

**Press Release
From the Office of
State Representative
Gale D. Candaras**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**MASSACHUSETTS' CERVICAL CANCER COMMISSION CHAIRWOMAN
URGES WOMEN TO KNOW THEIR HPV STATUS**

WILBRAHAM, MA – Representative Gale D. Candaras (D-Wilbraham), Chair of the Massachusetts Special Commission on Cervical Cancer, urges all women to learn their "HPV" status. "HPV" stands for "human papilloma virus," which causes cervical cancer. According to American Cancer Society estimates, approximately 10,000 women nationwide will be diagnosed with cervical cancer in 2006 and 4,000 women will die. Worldwide, cervical cancer kills millions of women, almost as many women as breast cancer. In the Commonwealth, nearly 100 women will perish from the disease this year.

"I once thought I knew everything I needed to know about cervical cancer until Women in Government, the non-profit, Washington-based organization for women in public service, invited me to a conference on the subject. The conference proved to be an extraordinary opportunity. Most importantly, I learned that what women do not know about cervical cancer is killing them," Candaras said.

Researchers discovered that certain strains of HPV cause cervical cancer. Many women are exposed and test positive for HPV at some point in their lives and most women shed the virus within several years of exposure. However, thousands of women unknowingly remain HPV positive, increasing their risk of developing cervical cancer. The 60 year old technology of the PAP smear yields a high number of false results both positive and negative. Women with "false positives" are put through the stress and expense of a second test. Women with "false negatives" are at risk of undiagnosed cervical cancer. One of the leaders in the movement, Christine Baze, is a young pop singer who almost lost her life as a result of undetected cervical cancer. Representative Candaras invited Baze to the state house to tell her story at a cervical cancer awareness forum. Baze told the audience she "did everything right." She took good care of herself and got annual PAP smears. Yet, she went undiagnosed. A hysterectomy and chemotherapy saved her life. (For Christine's story, go to www.popsmeat.org.)

Candaras said that a diagnosis of cervical cancer need not be a death sentence. "Cervical cancer is the most treatable and preventable of the gynecological cancers when detected early. A positive HPV test is, however, an important indicator for more frequent screenings". Early detection leads to complete cure in almost all cervical cancer cases, which makes the use of the new DNA based test for cervical cancer so important. When

used in conjunction with the PAP smear, the DNA based test makes early detection of cervical cancer possible in almost all cases. Women should ask their gynecologists whether this test is appropriate for them.

Working with Women in Government, Candaras spearheaded an effort that now ranks Massachusetts as a national leader in the fight. In 2004 she and her colleagues passed legislation creating a Special Commission on Cervical Cancer, becoming only the second state in the nation to do so.

As the Chair of the Commission, Candaras has worked closely with public health experts, physicians and pharmaceutical companies to find ways to raise public awareness about HPV and about the new technologies that bring with them so much hope for the future Candaras said, "Know your HPV status!" is the battle cry adopted by the Commission. "So much more remains to be done and we are going to hit the ground running. In late June, we began a local initiative with Baystate Medical to target some of the poorest women in Massachusetts," she said.

Today, those engaged in the fight are closing in on their target. Not only is a DNA based test available to supplement the 60 year old technology of the PAP smear, but now, a new vaccine has also been developed and as of June 8, 2006, it was approved by the federal Food and Drug Administration for use by women ages 9 through 26 years old. On June 22, the vaccine was made available to physicians across the country. The vaccine is believed to be efficacious in eradicating other preventable and treatable diseases and clinical trials are under way, which may also lead to FDA approval of the vaccine for men as well.

With the passing of the halfway mark for 2006, so too have nearly 2,000 women nationwide succumbed to cervical cancer. "There is no time to waste," said Candaras. "We urge women to take control of their health and their lives. Know your HPV status. Consult your gynecologist about the appropriateness and reassurance of a DNA-based, HPV test at your next annual exam. Encourage women you know to do the same. By spreading the word about cervical cancer, its prevention, treatment and cure we can together eradicate this deadly disease."

For more information or if you have any questions, contact either office of State Representative Gale Candaras by writing to P.O. Box 937, Wilbraham, MA 01095, the State House, Room 478, Boston, MA 02133, or by calling (413) 599-4785 or (617) 722-2520. You may also e-mail her at Gale.Candaras@state.ma.us. Please include in the subject line of the e-mail: "Cervical Cancer."