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## **Rhode Island Free Clinic local leader for Cover the Uninsured Week**

*The Free Clinic promoted awareness of Rhode Island's 114,000 uninsured*

**Providence, R.I., (May 19, 2006)** – Rhode Island Free Clinic celebrated Cover the Uninsured Week May 1<sup>st</sup>-7<sup>th</sup>. The week improved awareness of the Free Clinic and the growing numbers of uninsured Rhode Islanders. Activities included a Call10 Panel, a visit from Providence Mayor David Cicilline, an appearance on the Arlene Violet radio show, a monthly walk-in clinic to accept new patients, and regularly scheduled clinics for primary care and pre-employment physicals.

As the *only* free clinic in the state, Rhode Island Free Clinic coordinated activities during Cover the Uninsured Week to inform Rhode Islanders of its mission and the integral role it plays in the state's healthcare safety net. A health check report by Barbara Morse Silva on Channel 10's 5pm news May 1<sup>st</sup> kicked off the week. Local experts were on hand throughout the evening news to answer viewer questions regarding access to healthcare and health insurance for the uninsured and underinsured. Panelists included Lisa Smolski, Executive Director of Rhode Island Free Clinic, Christopher Koller, RI Health Insurance Commissioner, Kerrie Jones Clark, Executive Director of RI Health Center Association, and Sonia Rodrigues-Carr, Covering Kids & Families Project Director of RI Kids Count.

“This was our second year holding a Call10 Panel for Cover the Uninsured Week, and it was again an eye-opening experience. Each caller told a different, moving story. There are over 114,000 uninsured Rhode Islanders and many more underinsured. The need for affordable, accessible healthcare in Rhode Island is overwhelming,” says Lisa Smolski, Rhode Island Free Clinic Executive Director.

An appearance on the Arlene Violet radio show on 920 WHJJ May 4<sup>th</sup> explored the challenges of providing free healthcare to the uninsured. A Guest Column in the May 1<sup>st</sup> edition of the *Providence Business News* and an editorial in the May 17<sup>th</sup> issue of *The Providence Journal* educated the business and greater communities on the Free Clinic's role in Rhode Island's healthcare system. Each activity stressed the need to make access to healthcare for the uninsured a priority not only during Cover the Uninsured Week but each week throughout the year.

Cover the Uninsured Week is a national project of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. The week was created in 2003 to raise awareness of the growing numbers of uninsured, educate the public on who the uninsured are, and urge Congress to make healthcare coverage a top priority. Individual organizations throughout the country plan events to highlight these topics during the week.

Organized in 1999, Rhode Island Free Clinic is a volunteer-staffed, community-based non-profit organization in south Providence. The Free Clinic offers high quality primary medical care and a full array of no and low cost medications, diagnostic and specialty services to adults without health insurance. Rhode Island Free Clinic is funded solely by charitable giving. For more information, please call 401-274-6347 ext 201 or visit [www.rifreeclinic.org](http://www.rifreeclinic.org).

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