

Massachusetts to lead new **abuse** prevention program

BOSTON - Massachusetts is one of three states in the country selected to break new ground in the prevention of child **sexual abuse** by focusing on adult and community responsibility, rather than child safety programs.

On Wednesday, Rebecca Bialecki, coordinator of the **North Quabbin** Community Coalition, was at the Statehouse when Lt. Governor Kerry Healey announced that the Athol-based coalition was one of three communities in the state chosen to pilot innovative programs that will be used nationwide to target child **sexual abuse** prevention.

Healey said, "this new initiative puts Massachusetts in a position to set the national standard. New strategies will be developed to prevent child **abuse**. These new programs will add resources to training and communication programs that educate the public, parents, and professionals about measures they can take to prevent child **abuse**. Specifically, these programs will train adults how to recognize potential abusers." In the fall of 2002, after a nationwide competitive process, the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention selected Massachusetts, as well as Minnesota and Georgia, to lead a trailblazing effort to pilot and evaluate new programs and strategies to prevent child **sexual abuse**. According to their research, the CDC and Kaiser Permanente, the nation's largest HMO, confirmed that child **sexual abuse** is one of a handful of key adverse childhood experiences that are linked to later high-risk health behaviors (substance **abuse**, overeating, and tobacco use) that in turn are linked to the most frequent causes of death in our country, including heart disease and cancer, said Jetta Bernier, chair of the Massachusetts Child **Sexual Abuse** Prevention Partnership.

The new three-year public health initiative will be paid for by a \$500,000 grant.