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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Senate Takes Final Action on Legislation to Expand Child Protections in Massachusetts

Legislation Revamps State Agencies, Focuses on Care of Children

(Boston, MA) – The Senate on Tuesday took final action on legislation to improve child protection services in the Commonwealth through comprehensive changes within the state’s child welfare agencies, including foster care screening and placement standards.

Senator Steven A. Baddour (D-Methuen) said the bill will have immediate impact on the protection and well-being of the Commonwealth’s children.

“The new office of the Child Advocate will provide both the short-term and long-term oversight we need to assure the quality of child services,” Senator Baddour said. “We will also make needed improvements to our foster care system, DSS and overall family-planning efforts within the Commonwealth to help ensure that children are living in happy, healthy and safe environments.”

The newly-installed Office of the Child Advocate is responsible for monitoring and reviewing the services available to children under the Commonwealth’s protection and will report directly to the Governor. The Child Advocate will also be charged with developing a long-term plan to further coordinate and modernize the child welfare system.

“This bill is the collaborative result of hearing from and listening to child welfare advocates, organizations, the administration, and, most importantly, parents and children,” continued Senator Baddour. “It is a comprehensive review and reform of the laws related to child abuse, neglect and foster care.”

The foster care system will also see improvements under this legislation by extending services for individuals between the ages of 18 and 22 who would have ordinarily “aged out” of the system. Foster care children will also be eligible to receive expanded tuition payments that include fees at all state colleges and community colleges.

Other provisions of the legislation include:

- A foster care registry to track the success of foster parents in the state system. The system can search for relatives or other adult individuals who have positively influenced a child’s life.
- Changing the name of the Department of Social Services to the Department of Children and Families, and targeting issues of racial inequality within the department.
- A commission to study the status of grandparents raising their grandchildren.
- Mandates a review by the Department of Children and Families after three abuse and neglect reports on a family in three months or in one year, and requires review results to be submitted to the local district attorney, local law enforcement and the child advocate.
- Establishes an interagency child welfare taskforce that the Secretary of the Executive Office of Health and Human Services will chair to coordinate and streamline services to children and families who are receiving services.
- Requires social workers who are employed by the Department of Children and Families to have a bachelor’s degree, and supervisors to have a master’s degree.

The bill will now go to the Governor for his signature.

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