

## LEGISLATURE SENDS PLAN TO LOWER PRESCRIPTION MEDS COST TO GOVERNOR

Support for tough legislation to curb out of control prescription drug costs was finalized in the Legislature this week. Representative William Straus (D-Mattapoisett) and Senator Richard T. Moore (D-Uxbridge) successfully lobbied their legislative colleagues in the House and Senate to include a bulk purchasing plan in next year's state budget and the document was given final approval last Wednesday.

Straus, who has led House efforts over the years to get the state to adopt a bulk purchasing program for prescription drugs said he is very pleased the issue garnered the support of his colleagues. "The House and Senate have adopted a solid reform to benefit the public. The people of Massachusetts are paying exorbitant prices for drugs and the taxpayer is footing the bill. The program advocated by myself and Senator Moore offers a real hope to reduce prices for medicines," said Straus.

Moore, the Senate chairman of the state's health care committee, said he is pleased the Legislature is moving this forward. "The logic of having the state aggregate its purchasing of prescription drugs is undeniable. Combining the purchasing power of all the state agencies that buy medications for people they serve will allow us to negotiate a better rate with the drug companies."

Moore and Straus inserted identical language in their respective versions of the state budget. The language they fought for will require the Administration to implement a bulk purchasing plan by November of 2004. The bulk purchasing plan will save money by aggregating the prescription drug purchases of all state purchasers. Currently, four separate state entities contract with drug makers to buy prescription drugs for their members. The MassHealth program buys drugs for its approximately 661,000 members; the state's Prescription Advantage program buys for 83,000 seniors and disabled; the state office of pharmacy services (SOPS) which buys drugs for inmates in state prison has 15,000 members and the group insurance commission (GIC) buys pharmaceuticals for the 148,000 member state employee health insurance program. By aggregating all of these purchasers, the state would be purchasing for 907,000 members. Straus and Moore say that this combined purchasing power will allow the state to bargain for a better rate from drug makers.

"It is time for the House and Senate to take charge of the bulk purchasing issue because the cost of prescription drugs continues to rise," Straus said. "It is our hope that Governor Romney will join the Legislature in this effort to bring real savings in the cost of prescription drugs," he added.