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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
February 22, 2008

**California Mental Health Commission Tours L.A.'s Skid Row with Senator
Ridley-Thomas**

Senator Mark Ridley-Thomas hosted the Mental Health Services Oversight and Accountability Commission (MHSOAC) on a tour of several Los Angeles Skid Row neighborhood sites on Wednesday evening, February 20. The MHSOAC visited the Para Los Ninos Youth Center, the Union Mission, and the Midnight Mission. The Commission also took a walking tour of the area.

The MHSOAC and Senator Ridley-Thomas – also a member of the MHSOAC – highlighted the opportunity for developers to apply for Mental Health Services Act (MHSA) funds which are available for housing. Currently, the MHSA has over \$38 million in funding available for MHSA Housing Program subsidies for Los Angeles County. Over the next three years, the California Department of Mental Health plans to allocate a total of approximately \$115 million dollars for the development of supportive housing in Los Angeles County.

The MHSA Housing Program is providing funding for the development of permanent, affordable rental-housing units with support services for the homeless and their families, or those who are at risk of becoming homeless, and who have a mental illness.

“While on the Skid Row Tour, I was simply amazed at the difference I saw this time, as opposed to the tour the Commission took in ‘05,” said Chair Linford Gayle. “The cardboard tents seemed to have all but disappeared and the neighborhood actually seemed somewhat safer.”

“However, having been formerly homeless myself, I could not help but notice individuals who were gravely mentally ill laying on the floors outside of a shelter, some with no shoes, in the cold. I believe we have made some improvements but we still have a long way to go,” said Chair Gayle.

“We were inspired by our visit to this oasis for young people in the middle of Skid row – Para Los Ninos Youth Center,” said Commissioner Eduardo Vega, who serves as director of Empowerment and Advocacy at the Los Angeles County

Department of Mental Health. “They have a youth lounge, a basketball court, and even a climbing wall,” said Vega. “Skid Row offers little relief to young people, but Para Los Ninos provides a safe place to be,” said Vega.

Chair Gayle thanked Senator Ridley-Thomas for organizing the Skid Row Tour and providing the MHSOAC with the opportunity to visit in-person the homeless and mentally ill of the Skid Row Neighborhood.

The 16-member MHSOAC state commission was formed by the passage of Proposition 63, the Mental Health Services Act (MHSA), in November 2004. The MHSOAC is responsible for oversight and accountability for implementation of the MHSA.

The MHSOAC will convene the third, and last, day of public meetings in Los Angeles on Friday, February 22, from 10:00 am to 1:00 pm at the Hilton Los Angeles Airport, 5711 West Century Blvd., Los Angeles. This MHSOAC meeting is part of the Commission’s meetings around the state to conduct business where the public can have access to the commission and where it can bring information regarding mental health oversight and accountability to the public.

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