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**ADVOCATES AND LEGISLATORS LAUNCH YOUTH  
SUBSTANCE ABUSE PREVENTION PROJECT**

**Boston, MA (July 16, 2015)** - Legislators, advocates, and community members gathered at the State House today to launch the *Addiction Free Futures Project*. The project, led by the Children's Mental Health Campaign, is focused on preventing substance abuse by expanding screenings and early intervention to reach adolescents across the state.

The cost-effective, evidence-based tool called Screening, Brief Intervention, and Referral to Treatment (SBIRT), helps identify alcohol or drug use and guides follow-up counseling and treatment if a problem exists. Screening and counseling are well-established best practices for helping young people avoid substance use and is endorsed by the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) and National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA).

“The future prosperity of Massachusetts depends on its ability to foster the health and well-being of the next generation – but too often drug and alcohol misuse among young people is overlooked or ignored, rather than being treated like the health issue it is,” said Mary McGeown, President and CEO of the Massachusetts Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, a member of the project's leadership team. “When we have honest conversations with young people about alcohol and drugs, we help them stay on the path to a bright future – or get back on track if they need help.”

Jack Reilly of Yarmouth supports the effort because he watched his own daughter, who is in long term recovery from opioid addiction, struggle from a young age.

“This disease can happen anywhere. It does not discriminate. We need to focus on prevention to make sure all kids and families have the support they need,” Jack Reilly said. “By reaching kids early we can stop problems before they start. Strategies like this will save money, but more importantly, they will save lives.”

The project launch was followed by a hearing on H.1796 and S. 284 *An act relative to preventing adolescent substance abuse by expanding SBIRT*, co-sponsored by Representative Kahn and Senator Flanagan, before the Joint Committee on Mental Health and Substance Abuse. The legislation, if passed,

would add screening for substance use to the list of health screenings conducted in public schools across the state. The committee heard from a number of panels, including health care providers, advocates, youths and parents, about the efficacy of SBIRT and the need to expand screenings beyond the eight school districts where it is currently being used.

Senator Flanagan (D-Worcester and Middlesex), one the lead sponsors of the legislation, expressed her support of the project saying, “I’ve seen the toll that substance abuse, and particularly opioid addiction, has taken on my community and communities throughout the state. We need to make smart investments in prevention and early intervention to stem the tide of addiction in our state.”

“Making evidence-based substance abuse prevention accessible to children throughout the Commonwealth is crucial,” said Representative Kay Khan, who sponsored the event and the bill. “Schools are an ideal setting for this work because they are already equipped with highly skilled nurses who can be trained to use these preventative tools to establish a meaningful dialogue with students about substance use.”

### **About the Addiction Free Futures Project**

The Addiction Free Futures Project is funded through a three-year, \$2.5 million grant from the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation. The project’s leadership team includes: the Massachusetts Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (MSPCC); Parent/Professional Advocacy League (PPAL); Massachusetts Organization for Addiction Recovery (MOAR); Learn to Cope; Massachusetts Screening, Brief Intervention and Referral to Treatment – Training & Technical Assistance (MASBIRT-TTA) ; Heath Care for All (HCFA); HOPE Coalition of Worcester (Healthy Options for Prevention and Education); Students Against Destructive Decisions, MA Chapter (SADD); Rediscovery, Justice Resource Inc; and The Clay Center for Young Healthy Minds.

### **About the Children’s Mental Health Campaign (CMHC):**

The CMHC is an innovative children’s mental health system reform effort led by five partner organizations – Massachusetts Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, Children’s Hospital Boston, Parent/Professional Advocacy League, Health Care For All, and Health Law Advocates – and uniting more than 140 organizations in mental health, healthcare law, child welfare, family advocacy, and health policy into a dynamic coalition working together for systemic change.