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June 27, 2017

Assembly Member Jim Wood, Chair
Assembly Health Care Committee
State Capitol, Room 6005
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Assembly Member Wood:

Established in 1994, in Washington, DC, NHMA is a nonprofit association representing 50,000 licensed Hispanic physicians in the U.S. NHMA's mission is to empower Hispanic physicians and other healthcare professionals to improve the health of Hispanic populations with Hispanic medical societies, resident and medical student organizations, and its public and private sector partners.

Hispanics or Latinos are the largest racial/ethnic minority population in the US. Hispanics experience more deaths from diabetes, chronic liver disease, and kidney diseases. As a result, these patient will be particularly susceptible to any measure that would reduce access or increase the cost of dialysis, as SB 349 would do.

SB 349 mandates staffing ratios at dialysis clinics in California and also institutes a 45-minute "time out" in between patients. Together, these two provisions will result in clinics being forced to cut shifts, leaving fewer available appointments for dialysis patients in California.

Clinics serving a majority of Medi-Cal patients, such as clinics in lower-income and urban communities, would be especially hard hit since Medi-Cal reimbursement rates don't cover the costs to provide dialysis. These clinics would be the first to reduce shifts due to the new staffing mandates, or close altogether – leaving patients with fewer choices and reduced access to dialysis care.

It is bad policy to reduce access to life-saving dialysis when the number of dialysis patient had increased by more than 60% over the last 10 years and is projected to grow substantially in the future.

SB 349 would increase cost to California's healthcare system by hundreds of millions of dollars per year, meaning higher costs for an already strained Medi-Cal system, higher costs for patients and reduced clinic access. We should not put additional financial burdens on our already-strained Medi-Cal system.

Finally, California dialysis clinics outperform other states in both clinical quality and patient satisfaction. In fact, California outperforms states with mandated ratios already in place. As such, SB 349 is looking for a solution to a problem that simply doesn't exist.

SB 349 will be bad for patients, which is why the National Hispanic Medical Association opposes this bill.

Sincerely,

Elena Rios, MD, MSPH
President and CEO