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PRESS RELEASE

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Gobi and Day Appointed to Chair Special Commission of Qualified Examiners

BOSTON – **Senator Anne M. Gobi (D-Spencer)** and **Representative Michael S. Day (D-Stoneham)** were pleased to announce their appointment to Co-Chairs the special commission reviewing the qualifications and scope of practice for qualified examiners in Massachusetts. The commission was established through an amendment, submitted by Senator Gobi, to the Criminal Justice Reform Bill passed earlier this session- and will be tasked with reviewing the process which determines whether or not an individual meets the criteria for a Sexually Dangerous Person. This amendment arose from the release of convicted rapist, Paul Shanley, a Boston priest notorious for his role in the Catholic Church’s sex abuse scandal who was convicted in 2005 but subsequently released last year after examiners deemed him to no longer be a threat to society.

“I am pleased to co-chair this important commission,” commented Senator Gobi, “There have been too many instances where the safety of children has been jeopardized because of inconsistent assessments. Protecting children is my major focus.”

“I am honored to join Senator Gobi in co-chairing this commission,” said Representative Day. “The review of this area of the law is another important part of the reforms we passed earlier this year as we continue to modernize and improve our criminal justice system.”

Authorized under Section 226 of Chapter 69 of the Acts of 2018, the special commission is empowered with reviewing the educational and experiential requirements of qualified examiners, as well as reviewing clinical standards, practices and risk assessment criteria used by qualified examiners in conducting an assessment of sexually dangerous persons. The special commission shall:

1. Determine whether the requirements, standards and practices for qualified examiners reflect the current scientific research and best practice evidence in the field;
2. Make recommendations for the revision of current professional requirements, clinical standards, practices and risk assessment criteria; and
3. Make recommendations needed to support effective practices among qualified examiners and to maximally ensure public safety.

Prior to this legislation's passing, law only required Qualified Examiners to be licensed psychiatrists or psychologists with two years of experience in the diagnosis and general treatment of sexual offenders. However, sex offender-specific risk assessment demands specialized knowledge and training, especially given the high stakes involved with getting this important task right. This legislation directs the special commission to determine whether the current Qualified Examiner standards and practices need to be revised in order to support effective practices and, most importantly, ensure public safety.

"We are grateful for Senator Gobi's leadership on this important issue," said Dr. Laurie Guidry, public policy director for the Massachusetts Association for the Treatment of Sexual Abusers (MATSA). "She has opened the door to bringing the most current research and evidence-based best practices on the assessment of sexual dangerousness. Based on this research, a task force will be able to update the guidelines for qualified examiners as they evaluate sex offenders returning to the community. We are confident that this change will help make the communities in Massachusetts safer for everyone."

The commission must submit a report with recommendations, together with drafts of legislation to carry its recommendations into effect, with the Clerks of the House of Representatives and the Senate no later than December 31, 2018.

For more information, please contact Senator Gobi's office at 617-722-1540.

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