PART I. ADMINISTRATION OF THE GOVERNMENT.

TITLE II. EXECUTIVE AND ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICERS OF THE COMMONWEALTH.

CHAPTER 75. UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS.

Chapter 75 of the General Laws is hereby amended by adding the following section:-

Section 47. (a) As used in this section the following words shall, unless the context clearly requires otherwise, have the following meanings:

"Community mediation center", a community-based program of a private nonprofit or public agency organized for the resolution of disputes or for a public service, charitable or educational purpose, that provides direct access to free or low-cost mediation services at any stage of a conflict through trained community volunteers and involves community members in the governance of the center.

"Mediator", an impartial person who assists in the resolution of a conflict or dispute and meets the requirements of section 23C of chapter 233.

"Office", the office of dispute resolution at the University of Massachusetts at Boston established under section 46.

(b) There shall be a statewide community mediation center grant program to be funded by the commonwealth. The mission of the grant program shall be to promote the broad use of community mediation in all regions of the state. Public agencies shall use community mediation in support of statewide and community objectives. The grant program shall be administered by the office of dispute resolution. The office may expend appropriated funds on program administration and operational grants to community mediation centers, on the basis of need, for dispute resolution in neighborhoods and local communities. The office may advocate for funding and resources for the statewide program and for community mediation programming. The office may establish rules and regulations to effectuate the purposes of this section, including provisions for grant making, monitoring and evaluation of the statewide program and state-funded community mediation centers and the establishment of a quality assurance system for mediator excellence. The office shall establish a program advisory committee with balanced representation of interests, including representation of state-funded community mediation centers.

(c) Funds appropriated or available for the purposes of this section shall be allocated for eligible community mediation centers through operating grants from the office. The grants administered under this section shall be used solely to provide operational funding for centers to assist them in meeting the needs of local communities. Eligible centers shall be selected for operational grants based on grant applications. Grant applications shall be screened by a grant review committee established by the office to make recommendations. The office shall determine the final grant recipients and awards. The commonwealth’s share of the operating cost of any center funded under this section shall include a baseline grant award based on eligibility criteria and a proven track record and may also include an additional award based on performance levels set by the office that may include, but shall not be limited to, the volume of intakes, sessions and mediations during the immediate past performance cycle, the extent services are being provided to underserved or unserved areas of the commonwealth and the center’s contribution to identified community objectives within the geographical regions served.
(d) Community mediation centers applying for state-funded operating grants shall demonstrate compliance with eligibility criteria established by the office, including operational and structural criteria and requirements for matching funds. To qualify for funding, community mediation centers shall also comply with grant application procedures set by the office. The office shall consult with centers in establishing grant criteria and procedures.

(e) Applications to start a new community mediation center may be submitted at any time in the fiscal year; provided however, that the decision to provide grants shall be entirely dependent on available funds. The grant review committee shall determine how closely the startup center's operating philosophy, organization, by-laws and other supporting documents reflect the office's eligibility criteria for community mediation. Priority shall be given to eligible start-up centers serving areas that have no existing community mediation centers.

(f) Payments to centers awarded grants under this section shall be made under contracts with the University of Massachusetts at Boston. The methods of payment or reimbursement for community mediation center operating costs shall be specified by the office. All contracts and methods of payment or reimbursement shall conform to this section and the rules and procedures of the office and the University of Massachusetts at Boston.

(g) The office may accept and disburse from any public or private agency or person any money for the purposes of this section and may perform such services and acts as may be necessary for the receipt and disbursement of such funds. A community mediation center funded under this section may accept funds from any public or private agency or person for the purposes of this section. The state comptroller, university controller, the director of the office and their authorized representatives shall have the power to inspect, examine and audit the fiscal affairs of state-funded community mediation centers.

(h) Each state-funded community mediation center shall provide the office with data on operating budgets, mediation and related services, and such other information the office may require periodically for monitoring, evaluation and reporting purposes. The office shall provide periodic progress reports to the program advisory committee and shall report annually to the governor, the chief justice of the trial court, the senate president, the speaker of the house of representatives, the chairs of the joint committee on higher education, the chairs of the joint committee on the judiciary and chairs of the house and senate committees on ways and means, on the operations, activities and accomplishments of the statewide program and the centers funded under this section.