



**Senate Public Health and Welfare Committee  
Confirmation Hearing for Secretary of Health  
Dr. Eli Avila, MD, JD, MPH, FCLM  
Wednesday March 9, 2011**

Good Morning Chairman Vance, Chairman Kitchen, Vice-Chairman Mensch, members of the Senate Public Health and Welfare Committee and invited guests. My name is Dr. Eli Avila and it is an honor to come before this Committee and seek your approval to serve as the 26<sup>th</sup> Secretary of Health for the Commonwealth.

I would like to begin by saying that I recognize and applaud the critical role the Pennsylvania Legislature has played in supporting the Department of Health throughout the years. The most recent focus has been on passing laws to ensure modern; common-sense care is in place to protect the public's health and safety. This was evidenced with the passing of Act 37 of 2009 which developed a more responsive EMS system by allowing it to quickly adapt and evolve to meet the emergency and urgent medical care needs of the people of this Commonwealth.

Such examples of service, cooperation and health innovation are what will allow Pennsylvania to set the standard for health care excellence among all other states. I value the opportunity to work with you to protect and improve one of Pennsylvania's most valuable resources, the health and safety of its people.

My experience as a practicing physician, attorney and public health executive has afforded me unique qualifications to head the Pennsylvania Department of Health. Before my appointment as Acting Secretary, I served as Chief Deputy Commissioner of Health Services for Suffolk County, NY – the seventh largest county in the United States, managing an annual budget of more than \$400 million and overseeing a staff of nearly 1,500 employees. I believe this experience has prepared me to lead the Department of Health to its next level of efficiency, organization and strength.

I recognize the challenges that the next Secretary of Health will face. The Commonwealth's current budget deficit requires that the Department manages its resources, both human and financial, in an efficient and cost-effective manner. My focus is on accountability for health care providers and my own department operations. Whether it is oversight of abortion facilities, hospitals, nursing homes or community based providers. The Department's mission is to assure the safe delivery of quality health care for all Pennsylvanians. Applying sound management and fiscal controls, I will carry out the Department's statutory and regulatory responsibilities.

These responsibilities include; 1) licensing and regulating in-patient and out-patient health facilities to assure the delivery of quality health care for all Pennsylvanians, 2) operating 60 state health centers and coordinating public health services with local health departments, providers and community organizations, 3) conducting laboratory and epidemiological disease investigations, and working with sister agencies and professional groups to control and treat disease, 4) leading interagency preparedness for the public health consequences of all disasters and emergencies, and 5) carrying out federal and state disease prevention programs to reduce the prevalence of chronic conditions and ultimately lower health care costs.

Under my leadership, the Department will examine the growing financial burden on our health system due to the increase of chronic diseases among our population and it's leading contributor of obesity. We will use established, evidence-based programs to address the root causes of most chronic conditions, which account for approximately 70% of all health care costs. We will work with communities on wellness and prevention to support the fight against leading chronic diseases like heart disease, diabetes and cancer at every age and at every level in our communities.

Another area where we can make an important difference is by providing advanced medical support to law enforcement. With Pennsylvania police departments facing rising numbers of violent crimes, the need for this is critical. The Department of Health proposes a Tactical Emergency Medical Support (TEMS) Program to support Police operations that involve ensuring the safety of medical providers. TEMS providers are trained in law enforcement and emergency medicine. They provide medical services during law enforcement special operations to protect traditional/civilian emergency medical services, without having to divert critical police resources to support. It is our intent to leverage federal emergency preparedness funding for the development of this program.

The economic challenges we face today are certain to impact the health of the Commonwealth as well as the businesses and organizations that serve our most vulnerable citizens. Even in a time of great need, I am committed to seeing that the Department of Health continues to promote healthy lifestyles, prevent injury and disease and assure the safe delivery of quality healthcare to all Pennsylvanians. It is my hope to work closely with this Committee to improve the health of the citizens of this great Commonwealth.

I want to again thank you for this opportunity to appear before you today and ask for your endorsement to serve as the Secretary of Health for Pennsylvania. I will take any questions you might have at this time.