



# MASSACHUSETTS HOUSING AND SHELTER ALLIANCE

INITIATING SOLUTIONS TO END HOMELESSNESS

## For Immediate Release

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### **BILL TO END HOMELESSNESS SIGNED INTO LAW** *Commission to Recommend Permanent Solutions for Homelessness in the Commonwealth*

**Boston, October 30, 2006** – Governor Mitt Romney signed into law on Friday a bill that aims to end homelessness in the Commonwealth through the creation and implementation of a comprehensive five-year housing plan. The bill, HB 5206, calls for the formation of a special commission to end homelessness that would include members of the Legislative and Executive branches, city and county officials, and other pertinent entities.

The Commission to End Homelessness bill, sponsored by Representative Byron Rushing and Senators Steven Panagiotakos and Dianne Wilkerson, represents a major advancement in the effort to end homelessness in the Commonwealth. The Commission's plan will outline the "necessary steps to replace the decade-old system of ad hoc and disparate emergency responses to homelessness with a coordinated and consolidated plan for permanent solutions to homelessness involving housing, economic development, and job creation."

"Bringing these levels of government together in an effort to end homelessness is a huge step in the right direction," said Joe Finn, executive director of the Massachusetts Housing and Shelter Alliance. "Homeless people have suffered for far too long on our streets and in our shelters. It is my hope that this commission will provide a more rational, outcome-based approach that will provide permanent and cost-effective solutions to homelessness."

The special commission created by the law will be charged with creating a five-year comprehensive housing plan to end homelessness in the Commonwealth. The plan would include recommendations on the number and types of housing units and support services needed and the amount and types of investment to make it possible.

"This commission is not going to study the problem of shelters and report on what we already know. This commission is charged with actually developing a workable plan – which will be goal-oriented with benchmarks and timelines to end homelessness in the Commonwealth. We

need to stop talking about the problem, and dealing with it piecemeal. We can actually do something about it,” said Rep. Rushing. “Massachusetts needs to end homelessness.”

In August, the Governor amended the bill to formally include input from the Massachusetts Interagency Council on Homelessness and Housing (MICHH), which Romney formed by executive order in 2003. MICHH has worked to coordinate the relevant state agencies' efforts to find immediate and long-term solutions to end homelessness but does not include members of the Legislature.

“The passage of this bill demonstrates that homelessness need not be a partisan issue,” Finn said. “People from both sides of the aisle agree that we must end this social disgrace through strategic planning and implementation.”

The Massachusetts Housing and Shelter Alliance is a public policy advocacy organization with the singular mission of ending homelessness in the Commonwealth. Founded in 1988 by a dedicated group of “first responders” working with unsheltered adults in Greater Boston, MHSA initiates solutions to move people out of crisis to permanence.

MHSA membership includes 88 organizations serving homeless individuals across the state. These agencies have created over 250 programs which provide permanent housing; transitional programs; emergency shelter; outreach, assessment, and treatment programs; health services; day programs; employment and housing placement programs; economic development opportunities; and homeless self-advocacy.

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