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CONTACT: Sito Negron
915.351.3500 (o) / 915.227.0360 (m)

Senator Rodríguez stands up for women's health

AUSTIN - Today, Senator José Rodríguez attended a Senate committee hearing at the Texas Capitol on women's health. Sen. Rodríguez also led a news conference where participants highlighted the negative impact of laws passed by the Texas Legislature in 2011 and 2013 on women's health services. Participants included doctors, patients, and clergy, who shared their experiences as professionals and consumers in trying to navigate the impacts of the unnecessary and intrusive laws.

"Recent laws passed during the last several years have led to a systematic dismantling of women's access to health care across the state -- a system that was serving hundreds of thousands of women in a cost-effective manner. As a result of the 2011 budget cuts, 76 family planning clinics closed. After the passage of H.B. 2 this past summer, even more clinics have closed. These closures have had a devastating impact on Latinas and those in rural areas, not only in my district, but across the state.

"This is an example of government intrusion at its worst. Your rights and your ability to access medical care should not depend on your zip code."

"Even with the additional \$100 million appropriated for family planning for 2014-2015 -- in essence a restoration of cuts made in 2011 -- we're not anywhere close to serving all of the eligible women in the state. According to experts, an estimated 1.3 million Texas women need access to affordable preventative care and contraception, but current funding is sufficient to serve only 330,000, just a quarter of those in need.

"State leaders must focus on how we can best provide women's health services to all Texans in a comprehensive manner, which includes improving access to the entire range of services, especially sex education and access to safe abortion services," said Rodríguez.

The Senate Committee on Health and Human Services met today, and while it heard testimony on the Texas Women's Health Program and the new Expanded Primary Health Care program, the committee failed to consider key issues related to access and choice. Meanwhile, multiple lawsuits contesting the constitutionality and validity of the new laws are moving through the courts. Instead of expending state resources and taxpayer dollars in the defense of laws, which are likely to be deemed unconstitutional, state leaders should use these resources to improve access to care for Texas women.

José Rodríguez represents Texas Senate District 29, which includes the counties of El Paso, Hudspeth, Culberson, Jeff Davis and Presidio. He represents both urban and rural, and more than 350 miles of Texas-Mexico border. Senator Rodríguez was elected in 2010; in addition to chairing the Senate Hispanic Caucus, he is Vice Chairman of the Jurisprudence Committee and is a member of the Criminal Justice, Veteran Affairs and Military Installations, and Government Organization committees.