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CANDARAS AND COLLEAGUES NET \$500,000 FOR SPRINGFIELD AREA CHILDREN
“Open Wide” Oral Health Pilot Project to Serve Thousands of Hampden County Children

BOSTON—State Representative Gale D. Candaras (D-Wilbraham) secured final approval yesterday for a pilot program that will ensure every Springfield area child has seen a dentist at least once before starting kindergarten. Candaras spearheaded the effort that lead House and Senate leaders to incorporate \$500,000 in the fiscal year 2007 budget for the “Open Wide” Oral Health Project to be administered by the Springfield based non-profit organization Partners for a Healthier Community. Legislators voted unanimously yesterday to override Governor Romney’s veto of the Program.

The “Open-Wide” program will begin in Springfield with a county-wide expansion planned by year three. The goal is to serve approximately 30,000 of the area’s neediest children and make sure every preschooler receives appropriate dental care before starting kindergarten.

The program will provide oral health screenings, preventative measures (fluoride varnishes) and referrals for additional oral health care to all preschool children from birth through five years old; providing education and training to parents and caregivers; and implementing oral health curriculum and brushing times into existing early education and care settings.

Dr. Frank Robinson, executive director of Partners for a Healthier Community said, “Representative Gale Candaras’ legislative sponsorship of the Hampden County “Open-Wide” Oral Health Pilot Project provides a unique opportunity for child advocates, educators, health providers and dentists to form partnerships that will eliminate barriers to accessing services faced by low income families with preschool children. Early childhood caries is a public health problem affecting very young children

almost as soon as their first teeth erupt. In severe cases pediatric dental disease may require hospital treatment. In Hampden County too many very young children do not have access to preventive dentistry, particularly children in rural settings, those with special needs and low income children,” Robinson said.

“I am happy to work with Dr. Robinson and the Partners for a Healthier Community in bringing this critical initiative to Springfield. It is our sincere hope that the ‘Open-Wide’ pilot project will not only be a success story for Hampden County, but become the model statewide to ensure that no child starts school without appropriate dental care,” Candaras said. “A special thanks also needs to go to my colleagues from across the Commonwealth for their support, particularly the House Chairwoman of the House Oral Health Caucus, Representative Kathleen Teahan. This is a program I am sure many colleagues wanted to bring to their communities, but they recognized that the need is greatest in Springfield where the rate of dental carries in young children is 40%, double the national average,” Candaras said.

She also thanked these cosponsors for their support of the “Open-Wide” legislation: House Members: Thomas Petrolati (D-Ludlow), Sean Curran (D-Springfield), Michael Kane (D-Holyoke), Cheryl Coakley-Rivera (D-Springfield), Mary Rogeness (R-Longmeadow), John Scibak (D-South Hadley), Todd Smola (R-Palmer), Benjamin Swan (D-Springfield), Joseph Wagner (D-Chicopee) and James Welch (D-West Springfield). “Their support was critical,” Candaras said.