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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

MISSOURI LAUNCHES SUICIDE PREVENTION STRATEGY WITH SCHOOLS

JEFFERSON CITY, MO., NOV. 26, 2007 -- The Missouri Department of Mental Health and Department of Elementary and Secondary Education have collaborated on an initiative to engage Missouri's schools in addressing teen suicide.

Missouri Well Aware, a quarterly bulletin for superintendents, principals, counselors, and teachers, provides information about preventing teen suicide, along with additional tools to identify youths at risk for suicide. It highlights resources within the state and connects school officials to the latest information on risk factors related to teen suicide.

"Providing schools with effective, nationally recognized information about this public health issue is a critical part of our state suicide prevention efforts," said Governor Matt Blunt. "Our communities and our schools need this information." Suicide is the third-leading cause of death among Missouri youths, ages 10-24. Approximately 14 percent of Missouri high school students reported they had considered attempting suicide in the past year, according to the 2006 Missouri Student Survey. Suicide claims the lives of more than 700 Missourians of all ages each year.

"Many suicides can be prevented," said Joseph Parks, M.D., director of the Division of Comprehensive Psychiatric Services in the Department of Mental Health. "Effective prevention requires a comprehensive approach that includes increasing protective factors and reducing risk factors. It is incumbent upon us to try new approaches to address this public health problem."

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"Our goal is to support high academic achievement by all students and to help keep them safe, both physically and emotionally," said Missouri Commissioner of

Education D. Kent King. “We hope that *Well Aware* is a practical tool for Missouri educators in this effort.”

Well Aware is being developed in Missouri by the two state agencies with support of federal funding. Missouri received a \$1.2 million federal grant in 2005 to increase strategies to prevent youth suicide. This grant helped launch seven Regional Resource Centers for Suicide Prevention that offer free training to schools, faith-based organizations, civic groups, youth-serving agencies, and others to increase effective conversations that deter suicidal action. Visit these Resource Centers online at www.dmh.missouri.gov/cps/issues/suicide/ResourceCenters.htm

About Well Aware

Well Aware is a multi-faceted strategic communications program to inform and engage education leaders of the link between emotional well-being and academic achievement. It includes an interactive quarterly bulletin for school administrators with research-based content, best practices in the national prevention arena, and other information relevant to school leaders. Well Aware is a program from Point de Vue Communications, Inc. (pdvpr.com), publishers of Advancing Suicide Prevention (advancingsp.org), a national strategic health policy magazine. For more information, contact *Well Aware* staff at talkback@wellawaresp.org

The Department of Mental Health serves Missourians by working to prevent mental disorders, developmental disabilities, and substance abuse; by treating, habilitating, and rehabilitating persons with those conditions; and by educating the public about mental health.

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