

**For Immediate Release**

November 19, 2002

**Contact:** John Sewell

601-359-2916

## **Oral Health Task Force and Public Dental Director to Focus on Children's Oral Health**

(Jackson, MS) – Governor Ronnie Musgrove announced today the creation of an Oral Health Task Force to focus on the areas of prevention, health education, and the availability and affordability of quality oral health care for Mississippi's children. The Task Force was created as a recommendation from a National Governors Association Policy Academy on "Improving Oral Health Care for Children." Musgrove hosted representatives from six states in the Academy, held last fall in Jackson.

"The health of our children is a strong indicator of where we're headed as a state," Musgrove said. "Healthy children go to school ready to learn, ready to succeed, and ready to make the most of their promise and potential."

Musgrove said the need for good oral health was obvious, pointing to the fact that severe tooth decay is the most chronic childhood disease for children under five in Mississippi. He said other factors such as a lack of adequate transportation, the state's large rural areas, and the difficulty for parents in taking off work to take their children to a dentist all create barriers to good oral health.

The membership of the Task Force will include health care professionals and public officials. They will meet quarterly and provide an annual report to the governor regarding the state's oral health status and recommendations for action.

State Health Officer Dr. Brian Amy will chair the Task Force.

**Oral Health Task Force**  
**November 19, 2002**  
**Page 2**

“I want to thank Governor Musgrove for his leadership in inviting states to participate in last year’s Policy Academy, because great ideas arose from that meeting and great results will follow,” Amy said. “We have a strong passion and commitment for the promotion and protection of oral health care for Mississippi’s children.”

Dr. Amy also introduced Dr. Nicholas Mosca as the new full-time Dental Director with the State Department of Health. Dr. Mosca is charged with the development of a statewide action plan for the improvement of oral health care in the state.

“It is now our task to deliver the goods to improve the public’s oral health by forging new alliances between dentistry, primary care and public health,” said Mosca. “We must integrate dental and medical care, emphasize community-oriented care, and improve access to care.”

###