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PRESS RELEASE

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ALTERNATIVE SENTENCING PROGRAM HONORED WITH NEW ENGLAND BOARD OF HIGHER EDUCATION EXCELLENCE AWARD

Boston—Recognized as a “truly exceptional life-changing program,” Changing Lives Through Literature, an innovative alternative sentencing program developed in 1991 by Superior Court Judge Robert J. Kane and University of Massachusetts/Dartmouth Professor Robert P. Waxler, today will receive the Excellence Award for Program Achievement by the New England Board of Higher Education. The award will be presented at 7:00 p.m. at the Fairmont Copley Plaza Hotel in Boston. About 200 New England leaders in education, government, and business are expected to attend.

Changing Lives Through Literature motivates men and women offenders who have been sentenced to probation to become better citizens by examining their own lives through a discussion of novels and short stories focusing on issues such as violence, gender and race. By analyzing the obstacles of characters in literature, participants gain insights into their own obstacles in life and often become productive members of society instead of returning to a path of crime. Studies by independent researchers have consistently shown that recidivism rates are lowered by as much as fifty percent as a result of successful participation in the program.

Barnstable District Court First Justice Joseph J. Reardon, an ardent supporter of the program who has observed participants for eight years, said Changing Lives through Literature is a “voyage of self discovery” for many probationers and it helps them to “re-

establish contact with basic concepts of morality.” Judge Reardon said the program is designed to prevent repeat offenses and that it works in the majority of cases.

More than 3500 offenders in Massachusetts have completed the course in about twenty programs throughout the state. Courts that have successfully launched programs include Barnstable, Concord, Dorchester, Framingham, Lowell, Lynn, New Bedford, Roxbury, Southern Berkshire, Woburn, and Wrentham.

New England Board of Higher Education President Robert Weygand said, “This program, which proves the power of literature does alter human lives, is a shining example of the importance of sustaining excellent humanities education on our public campuses and has been recognized by the Board as being a truly exceptional life-changing program.”

Professor Waxler said Changing Lives through Literature also is cost efficient as it costs less than \$500 per offender while the cost of one year of imprisonment in Massachusetts is about \$25,000. He said last year the program saved the Commonwealth about three million dollars by keeping offenders from reoffending.

The Massachusetts program serves as a model to similar projects in the United States and in Europe. Texas, Kansas, Arizona, Connecticut, Maine, Rhode Island, New York, and England currently have Changing Lives Through Literature programs, while Canada and California have launched pilot projects.

The New England Board of Higher Education is a nonprofit, congressionally authorized agency whose mission is to promote greater educational opportunities and services for the residents of New England. The Board instituted the awards to recognize individuals and institutions that have made substantive contributions to the improvement of higher education opportunities for New England students.