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For Immediate Release
October 2, 2007

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MASSACHUSETTS BILL WOULD DRIVE UP TEXTBOOK PRICES

Publishing industry representatives testify before Mass. Higher Education Committee on information transparency and learning materials that are helping students succeed

Washington, D.C.—The Massachusetts State Joint Committee on Higher Education today held a hearing on House Bill 1200, legislation supported by the Massachusetts Public Interest Research Group (MassPIRG). Bruce Hildebrand, Executive Director for Higher Education for the Association of American Publishers (AAP), issued a statement on the negative effects this bill would have on textbook prices and student success. Mr. Hildebrand said:

“Across the country, state PIRGs have been unsuccessful in their legislative efforts to regulate the textbook market and publishers’ practices. HB 1200 is yet another version of what the PIRGs have been peddling -- a call for transparency that is already there. If passed, HB 1200 and legislation like it would result in higher textbook prices for students who are already struggling to meet the growing cost of college.

“Publishers already provide the transparency advocated by the bill. They go to great lengths to make certain faculties have access to pricing and product information through their marketing representatives or online. And thanks to the Internet, students and parents also have this information at their fingertips. Armed with a textbook’s ISBN (International Standard Book Number) or, simply, a text’s title and author, a quick Internet search brings up hundreds of sources listing price and product information. Yet, this bill would require publishers to provide the same product information to instructors over and over again. Doing this would be a waste of faculty time, add costs to the system and drive up the price of textbooks.

“The legislation also attacks the ‘bundling’ of textbooks with helpful learning materials and technologies. Today’s colleges and universities are being asked to accommodate a more diverse student population with a broader range of preparedness and skills than ever before. To meet each student’s needs, an overwhelming majority (86 percent) of instructors require or recommend supplemental materials to better ensure their students succeed. In fact, faculties require a full complement of supplements in a variety of formats, including Web-based and digital technologies. To that end, publishers work closely with faculty to customize learning materials that are specifically designed for integrated use in the classroom. Unfortunately, the use of these materials would be severely limited if this bill passes, as written.”

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The Association of American Publishers (AAP) and its member publishers understand college students’ concerns about the cost of college, including textbook costs – and publishers have responded to these concerns by increasing

both the number of lower-cost options available to faculty and students and the kinds of materials available, such as custom textbooks and e-books. Publishers are committed to providing the best possible learning tools to help more students succeed in college. More facts are available at www.textbookfacts.org.