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**MASSACHUSETTS SPECIAL COMMISSION
RELEASES REPORT ON AFTERSCHOOL TIME**

Comprehensive study details the critical need to engage 1.3 million youth

[Boston, MA] November 15, 2007 - Concluding seven months of research, the Massachusetts Special Commission on Afterschool and Out of School Time found that quality programs play a key role in making sure that young people realize their full potential to become well-rounded adults and responsible citizens. However, the Special Commission found that an estimated 80% of the Commonwealth's children and youth are not currently participating in these programs because of cost, transportation, and other barriers.

Afterschool programs – referring to high quality activities that engage children and youth when they are not in school, including before and after school, week-ends, school vacations and during the summer – have proven to help students do better in school, live healthier, and gain and practice the critical skills that allow them to compete in the new economy. Afterschool programs also contribute to positive relationships among young people, which are critical to child and youth development, including healthy brain development.

At a State House event on Thursday, the Commission officially released **their report** “**Our Common Wealth: Building a Future for Our Children and Youth.**” The Special Commission found afterschool programs provide a unique opportunity where all the key domains of child and youth development **are linked**. Valuable lifelong benefits include a range of hands-on learning and interactions with caring adults and essential life skills such as teamwork, creative problem-solving, perseverance, conflict resolution, project management and leadership.

“We heard some amazing stories from kids across the state. Providing quality opportunities after school is essential to helping them become productive, future leaders in the Commonwealth,” said **Senator Thomas McGee, Co-Chair of the Special Commission** and Chair of the Labor and Workforce Development Committee. “Learning takes place at every hour of the day and in all of the places where young people spend their time. What are we doing to help them become the people they are meant to be and the future leaders that we need to help us address the complex issues of living in a global society? We need to recognize that and make sure all the places that our young people go are equipped to help them realize their full potential.”

The Special Commission found that afterschool programs provide a critical place for young people to develop positive relationships with their peers and with caring adults which become the foundation for their lifelong success. Their participation in high quality afterschool opportunities helps them gain employment, be in stable relationships, be more involved in their communities, trust their parents more, and be happy.

“It’s about the ‘We’ in our society,” noted **Representative Marie St. Fleur, Co-Chair of the Special Commission** and Vice-Chair of the House Committee on Ways and Means. “We are responsible and both the public and private sectors should do everything we can. We have to do everything possible to support how our young people learn and grow when they are in or out of school. If we don’t, thousands of young people will continue to miss out on the types of activities that will help them succeed in life.”

Massachusetts has nearly 1.3 million children and youth; more than 850,000 are ages 5-14 and more than 400,000 are ages 15-19. Survey research estimates that only 20% or 260,000 are participating in afterschool programs statewide ages 5-14. The Commission found a significant gap in afterschool programs for older youth. The Commonwealth is only able to serve close to 6% or 70,000 children and youth with current state funding, leaving thousands of children and youth, or nearly 80%, without access to the enriching opportunities that are proven to help them become well-rounded individuals as well as future leaders of our state and nation.

Calling for specific actions in five key areas, the Special Commission recommends:

- 1) **Increasing Public Awareness** by creating a statewide public awareness campaign about the importance of afterschool programs in the development of children and youth.
- 2) **Providing Information and Increasing Access** by making it easier for parents to find out about afterschool programs statewide and for the state to collect more data that will help policymakers and funders better understand the need for afterschool programming across the Commonwealth.
- 3) **Promoting Quality Programs and a Quality Workforce** through the creation of a professional development fund, the enhancement and coordination of existing regional technical assistance centers, the systemic exploration of compensation and benefits to reduce the high turn-over rate; and formalizing a set of competencies and program measures to achieve quality standards.
- 4) **Fostering Partnerships and Collaboration** by creating public and private partnerships at state, regional and local levels to leverage existing revenue and resources already dedicated to this purpose. In particular the Special Commission calls for increased collaboration between schools and community-based organizations where school facilities, alternative transportation drop-offs and other strategies can be explored to increase access to quality afterschool program opportunities for children and youth. In addition, there are a number of **other** allies who want to be more involved in a coordinated effort to provide afterschool programs such as the Commonwealth's library system, private and parochial schools, the Massachusetts Cultural Council and the network of municipal parks and recreation departments among others.
- 5) **Sustaining the Effort** to ensure the afterschool field has the sustained resources, policies and partners to help provide a stable continuum of quality afterschool experiences for children and youth by maximizing all the federal, state, local and private revenue coming to Massachusetts including full federal reimbursement. Other recommendations call for state agencies to work together to reduce the administrative barriers afterschool programs face when applying for funding.

Central to implementing the recommendations in these five areas is the proposed creation of a Statewide Afterschool and Out-of-School Time Public and Private Coordinating Council.

Comprised of senior leaders across a variety of disciplines, this group will bring together representatives from state and municipal governments, public safety, arts, libraries, parks and recreation departments, workforce development, business, higher education, private funders and youth, and other community leaders, to create a more unified and coordinated response to ensure that Massachusetts' children and youth receive quality opportunities for all youth in the Commonwealth.

For access to the Special Commission's full 160 page report, its 28 page Executive Summary, and Profiles of Selected Afterschool Programs in every Massachusetts Legislative District, visit www.massafterschoolcomm.org.

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