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PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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**CANDLELIGHT VIGIL TO RAISE AWARENESS ABOUT
THE MENTALLY ILL IN EL PASO**

The lack of sufficient, good quality, and affordable long-term housing in El Paso for people suffering from severe mental illness, along with the limited access to crisis centers, intermediate care facilities, and outpatient services, is creating a public health crisis in our community. However, not enough people and organizations seem to be concerned about the issue.

To raise awareness about the needs of the mentally ill in our community, El Paso County Attorney José R. Rodríguez will join members of the El Paso chapter of the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), and local residents, in the annual Bipolar Disorder Awareness Candlelight Vigil. The event is scheduled for tomorrow October 5, 2006 at 7 pm outside the El Paso Psychiatric Center, 4615 Alameda Ave.

County Attorney José R. Rodríguez says that the lack of services for the mentally ill in our community is merely shifting costs from the state to the local level. In April he filed a lawsuit against the Texas Department of State Health Services, the El Paso Psychiatric Center, and El Paso MHMR alleging they are failing to timely and adequately assess and treat mentally ill individuals who are in crisis.

“Emergency room visits and hospitalizations of mental patients have been increasing in El Paso during the last couple of years. Also, police and sheriff’s officers have been responding to a greater number of psychiatric crises, and many of these patients end up in the Texas criminal justice system”, explained Rodríguez.

“We all need to unite to find a solution to this problem. A community, who does not take care of its mentally ill citizens, is not a healthy community” finalized Rodríguez.

About the National Mental Illness Awareness Week: Established in 1990 by Congress, the first week of October is designated as "Mental Illness Awareness Week" (MIAW) in recognition of NAMI's efforts to raise mental illness awareness. "Bipolar Disorder Awareness Day" (BDAD) is held each year on the Thursday of MIAW to encourage further understanding and promote early intervention and treatment for this mental illness. MIAW and BDAD are NAMI's premiere public awareness and public education campaigns that link the organization nationally to the organization's over 1100 local affiliates across the country.

WHO: El Paso County Attorney José R. Rodríguez

WHAT: NAMI's Bipolar Disorder Awareness Candlelight Vigil

WHEN: Thursday, October 5, 2006 at 7:00 p.m.

WHERE: El Paso Psychiatric Center

4615 Alameda Ave.

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For more information about the vigil and other events planned for tomorrow, please call Leo DiValentino, Executive Director NAMI – El Paso Chapter at 534-5476, or Victor Ortíz, President of El Paso NAMI at 534-5478.