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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
November 4, 2016

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Representative Smola Reflects on Session Accomplishments

BOSTON – Representative Todd M. Smola (R-Warren, Ranking Member, Committee on Ways & Means) recently congratulated his colleagues in the Massachusetts Legislature for completing a productive 2015-2016 legislative session. Representative Smola completed the two-year session with a perfect voting record which included the passage of multiple landmark bills. The Legislature passed major bills related to substance addiction; a statewide “Stolen Valor Act” to prosecute individuals who falsely claim to be a veteran or military honor recipient; an historic pay equity law designed to prevent gender-based wage discrimination in the workplace; and legislation reforming the state’s public records law for the first time in over 40 years.

“I am very proud of the Legislature’s achievements this session,” said Representative Smola. “As a member of the Ways and Means Committee, I was particularly encouraged by our commitment to increase local aid and education funding.”

This session the Legislature took up various pieces of legislation in response to rapid shifts in economic, environmental and regulatory landscapes, including a landmark energy bill. The recently-signed law will diversify Massachusetts’ energy portfolio and ensure a reliable electric grid by replacing older power sources that are due to retire. These measures will protect the Commonwealth’s ratepayers while enhancing clean energy and securing a more sustainable future. The law supports 2,800 megawatts (MWs) of clean energy - the largest amount the Legislature has included in any single bill - and requires distribution companies to conduct solicitations for 1,600 MWs of offshore wind.

During the 2015-2016 legislative session, Representative Smola reinforced his commitment to the communities within the First Hampden District by voting in support of significant local aid increases. Over the last two years, Chapter 70 education aid has increased by \$227.3 million, bringing the statewide total to a record \$4.6 billion. It

provides \$55 in per-pupil-aid, more than doubling the FY16 expenditure, and fully funds the Special Education Circuit Breaker. Over the same time period, Unrestricted General Government Aid – which helps communities pay for a variety of essential municipal programs – was increased by \$76.1 million, to a total of \$1.02 billion.

Representative Smola also recorded votes in support of an \$800 million municipal road and bridge bill to help cities and towns address critical infrastructure needs, as well as a municipal modernization bill designed to help streamline municipal operations, provide greater financial flexibility to cities and towns, and improve the delivery of essential services at the local level.

“Representative Smola continues to be a strong advocate for fiscal responsibility and accountability to the state’s taxpayers, while effectively championing the needs of his district,” said Representative Jones. “The residents of the First Hampden District are very fortunate to have him representing them and fighting for their interests on Beacon Hill.”

The 2014 and 2016 substance addiction laws are designed to complement each other, providing both proactive and responsive approaches. For the first time in Massachusetts’ history, the 2014 law made it mandatory for insurers to cover detox and stabilization. The 2016 law enhances intervention, prevention and education efforts, and includes a new framework to evaluate and treat patients presenting with an apparent overdose. This practice, which reflects research that voluntary treatment is more effective than involuntary, must be covered by insurance.

For the first time in more than 40 years, the Legislature updated the Commonwealth’s public records law. This House-led initiative enhances accountability measures and creates a standardized timeframe and process in which requested documents must be produced. It also ensures that judicial remedies can be sought. In another effort to increase transparency, the Legislature passed three bills related to campaign finance and disclosure regulations which will update and strengthen existing laws.

This session the House also took measures to build upon Massachusetts’ legacy as a leader in civil rights and social equality. The Commonwealth’s nationally-lauded pay equity law provides tools to help ensure that men and women receive equitable compensation for comparable work. This law represents a consensus-based effort to ensure that the legislation would be practical, effective and sustainable.

This session the Legislature also raised the solar net-metering cap and created a long-term roadmap for the continued growth of solar power in the Commonwealth. These updates will provide a stable framework that will better protect the Commonwealth’s ratepayers while supporting the growth of the solar industry in a cost-effective manner.

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