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**For Immediate Release****May 30, 2007****Over 200 professionals and agencies from across the northeast meet to collaborate on the juvenile firesetting public safety issue.  
Creation of Juvenile Firesetting Task Force announced.**

Worcester, MA - On May 11, 2007, over 200 professionals and agencies from across Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Vermont, Connecticut, New Hampshire, Maine and New York met to learn more about the juvenile firesetting issue and to collaborate on how to address it. *The Northeast Juvenile Firesetting Conference: Pathways to Collaboration & Intervention* was jointly sponsored by the Massachusetts Department of Fire Services, the Massachusetts Association of Safety and Fire Educators and the Brandon School of Natick, MA.

State Fire Marshal, Stephen Coan, speaking during the luncheon shared, "One of the impediments to creating a statewide program for juvenile firesetting is that no single agency can address the problem on its own, and no single agency has had the resources to provide the necessary leadership." He added, "We need to bring all the stakeholders together", to develop a multi-agency approach."

Dr. Robert Kinscherff, J.D., Ph.D., Assistant Commissioner of the MA Department of Mental Health opened the conference with a summary of the development of treatment models over the past 20 years and an update on the current best practices in a talk entitled "*Child and Adolescent Firesetting: What We Know Now*".

During the luncheon, now former Commissioner, of the MA Department of Social Services Lewis H. Spence, spoke about the need for collaboration in addressing this problem. He noted that, with proper treatment, the recidivism rate for juvenile firesetters is very low.

This inaugural conference provided a unique opportunity for mental health, fire services, burn care, schools, social service and juvenile justice professionals to receive the most up-to-date information and best practice models for multi-disciplinary collaboration in responding to problem firesetting behavior. Attendees spent the day hearing from keynote speakers, participating in workshops that focused on various aspects of this national public safety issue which affects all communities and sharing ideas with their peers about ways to address juvenile firesetting.

Timothy M. Callahan, Executive Director of the Brandon School said of the conference, "I have never experienced such a coming together of all the agencies that need to work on the serious problem juvenile firesetting". He added, "to have the leaders and representatives from fire

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services, the district attorney's office, state police, social services, youth services, mental health, public schools, burn care and the state early education agency together to study and address this important issue is a giant step toward addressing this critical problem".

The main objective of the conference was to bring together all of the different disciplines involved in preventing, responding to, and treating juvenile firesetting behaviors. There were six workshops presented at the conference:

- *"Deciphering the Alphabets: Making Sense of the Mental Health World"*
- *"There's a Fire or Explosion in Your School!: Guidelines for Responding"*
- *"What's in an Assessment"*
- *"Firesetting Treatment and Intervention: Strategies and Resources"*
- *"What Parents and Families Should Know"*
- *"Fire Safety for Firesetting Kids"*

Workshop presenters included David Wilcox, Middlesex Juvenile Court Clinic; Captain Rick Tustin, Winchester Fire Department; Sgt. Paul Zipper, Ph.D. and Trooper Eric Gahagan of Massachusetts State Police- Fire and Explosion Investigation Unit; Charlie Guimond, Center School; Robert Stadolnik, Ed.D, FirePsych, Inc. and Brandon School; Erin Morrison of Shriners Burn Hospital; Tim Handorf, LICSW, Private Practice, Lt. John Egan, FireSmartKids; Paul Schwartzman, Consultant, State of New York.

#### **Juvenile Firesetting Task Force:**

It was announced at the conference that a task force will be created that includes members of all of the disciplines dealing with juvenile firesetting and other stakeholders, as well, to include insurance companies. The first meeting of the task force will be in September 2007 at the Brandon School Conference Center, Natick, MA. The objective of the task force is to develop a collaborative and unified system of responding to juvenile firesetters and to begin to identify funding sources to support this effort. Dr. Robert Stadolnik, an expert in these behaviors, said that "the Task Force will provide ongoing direction, planning and the support required to forge the types of partnerships necessary to respond to this national public safety issue".

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Northeast Juvenile Firesetting Conference is scheduled for May, 2008, in Worcester, MA.

For information on juvenile firesetting, visit the state Department of Fire Services website at [www.mass.gov/dfs](http://www.mass.gov/dfs). For more information about the conference or task force, please visit [www.brandonschool.org](http://www.brandonschool.org).

#### **About state Department of Fires Services (DFS):**

The State Fire Marshal heads the Department of Fire Services, the sole agency within state government responsible for overall coordination of fire service policy and operations. Within DFS is the *Massachusetts Firefighting Academy*, providing fire training to municipal fire service personnel. The mission of the Department of Fire Services is to provide the people of Massachusetts the ability to create safer communities through coordinated training, education, prevention, investigation, emergency response and leadership.

#### **About Brandon School:**

Since 1966, Brandon School and Residential Treatment Center, Inc. in Natick, MA has been providing services for troubled boys and their families. In addition to treatment and educational programs for a broad range of behavioral and emotional disorders, Brandon operates a

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specialized program for the intensive treatment of boys with firesetting behaviors and has recently pioneered a short-term residential assessment service, called a Rapid Firesetting Assessment, the only one of its kind in the country.

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