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CONTACT: Denis Kennedy
Director of Public Information
(617) 727-8352 / (800) 462-6273

1997-98 PAC activity up from previous period, according to OCPF study

Contributions by political action committees to state and county candidates in Massachusetts totaled just over \$2.1 million in the 1997-98 election cycle, an increase of 28 percent from two years ago, according to a study released today by the Office of Campaign and Political Finance.

The 1997-98 contribution total was an increase of about \$467,000 from the 1995-96 figure, which was the lowest total in a decade. Total PAC contributions for 1997-98 were the third highest of any two-year election cycle recorded by OCPF (the record was \$2.3 million in 1989-90). The two-year total exceeded \$2 million for the fourth time in the last decade, with 1995-96 the only exception.

Total PAC spending for 1997-98, which in addition to contributions included administrative costs and contributions to local and federal candidates, was \$3.9 million. That represents an increase of just under 2 percent from the previous period.

The latest election cycle also saw increases over 1995-96 in such categories as the number of PACs and the average contribution to a candidate, reversing a decline from the early 1990s.

The average PAC contribution to a candidate in 1997 was \$207, up \$7 from the all-time low in 1996, while the 1998 average was \$225. Nevertheless, the most recent averages were still less than those of the late 1980s and early 1990s, which were about \$50 higher. The drop was due partly to a change in the law in 1994 that cut the maximum PAC contribution to a candidate from \$1,000 to \$500.

After falling to a 12-year low in 1996, the number of PACs on file with OCPF started to increase in 1997 and 1998. OCPF recorded 303 PACs on file in 1998, the first

time in four years the number had exceeded 300 and an increase of more than 40 from 1996.

The decline in PAC activity in 1996 was due at least partly to the changes in the law that, in addition to the cut in the contribution limit, mandated the end of candidate-controlled PACs, the imposition of a monetary penalty for failing to file campaign finance reports on time, and more stringent organization requirements for PACs, all of which took effect in January 1995.

Some trends shown in previous studies were continued in the latest period: PACs still favored incumbents, Democrats and legislative candidates in their contribution activity. In addition, those who ultimately won their races in 1998 were more likely to have received PAC money.

As in the past, the list of top PACs according to total amounts contributed continued to be dominated by labor, business and professional groups. Labor organizations slightly increased their majority share of the Top 20 in the 1997-98 election cycle: labor accounted for 13 of the top 20 PACs for the period, up one from 1995-96..

The top PAC in terms of contributions reported in 1997-98 was the Retired Public Employees PAC, which reported giving \$70,300 to state and county candidates over the two-year period.

The figures in the study also include activity by 13 people's committees, which originally organize as PACs but may switch to people's committee status after six months. People's committees may only receive contributions from individuals, not to exceed \$108 annually, but may still give up to \$500 per candidate.

The study tracks contributions by PACs to candidates as reported by the PACs in reports filed with OCPF. The study does not take into account subsequent amendments by PACs, reflecting contributions that were returned or never cashed by candidates. Those in search of the exact amount received by an individual candidate from PACs should check the candidate's reports on file with OCPF.

A copy of the study is attached. Disclosure reports filed by PACs, candidates and all other committees reporting to OCPF are available for public inspection at the agency's office at Room 411, McCormack Building, One Ashburton Place, Boston.