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*Project Funders:*

Gulf Coast Community  
Foundation of Venice

Bon Secours  
Venice Hospital

Sarasota County  
Health Department

Sarasota Memorial  
Hospital

Englewood Community  
Hospital

Fawcett Memorial  
Hospital

Bon Secours  
Saint Joseph's Hospital

Charlotte County  
Health Department

August 18, 2005

Secretary Michael Leavitt  
Department of Health and Human Services  
200 Independence Ave. SW  
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Secretary Leavitt:

The Community Health Improvement Project (CHIP) is a community effort to engage residents, non-profit organizations, hospitals, health departments and funding organizations in improving the health of Sarasota and Charlotte County Florida residents. Three community groups, called Community Health Action Teams (CHATs) in Englewood, North Port and the Laurel /Osprey /Venice/ Nokomis (LOVN) areas meet regularly as part of the CHIP process. The CHATs are now implementing strategic plans that include efforts to improve access to health and wellness information and preventive care, and improve the local health care system. As part of the CHAT's initiative, we have identified obesity and resulting chronic diseases as a major challenge to our local health care system. This problem is particularly a challenge in our younger population.

On July 13, the Center for Science in the Public Interest submitted a petition to your Department through the Food and Drug Administration to require health messages on the labels of soft drinks. Along with this petition, they have submitted compelling evidence of the negative health implications of consumption of these empty calories and their marketing to our youth. Many in the nutrition field have supported the petition. The North Port CHAT, representing a community of 40,000 in Southwest Florida, would like to encourage favorable consideration of this petition.

Thank you for your valuable time and consideration of this important matter.

Respectfully Submitted,

*Open Enrollment*  
CHAT Chairman