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**SENATE PASSES LEGISLATION TO PROVIDE HEALTH INSURANCE COST RELIEF TO
SMALL BUSINESSES**

BOSTON – The Massachusetts Senate on Friday passed a \$28.4 billion balanced budget for the 2011 fiscal year that focuses on prudent expenditures, reforms and economic development, Sen. Michael O. Moore (D-Millbury) announced today. In a conscious effort to unburden residents and keep the Commonwealth on solid fiscal footing, the Senate’s budget does not contain any earmarks or rely on any additional taxes or withdrawals from the stabilization fund. The Senate used a combination of spending reductions and legislative reforms to close the \$2.85 billion budget gap.

“I am pleased that the Senate was able to pass a balanced budget that included no tax increases, and a relatively modest blow to essential services,” said Sen. Moore. “This budget reflects responsible planning and leadership. I was also happy to see the final Senate budget include several amendments that I had proposed.”

Utilizing the most up- to- date revenue numbers, the Senate was able to provide targeted increases to areas of the budget that help cities and towns, schools and families.

Several amendments filed by Sen. Moore were adopted for inclusion in the Senate budget, including a program that will assess a fee of up to 10% of earnings of prisoners on work release programs, which will go to support rehabilitation programs. Prior to the fee being assessed, the inmate must comply with all court orders relative to child support, victim restitution, and judgments of monies owed to health care institutions. The debt will be forgiven for inmates who stay out of trouble for 2 years after release.

Another amendment filed by Sen. Moore would require a feasibility study to determine potential cost savings that could be realized by enrolling MassHealth recipients into a Medicaid managed care organization.

Sen. Moore also co-sponsored a successful amendment to increase the funding for the Special Education Circuit Breaker program by \$13.5 million.

In addition to increasing support for important programs, the Senate budget includes important reforms in the areas of probation, illegal immigration and municipal plan design.

The senate proposes significant changes to the state’s probation department. The final Senate budget limits the probation commissioner’s term to five years and requires all appointments to the trial court to be approved by the Chief Justice, stripping the exclusive authority from the Commissioner of Probation.

The Senate budget also establishes a task force that is charged with making recommendations on placing the department in the executive branch or elsewhere.

In an effort to reform and codify state regulations relative to illegal immigrants, the final Senate budget includes a comprehensive bipartisan amendment that will bar illegal immigrants from public health care, housing, and higher education benefits.

The amendment requires state contractors to verify citizenship status of their employees and any contractors found in violation of federal law will be debarred from public projects. It also includes new penalties for falsifying state IDs and driver's licenses, denies illegal immigrants access to in-state tuition rates at state colleges and gives priority to eligible housing applicants over non-legal residents.

The Senate budget addresses rising municipal health care costs by giving cities and towns health care plan design authority. This measure will result in substantial savings in those communities which choose to adopt it, while protecting municipal employees from substantial cost increases or coverage limitations. The Senate's plan design approach strikes a balance that will help our municipalities meet fiscal challenges without sacrificing quality of care.

The Senate also added \$5 million to childcare support for low income families, increasing its funding to \$233.5 million. There are over 25,000 children on the waiting list for Early Education and Childcare. Last fiscal year, 4,000 children were given access to childcare due to an unexpected surplus of funds. The additional funding in this year's budget will ensure that those children continue to receive services in fiscal year 2011.

Further focusing on our children, the Senate included an additional \$6.7 million for Kindergarten Development Grants that expand classroom time from half day to full day. This will make grant funding available in 2011 for those school districts who received the grants in 2010.

The budget will now go to conference committee with the House of Representatives. The new fiscal year begins July 1.

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