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PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

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Senator Gobi and Colleagues Adopt Joint Rules, Vote to Close Budget Deficit

(**Boston, MA**) - Today the Senator Anne M. Gobi (D-Spencer) and her colleagues adopted a new set of joint rules that will govern the work of joint legislative committees in the state legislature. Major changes to the rules include an amendment that would allow Senators to exec Senate bills out of Joint Committees to the full Senate without consent of their House counterparts. This measure would prevent Senate bills from being stuck in committee, where Senate members are outnumbered.

“Today’s votes were critical to deal with the budget issues in a timely manner and to adopt rules that will assist each Senator to ensure that the committee process is a true partnership that will benefit our constituents,” said Senator Gobi.

The new rules reflects some significant changes including bringing a more open and transparent process and streamlining how the committees will function for the upcoming legislative session. For instance, joint committee votes will be posted on the Legislature’s website within 48 hours, late filed bills referred to a committee by one branch must be referred within 60 days by the other branch, the deadline for filing conference committee reports has been moved from 8:00 pm to 5:00 pm., and the deadline to report bills out of committee in even numbered years has been moved from mid-March to mid-January.

“With the adoption of the joint rules today, the Senate continues to build on my promise of a more transparent and open process,” said Senate President Stan Rosenberg (D-Amherst). “These new rules will help the members of the Senate move the agenda forward and I look forward to a productive legislative session.”

Once adopted by the Senate and agreed upon with the House of Representatives, the rules will govern the procedural workings of each joint legislative committee. There are 27 joint committees in the Massachusetts Legislature.

After vigorous debate and numerous members expressing their concerns over the proposed cuts to human services and the MBTA, the Senate voted today to close the \$768 million budget deficit for the fiscal year 2015 budget. The Senate authorized the transfer of excess capital gains receipts to the General Fund and authorized a corporate tax amnesty program through the Department of Revenue. In addition, the Senate did not adopt the Governor's request to unilaterally manage the MassHealth program without oversight of the legislative branch.

“The Senate Ways and Means Committee has had to make hard choices to close the Fiscal Year 2015 budget gap, including cuts to services provided by our health and human services and transportation agencies. Governor Baker has assured us that these cuts will not have an impact on MBTA services, and in light of the recent struggles by the MBTA, we certainly hope that is correct,” said Senate Ways and Means Chair Karen E. Spilka (D-Ashland). “In addition, the Committee chose not to include a section that would expand the Governor's power to make unilateral changes to MassHealth benefits. We will closely monitor the impact of all cuts moving forward, as we work with the House and the Administration to identify ways to enhance the state's fiscal condition while lifting all citizens across the Commonwealth.”

The bill was filed by Governor Baker on February 6th and voted on by the House on February 11th. The budget fix bill moves next to the Governor for signing.

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