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John Bonifaz, Candidate for Massachusetts Secretary of State, Issues Statement on Springfield Voting Rights Investigation

SPRINGFIELD, MA - Last Friday, the Department of Justice (DOJ) confirmed that it is investigating the City of Springfield for possible violations of the Voting Rights Act. The DOJ has also been involved in similar efforts in Boston, Lawrence and Lowell over the last year - including filing a lawsuit against Boston in 2005.

Voting rights leader **John Bonifaz**, Democratic candidate for Secretary of State, issued the following statement today addressing the DOJ's investigation of Springfield:

"The confirmation of the Bush Justice Department's investigation of Springfield is the latest example of the need for a pro-active Secretary of State who will work collaboratively with each jurisdiction to assure that these voting rights cases never come to fruition.

"One month ago today, I issued a statement calling attention to US Justice Department investigations in Boston, Lawrence, Lowell and Springfield. At the time, Secretary Galvin told the State House News Service that I was saying 'things that aren't true.' When asked about the investigations he said, 'I don't know who he's talking to.'

"Not only did he admit to being unaware of a major development in one of our cities that has now been confirmed, but he has again shown a significant lack of leadership in investigating these allegations himself.

"As Secretary, I will ensure that every jurisdiction is complying with federal and state anti-discrimination law with respect to elections by providing the resources and assistance needed in our cities and towns. I will not rely on the Bush Justice Department to enforce the Voting Rights Act. Instead, it must be the Secretary of State's office that leads the way in enforcing this landmark voting rights law. Voters must be able to participate in the electoral process free of discrimination and I will be vigilant in demanding that.

"The right to vote is universal; it does not speak only one language. We must ensure that language minorities are provided bilingual ballots and proper assistance at the polls. This is why I was involved in trying to right the wrongs committed in Lawrence in 2005 when thousands of Latino voters were told they were on the inactive voter list days before the municipal election last November. Despite a federal judge demanding that the city reach out to these voters and inform them that they could still vote, Lawrence had its lowest voter turnout in 30 years.

"Massachusetts should be the national model for our democracy, not playing defense to the Bush Justice Department."

For over a decade, Bonifaz has been a powerful voice and dedicated leader working with people throughout Massachusetts and across the country to protect the right to vote, demand a full recount in Ohio, overhaul the nation's campaign finance system and broaden citizen participation in the democratic process.

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