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**California Recognizes Suicide Prevention Week
--Governor's Proclamation and Senate Resolution Declares
May 4-10 Suicide Prevention Week in State--**

For Immediate Release -- Sacramento, May 5 -- Governor Davis has declared May 4-10, 2003, Suicide Prevention Week, in recognition of the more than 3,000 Californians who died by suicide in 2000 (latest statistics) in an effort to increase awareness of the tragedy and widespread incidence of suicide.

The California Senate has passed a resolution (SR18), introduced by Sen. Deborah Ortiz (D-Sacramento), also recognizing Suicide Prevention Week, and going on to state that in 2000, in California, 33,000 suicide attempters were treated in emergency rooms or admitted to hospitals for treatment, and the hospital charges alone for suicide attempters admitted as inpatients exceeded \$275,000,000.

“Suicide is a serious public health problem and, as the proclamation states, we encourage state and local public and private organizations to cooperate to develop and implement a California Strategy for Suicide Prevention,” stated Senator Ortiz, who chairs the Health and Human Services Committee.

Likewise, in the California Assembly, Assemblymember Alan Lowenthal (D-Long Beach) introduced the resolution and anticipates it will be adopted by the Assembly within the week. “It is time to erase the stigma of suicide and begin talking about how best to prevent this tragic loss in our state,” Lowenthal stated.

The Senate Resolution states that suicide is the 11th leading cause of death in California, exceeding deaths by homicide by 144 percent and exceeding deaths by HIV/AIDS by 202 percent. Additionally, suicide is the third leading cause of death in California among youth 15-24.

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Suicide Prevention Advocacy Network-California (SPAN-California), a grassroots, advocacy group, plans to spearhead the effort to develop the state strategy referred to in the resolution.

According to SPAN-California President Mark Chaffee, “Our immediate goal is to bring this problem to the attention of everyone in the state. We are planning a state-wide conference to bring together government agencies, legislators, practitioners, educators, survivors, mental health organizations and others interested in saving lives to create a state plan to prevent suicide. This plan would address the U.S. Surgeon General’s Call to Action to Prevent Suicide and the National Strategy for Suicide Prevention, which encourage each state to develop and implement suicide prevention strategies.”

The Senate Resolution goes on to declare that suicide is a major public health problem and suicide prevention is a state priority. Initiatives dedicated to the prevention of suicide are encouraged as is the development of accessible and affordable mental health treatment. It also declares that not only this year, but in future years, the first full week of May will be known as Suicide Prevention Week.

For more information, contact SPAN-California at 760/753-4565.

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