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PRESS RELEASE

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ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE ADVANCES GMO LABELING LEGISLATION

BOSTON - State Senator Anne M. Gobi (D-Spencer), Senate Chair of the Joint Committee on the Environment, Natural Resources and Agriculture has announced the favorable report of legislation regulating the labeling of genetically modified organisms (GMO) in food products. The report was passed unanimously by members of the committee.

“A consumer’s right to know is of paramount importance as we continue to work with the medical community to understand the health impacts of GMOs,” said Gobi. “The committee was able to work with so many concerned constituents and advocacy groups as we strive to make sure consumers have the best information about the foods that they are purchasing and consuming.”

GMO food products are foods that contain one or more ingredients that have been produced with genetic engineering. Typically, crops that are genetically modified are done so to change or add a trait that does not exist naturally, whether it is to defend against the elements, avoid the need for pesticides, to boost a cosmetic aspect of the plant or any number of other reasons to increase the value of the plant.

This legislation was introduced due to concern from the public about which foods they are eating are genetically modified and which are not. Aside from buying all organic food, consumers have little to no ability to know the difference. While there are some in the medical society that have expressed concerns over unanswered questions regarding the potential long-term impact on human health from a diet consisting of GMO food, the purpose of this legislation is to simply provide consumers with the information so they can make their own informed decisions.

This bill establishes a mandatory GMO label within Massachusetts that will go into effect upon meeting the criteria of a two-pronged trigger:

- 1) Five other northeastern states, with one bordering MA, must enact a mandatory labeling law and;

2) The collective population of these states must be 20 million according to the 2010 census.

The states that qualify under this trigger are Connecticut, Maine, New Hampshire, New York, Rhode Island, and Vermont. Connecticut, Maine, and Vermont have already passed such legislation.

The bill institutes a \$1,000 per day violation to someone who knowingly violates the provision of the law. Additionally, the bill bans the labeling and advertising of products as being natural, naturally made, all natural, etc. if they are produced with GMOs. Items that will be exempted from labeling are alcoholic beverages, food not packaged for retail sale or served at a restaurant, and farm products sold a farmers market or farm stand

The legislation now advances to the House of Representatives for consideration.

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