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COUNCILMEMBER ALARCÓN COMMENDS SENATOR OBAMA FOR SUPPORTING AN UPDATE OF THE FEDERAL POVERTY GUIDELINES

Los Angeles, CA – On Friday, July 18th, Congressional Quarterly reported that Senator Obama endorsed an update of the Federal Poverty Guidelines that would take into account regional cost of living factors. Councilmember Richard Alarcón has been a long time champion of updating the federal poverty level to a “self-sufficiency standard” – a measure that takes into account regional cost of living and family composition.

“During this time of sky-rocketing gas prices, rising food costs and high foreclosure rates, I commend Senator Obama for supporting an update of the Federal Poverty Guidelines to a measure that more accurately measures what it takes an American family to make ends meet,” said Councilmember Alarcón. “The current one-size-fits-all poverty calculation promotes waste and inefficiency in government spending. A regionally calculated measure will allow us to more effectively target our resources and will be a true reflection of economic challenges our nation faces.”

Last July, Councilmember Alarcón introduced a resolution in support of an update of the Federal Poverty Guidelines and called on the 2008 presidential candidates to take a position on this issue. Senator Barack Obama responded, writing a letter in support of the resolution. Senator Obama’s letter included, “As your resolutions states, the Federal Poverty Guidelines, which were developed decades ago, simply do not take into account the rising costs of child care, health care, transportation, and housing and make it difficult for many families to make ends meet...” Councilmember Alarcón also sat down with Senator John Edwards to discuss the resolution, which Senator Edwards also strongly supported. Senator Clinton and Governor Richardson both responded to the request, however neither took a position on the issue.

As a State Senator, in 2003 Alarcón introduced a state resolution in support of updating the Federal Poverty Guidelines, SJR 15. Additionally, last August, Councilmember submitted testimony to the House Sub-Committee on Income Security and Family Support for the Hearing on Measuring Poverty in America that was held on August 1, 2007 by Sub-Committee Chairman Jim McDermott (WA-7). In his testimony, Councilmember Alarcón expressed his support for updating the Federal Poverty Guidelines in order to create more targeted and efficient policy decisions.

Today, Councilmember Alarcón is holding a hearing of the Ad Hoc Committee on Ending Poverty in Los Angeles, which he created and chairs. During this hearing, witnesses will present information on the Federal Poverty Guidelines versus self-sufficiency in Los Angeles. Tomorrow, Councilmember Alarcón plans on introducing a motion for the City of Los Angeles to create its own poverty guidelines. Alarcón’s motion will allow the city to more accurately and efficiently target city resources and will be similar to New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg’s announcement last week that New York would be using its own formula, not the Federal Poverty Guidelines, to calculate poverty.