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MASSACHUSETTS HOUSE ADOPTS FISCAL YEAR 05 SPENDING PLANS

Boston: Rep. Bill Straus announced today that the House of Representatives passed its annual spending plan for the next fiscal year beginning July 1, 2004. The plan increased funding for special education, regional school transportation and school nurses. Rep. Straus was also able to secure funding for local Buzzard's Bay restoration projects, and the establishment of an ALS (Lou Gehrig's disease) registry.

House plans also increase funding for special education from \$121 million to \$201 million, in order to meet its obligation to properly educate special needs students in our public schools. The House also increased regional school transportation from \$26.4 million to \$38 million in an attempt to ease the growing financial burden faced by many cities and towns.

Through lobbying efforts by Rep. Straus and other legislators, the House also restored \$12 million in funding that Governor Romney had sought to eliminate for school nurses, alleviating concerns of many school districts which could not afford to keep a nurse on staff.

"Through these actions, the House has made it clear that education is one of its highest priorities, and I am pleased that the House not only met, but exceeded, its promise to properly fund these vital programs," stated Straus.

Rep. Straus also secured \$75,000 to fund the Lou Gehrig's Disease Registry, which will help the State detect the actual incidence of ALS, possible changes in incidence, and possible ALS clusters throughout the State. This information is vital as federal funding is directly tied to the number of patients affected.

"It is vital that the State has an accurate count of those affected by ALS so that we may obtain the necessary resources in our fight against this terrible disease," stated Rep. Straus.

In another amendment offered by Rep. Straus, the House adopted his proposal to require the Governor to finally initiate a program of bulk purchasing to reduce the state's cost for

drug programs. “With over \$1 billion spent by the state each year for prescription drugs, it is time we finally made use of our bargaining clout to get lower prices to benefit seniors and those on state medical plans”, said Bill Straus. Straus has been a leader on the prescription drug issue for several years. At this time, Governor Romney has been studying the issue by requesting information through the Department of Public Health.

In addition to obtaining financial benefits for the region, Rep. Straus also made further progress in securing personal privacy. Rep. Straus’ “Gmail” amendment will prohibit internet service providers from scanning the content of personal emails. Also, Rep. Straus sponsored an amendment prohibiting the RMV from issuing driver’s licenses that display social security numbers, in an attempt to curtail identity theft.

“Identity theft is of growing concern because it results in the loss of millions of dollars every year, and safeguarding social security numbers is a major victory in the battle against this growing trend,” stated Straus.

The Budget will now proceed to the Senate for further consideration later this spring.

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