

*The following statement may be attributed to Melanie Wyne, Executive Director of the Initiative for Software Choice (ISC):*

### **Coalition Says Massachusetts' Search for ODF Plug-in Evidences Flaw in Mandate Policy**

*Effort indicates greater reliance on marketplace guidance to promote document access*

**Washington, DC, May 8, 2006** – “Last Fall, Massachusetts’ Information and Technology Division (ITD) presented the state’s executive agencies with a stark mandate – Microsoft’s Office Suite will be replaced with OpenDocument Format (ODF) compliant desktops by January 2007, ostensibly to further ITD’s goals of greater, more cost-effective access to documents and data by administrators and citizens.

“Last week, ITD released a request for proposal (RFP), looking for an ODF Plug-in for Microsoft’s Office Suite.

“The RFP reveals that the choice presented by the previous ITD bureaucrats – i.e., ODF-compliant desktops for state agencies are the only viable options for citizens to have access to their data in the future – was purposely exclusionary, being primarily designed to distort the competitive landscape. In other words, it had little to do with access to documents, and everything to do with excluding proprietary software providers.

“The RFP reflects a wise use of market dynamics. There exist many paths to interoperability and document access. We trust that with this new development ITD recognizes that a plug-in, as well as other technological and market-based solutions, will help its administration and citizens gain better access to state-stored documents and data.

“Importantly, the RFP, as well as a plug-in’s purported existence, will allow Massachusetts to meet its stated goals in a cost-effective, market-friendly way. Instead of leveraging a dubious scarcity rationale, a plug-in would add new options to today’s technology and marketplace, working with, not at odds against, what the state and the marketplace now possesses.

“The Massachusetts policy has been closely followed by other governments and the open source-only community. If it can be characterized as a model for ‘disruptive’ change – it is a deeply flawed one. After two years of shifting policy tweaks created through a specious administrative process, the policy never really inched past being one that promotes an open source-only objective. That is so because it was not designed as anything other than to benefit a handful of special interests. So-called ‘access to documents’ provided the convenient patina to make it socially palatable.

“Regardless, the Massachusetts ODF policy – not ODF, the format – is a biased, open source-only preference policy. We believe such preference policies exclude choice, needlessly marginalize successful marketplace options, and curtail merit-based selections for state procurements. In short, they disserve citizens who demand cost-effective solutions for their hard-earned tax dollars.

“We hope that other governments will understand the broader implications of the RFP, as well as the competitive dynamic playing out for the desktop. Already, the EC has noted it will not now formally promote adoption of ODF-compliant desktops because other competitive desktop standards are imminent. This demonstrates the EC’s understanding that policies supporting open

standards/formats generally remain preferable to those promoting specific open standards/formats. This is itself a positive development.

“In a macro-sense, the Massachusetts RFP shows that technology and marketplace dynamics are far better equipped to deliver solutions to customers than any mandate could hope to be. Merit-based, platform neutral, competitive standards best serve citizens. They foster choice without deleterious mandates, ensuring that the best, most cost-effective items can be procured.

“We applaud these and subsequent, market-based developments.”

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**About the ISC**

The Initiative for Software Choice (ISC) is a global coalition of large and small companies committed to advancing the concept that multiple competing software markets should be allowed to develop and flourish unimpeded by government preference or mandate. For more information, please see us on the web at [www.softwarechoice.org](http://www.softwarechoice.org).

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