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LEGISLATURE TO TAKE UP FOSTER CARE REFORMS

State Senator Stan Rosenberg (D-Amherst), President Pro Tem of the Massachusetts Senate and member of the Legislature's Foster Kid Caucus, announced today that a legislative committee has approved a bill to strengthen the protections of children in the care of the Department of Social Services.

The bill, S-110, An Act Relative to the Protection and Care of Children in the Department of Social Services, is based on legislation Rosenberg wrote last year. It was approved by the Joint Committee on Children, Families and Persons with Disabilities and will now go to the full House and Senate. Senator Karen Spilka, chairwoman of the committee, is the bill's chief sponsor. Rosenberg is chief Senate co-sponsor of the bill.

"This bill would help the Department of Social Services address many of the lapses in the care the Commonwealth currently provides to our most vulnerable children," Rosenberg said. "I'm looking forward to working with my colleagues in both the House and Senate to see these policies carried out."

The bill would require DSS to:

- Coordinate and assure that all children in foster care receive medical, dental and mental health services;
- Recruit more foster parents in Massachusetts;
- Search for any relative or other adult person for a child who enters the foster care system;
- Inform the relative of the option to provide care for the child and the possibility of adopting the child;

(more)

- Find any sibling or half sibling of the child and place them together if it is appropriate;
- Report annually on residential foster care placements (including cost) in the Commonwealth;
- Pay foster care, adoptive and guardianship families a daily rate as it is set by the US Department of Agriculture, subject to appropriation;
- Report annually on the amounts expended to provide this care and the estimated cost to implement an annual adjustment to the rate set by the US Department of Agriculture;
- Work with the Executive Office of Public Safety and police departments to ensure that children whose parents are taken into custody are protected and cared for by developing policies and procedures and including these policies in all future trainings;
- Medically screen all children who enter the foster care system (includes medical, dental and mental health screening);
- Establish a medical advisory board to locate doctors who would help with this medical screening.

The bill would also allow children the right to change their birth certificates back to their biological name if their adoption from DSS is interrupted. The bill also details the guidelines DSS must follow in all end of life decisions for children in DSS custody.