishing only ahead of California. The major issues cited were too few emergency facilities for Florida's residents, a large number of uninsured, a lack of psychiatric care beds, a dearth of primary care providers, a low number of physicians who accept Medicare, a scarcity of specialists and registered nurses, a lack of injury prevention funds and a low ranking for vaccinations for the elderly. Florida's best grades came in the *Quality and Patient Safety Environment* category (A-), and *Disaster Preparedness* (A-), a new category for the 2009 Report Card. Florida finished 10<sup>th</sup> nationally in both categories.

"We believe that Florida can improve access to emergency care by granting sovereign immunity to providers of state and federally mandated emergency care," said Dr. Page. "This would address the liability problem that prevents many specialists from taking emergency call. It would also help Florida retain many of the emergency medicine residents that leave the state after graduation due to the poor liability climate."

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FCEP appreciates the efforts that the Florida Legislature made to address this access to emergency care issue in 2003, by instituting a cap of \$150,000 on non-economic damages for providers of emergency care. The cap was a good start toward addressing some of the problems with Florida's emergency care system. FCEP supports strengthening that protection, as well as the provision of sovereign immunity for emergency care providers, who are acting under the Florida Access to Care Law.

FCEP will also continue its support and development of the **Emergency Medicine Learning & Resource Center (EMLRC)**, an educational facility which will be housed in Orlando and dedicated to promoting and advancing emergency medicine, disaster management, pre-hospital emergency care, and public health by providing education and research activities. The presence of the EMLRC will help raise Florida's grades in several categories.

To improve the state's grade in Public Health & Injury Prevention ('D-'), FCEP will support legislation committed to injury prevention programs and seek the reinstatement of helmet laws and for tougher seatbelt legislation. FCEP also supports programs aimed at heightened awareness of immunization and prevention programs.

"The low vaccination rate among Florida's seniors continues to contribute to the state's high number of hospital admissions from emergency departments," said Dr. Page. "With flu season upon us, we encourage our law makers to prioritize the creation of awareness programs about the importance of vaccinations."

*The Florida College of Emergency Physicians (FCEP) represents more than 1,200 emergency physicians in the state of Florida. FCEP members represent the health care safety net of Florida's residents and visitors. More than seven million patients seek care annually in Florida emergency departments. FCEP was founded on Oct. 15, 1971 and is headquartered in Orlando.*

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