The Massachusetts survey of 51 randomly selected pharmacies in Massachusetts compared the prices of the nine most commonly prescribed medications to senior citizens (three of the drugs are the most widely prescribed to all consumers). Overall, the average retail price charged to Medicare beneficiaries without drug coverage was $191 versus $102 for the most favored customer, such as the Department of Veterans Affairs. Overcharges ranged from 72% for Lipitor, (cholesterol medication) to 174% for Pepcid (ulcer medication). The Massachusetts results are similar to those of 13 other surveys that the groups have conducted in ten other states.

"Almost 20% or, about 1.2 million Massachusetts residents, are at a disadvantage because they have no prescription drug insurance they have to pay out of pocket for their medications and they are charged more than double what the insured pay," said Deirdre Cummings, MASSPIRG’s Consumer Program Director. Congress should act to make prescription drugs more affordable, and states should pass legislation allowing them to negotiate lower drug prices for all consumers," she said.

"The study shows that if the Medicare program received the same price discount as the Veterans Department, the price of drugs to uninsured Medicare beneficiaries could be cut in half," said Frank Clemente, Director of Public Citizen’s Congress Watch. "Such a price cut would make Medicare drug coverage much more affordable for taxpayers and substantially reduce out-of-pocket costs for beneficiaries."

"Drug makers' sales volume will rise as prices fall, so lower prices need not hurt drug companies or their research," observed Professor Alan Sager, a health economist at the Boston University School of Public Health. Commenting at the report's release, he added, "The industry's extraordinarily high profits, year after year, also show this is not the risky investment that drug makers claim. And those profits don’t finance research — they are what's left after research and all other costs are paid."

Jerry Hurley, from Massachusetts Senior Action added, "Already, more than 300,000 Massachusetts seniors lack prescription drug coverage and more Massachusetts seniors will be put in the category of lacking prescription drug coverage unless significant changes in drug pricing are made." Hurley continued, "Reports have been written. Studies have been commissioned. We know what needs to happen but our leaders need to overcome the attitude and overwhelming influence of the drug companies who fight every plan and program which attempts to bring fairness to drug pricing."

"People are put in unfair positions when it comes to paying for prescription drugs," explains Ana Bodipomo-Mamba, policy analyst for Health Care For All. "A parent should not have to choose between his child's asthma medication or filling his own prescription for high blood pressure. Nor should our seniors have to resort to traveling to Canada to meet their prescription needs. Pharmaceutical companies need to be held accountable for their actions and our state and federal government should continue to take steps at enforcing fair and con-

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scionable practices by the drug companies.

Meanwhile Massachusetts programs such as the Pharmacy Program and Pharmacy Plus program should continue to provide prescription drug assistance to our elders and people with disabilities.”

For a copy of the Massachusetts drug price study, please visit our Web sites at: www.masspirg.org and www.citizen.org