



CONTACT:

Ann L. Hartstein, 617-763-1396,
AHartstein@MAOAmass.org
Massachusetts Association of Older Americans
Laura Henze Russell, 617-287-7313, 617-429-6691
laura.russell@umb.edu
Gerontology Institute, UMass Boston

For Immediate Release/February 13, 2007

**LEGISLATIVE CAUCUS ON OLDER CITIZENS CONCERNS TO HEAR ABOUT NEW
TOOL ON ELDERS' LIVING COSTS IN MASSACHUSETTS, HOW TO ADDRESS THEM
PUBLIC INVITED**

Boston, MA – To inform legislators' understanding of how to help elders struggling to make ends meet in Massachusetts, the Gerontology Institute of the John W. McCormack Graduate School of Policy Studies, University of Massachusetts Boston, will brief the Legislative Caucus on Older Citizens' Concerns Caucus on a new tool, *The Elder Economic Security Standard for Massachusetts*, on Thursday, February 15 at 11:30 a.m. in Hearing Room B-2 at the MA State House.

"The Elder Economic Security Standard defines the amount of income that is required for older adults to pay for their basic expenses in each county in the Commonwealth," says co-author Laura Henze Russell, Director of the Elder Standard Project at the Gerontology Institute. "Our research shows that an elder living alone in Massachusetts needs between \$14,700 and \$28,100 annually to cover basic living costs depending on housing, health and geography. For elder couples, the need is \$21,400 to \$39,100."

"I'm pleased that the Elder Caucus is sponsoring this presentation," said Caucus Co-Chair Representative Richard Ross. "The findings of the Elder Standard will solidify what we see in our communities and the struggles we hear about from our constituents. It's a starting point to developing comprehensive solutions."

"The Elder Economic Security Standard provides insight into the costs of housing and healthcare for our seniors and is a useful tool to determine our future legislative and budgetary priorities," stated Caucus Co-Chair Representative Barbara L'Italien.

The Elder Economic Security Standard for Massachusetts was developed by the Gerontology Institute at the University of Massachusetts Boston, with input from a 35-member Advisory Committee in Massachusetts, and Wider Opportunities for Women. The MA Association of Older Americans (MAOA) is guiding the implementation of the Elder Standard in Massachusetts.

A panel, including Laura Henze Russell, of UMass Boston Gerontology Institute, Ann L. Hartstein, of Massachusetts Association of Older Americans (MAOA), Chris Widelo of AARP, Al Norman of MassHomeCare and Marion G. Aspinall, of the MA Elder Affairs' SHINE program will discuss the findings in the Elder Standard report, which highlights the high costs of housing, health care and long term care, and propose action strategies to shape the future economic security of elders.

-more-

According to the findings in the Elder Standard:

1. Single elders who live alone, and elder couples, who live in Massachusetts cannot make ends meet at the poverty level (\$9,800 for one, \$13,200 for two) or at the average Social Security payment (\$12,024 for retiree, \$19,776 for couple) without subsidies for housing and health care.
2. Massachusetts' high housing costs put a heavy burden on elder households, from 33 to 52 percent of total expenses, depending on their community and living circumstances.
3. Health care costs are the second largest expense for Massachusetts elders, who need to purchase full supplemental health and prescription drug coverage to Medicare. Health care expenses can range from 10 to 30 percent of total expenses.
4. Some elders who are currently making ends meet face uncertainty if their life circumstances change, such as losing a spouse or experiencing a change in health status.
5. The need for long-term care can more than double an elder's expenses, significantly increasing the income needed to meet basic needs.

“Our goal with this Standard is to have it serve as a catalyst for new programs and policies positively impacting elder here in Massachusetts,” says Ann L. Hartstein, Executive Director of MAOA. “We realize that when elders have to decide between paying their rent or buying their food or paying for medicine, we have to do something. We have to develop sound policy and strong programs her in Massachusetts and the Elder Standard is our framework to begin.”

“Everyone knows Massachusetts has a high cost of living,” says Laura Henze Russell, Director of the Elder Standard Project at UMass Boston, “it is time to understand its impact on seniors, who raised their families, built our communities, and want to be able to live at home.” The report raises new questions to address, she says. “How many seniors have incomes below the budget required to adequately cover living costs in their communities? How do income limits for elder support programs compare to today's costs?” The Gerontology Institute at the John. W. McCormack Graduate School of Policy Studies at UMass Boston and MAOA are working to secure resources for this effort.

The Massachusetts Association of Older Americans leads the Massachusetts Elder Economic Security Initiative, which is a part of a national campaign led by Wider Opportunities for Women (WOW). The Massachusetts Elder Economic Security Initiative illustrates the basic costs seniors face and how their financial security is affected when their life circumstances change. It is calculated by county. The MA Elder Standard was calculated using the WOW-GI National Elder Economic Security Standard developed by the Gerontology Institute at the University of Massachusetts-Boston (GI) and WOW. The Elder Economic Security Standard will be calculated over the next year in additional states as part of the Wider Opportunities for Women's National Elder Economic Security Initiative. Massachusetts is the first state to release the Elder Standard.

The Elder Economic Standard Initiative builds on the work of the Gerontology Institute at the University of Massachusetts to develop and pilot a new measure of elder economic security for Boston funded by The Boston Foundation, and for Massachusetts supported by the Retirement Research Foundation, The Boston Foundation, and the Charles H. Farnsworth Trust.