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SPRING INTO ACTION FOR PREVENTION

Portland, ME — The time for action is now. This was the conclusion of the close to fifty community members that gathered last night to discuss the issue of underage drinking and substance abuse in Portland. One Maine/One Portland (OMOP) and Portland Communities Mobilizing for Change on Alcohol (Portland CMCA) hosted the public action forum at Merrill Auditorium Rehearsal Hall to get community input on building a five year prevention plan to create a safe and drug-free community for our children's future.

These two community coalitions unveiled the results of their recent citywide survey entitled, "Preventing Youth Substance Abuse in Portland," as a basis for the evening's discussion. The over 700 survey participants of the survey all live or work in the city and represent all ages and walks of life, including youth. There were breakout sessions in the three key levels for action; individual, family and community. Participants discussed the problems, strategies and barriers identified in the survey and then voted on priorities for action. These priorities will form the basis for the Portland Prevention Plan.

"Our goal is to reduce alcohol and other drug use by Portland teens an initial ten percent by 2008, and an additional ten percent by 2010. To do this, we need the community on board and clear priorities for action," stated Erica Schmitz, Coordinator for Portland CMCA.

The survey results point to a strong need for community involvement. The top three things that are seen as currently helping to keep youth healthy and safe are alternative activities in the community, family and parent involvement and positive peer influences. Survey respondents expressed a need for more alternative activities for youth, prevention and educational programs for parents and youth, community-level engagement and commitment, stronger policies, and a more consistent law enforcement presence. The survey also clearly showed a desire for more neighborhood and community centers as gathering places for youth and families.

Portland CMCA is a coalition of individuals and organizations working together to strengthen policy, enforcement & community norms for the drug-free development of our youth. One Maine One Portland is a project of the City of Portland Public Health Division, Health and Human Services Department, dedicated to supporting healthy youth and families.

Both coalitions will be holding open meetings in May for interested members of the community to attend and get more involved in this important work. The next OMOP meeting will be held in room 303 at City Hall on May 9 at 11:30 am. Bring a brown bag lunch, beverages provided. Portland CMCA will meet next in the State of Maine room at City Hall on May 17 at 4:00 pm, snacks provided.

Portland CMCA is also collaborating with the Bayside Neighborhood Association in hosting a forum at Portland High School on June 14 with Attorney General Steve Rowe, entitled Alcohol Impacts on Neighborhoods: What is happening, Why and What can be done. The public is encouraged to attend.

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