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**STATE BOARD OF MEDICINE RESPONDS TO
TWO NATIONAL REPORTS ON DOCTOR DISCIPLINE**

BOSTON –The Federation of State Medical Boards (FSMB) released its Annual Summary of 2001 Board Actions on April 9, 2002, a compilation of data on physician licensure and disciplinary activities from 70 medical boards. Following the release of the FSMB report was the annual ranking of State Medical Boards across the country, released today by Dr. Sidney Wolfe of *Public Citizen*, a national public interest group.

The FSMB report does not rank the performance of State Medical Boards; instead, it releases a compilation of data summarizing physician discipline by State. The Public Citizen report uses the FSMB data to create its rankings. Massachusetts placed 27th in the nation in the number of disciplinary actions taken in 2001 against physicians. In 2000, Massachusetts ranked 45th in the nation.

In response to these figures, Board of Registration in Medicine Chair, Peter N. Madras, M.D., said, “We are very pleased with this year’s result in that it is one more measure of success for the Massachusetts Board of Registration in Medicine. In 2000 and 2001, the agency focused on accomplishing a reduction in the huge backlog of consumer complaints. Today, both the open caseload and the average age of cases have been cut in half. In 2001, we built upon the success of 2000 to further streamline the complaint resolution process. We also developed plans for meaningful technological enhancements to better serve the public and physicians.” Dr. Madras added, “On behalf of the entire Board, I want to laud our staff for an outstanding performance. Our agency operates with approximately half the funding of comparable state boards across the country. The staff’s performance is even more impressive in light of this funding disparity.”

Nancy Achin Sullivan, the Executive Director for the Board of Registration in Medicine, stated that the Board has other policies and programs in place that continue to improve health care quality that are not reflected in the disciplinary numbers. “Our Patient Care Assessment (PCA) Committee identifies and corrects breakdowns in the checks and balances of health care quality assurance programs in hospitals; our Board’s Licensing Division prevents substandard physicians from attaining licensure in this state; and our nationally recognized Physician Profiles Program discloses to the public any disciplinary action that is taken against a physician’s license.”

“Although we have concerns about the methodology used by Dr. Wolfe in determining ‘rankings’ of state medical boards, we do use the results to measure our own performance over time. We believe that Dr. Wolfe’s methodology is skewed in favor of states with smaller physician populations,” Sullivan said. Massachusetts’ improvement in the underlying data between 2000 and 2001 improved by nearly 78% (from 2.54 to 4.51 in the FSMB annual statistical reports). Sullivan pointed out that the most important factor in the long-term success of the Board is adequate funding, which she notes, was highlighted by Dr. Wolfe as a key issue. The *Public Citizen* report identified “...adequate funding (all money from license fees going to fund board activities instead of going into the state treasury for general purposes)...” as its most significant recommendation for states. Currently, 40% of licensing fees are retained by the Board and 60% revert to the General Fund. “We are working with the legislature to allow 100% fee retention by

the Board. Such a structure would bring Massachusetts into alignment with the majority of medical boards throughout the country,” she added.

The Massachusetts Board of Registration in Medicine licenses more than 30,000 physicians, osteopaths and acupuncturists. The Board was created to protect the public health and safety by setting standards for the practice of medicine and ensuring that doctors who practice in the Commonwealth are appropriately qualified and competent. The Board investigates complaints, holds hearings, and determines sanctions. More information about the Board is available at www.massmedboard.org.
