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MassEquality To Honor Gov. Deval Patrick, Boston Bruins, MA Coalition for the Homeless, and Esmond Harmsworth at 2013 Icon Awards

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Second Annual Icon Awards Recognize Extraordinary Contributions to LGBTQ Equality By Political, Corporate, Advocacy, and Philanthropic Icons

BOSTON, January 16, 2013 – MassEquality will honor Massachusetts Governor Deval Patrick, the Boston Bruins, the Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless, and Esmond Harmsworth at its second annual Icon Awards, which take place February 28, 2013 at 6pm in the Oval Room of the Fairmont Copley Plaza Hotel in Boston.

“Icon Awards honor and celebrate individuals and entities who have demonstrated extraordinary leadership and a steadfast commitment to bettering the lives of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer people in the Commonwealth,” said MassEquality Executive Director Kara Suffredini. “They aren’t just allies – they are symbols of what others should aspire to in their support of LGBT issues. Those we are honoring on February 28 have demonstrated through their actions that they understand the necessity of doing the right thing, even if it seems unpopular. That’s what makes them icons, and that’s what makes MassEquality proud to recognize them.”

Massachusetts Governor Deval Patrick is the most pro-LGBTQ governor in the country. He has backed passage of numerous laws protecting the LGBTQ community including last year’s Transgender Equal Rights Law and the HIV Testing Law. He has issued executive orders protecting LGBTQ people including two in 2011 that prohibit discrimination against transgender workers in state employment and among state contractors. He nominated the state’s first openly gay Associate Justice to the Supreme Judicial Court. And he was the first Governor in the nation to run on a platform supporting marriage equality, playing a pivotal role after his election to office in defeating a proposed amendment to the state constitution that would have prohibited same-sex couples from marrying.

“I am humbled by this honor and grateful for the partnership we have had with MassEquality in building a Commonwealth where people come before their government as equals,” said Governor Deval Patrick.

The Boston Bruins have been proactive in their efforts to ensure equality, respect, and safety for all athletes. The team participated in the annual “Spirit Day” campaign to raise awareness of the need to end bullying targeting LGBTQ young people, and Bruins players have spoken to local press about sports culture, LGBTQ people, and the National Hockey League’s status as a supportive environment for all players. Bruins captain Zdeno Chara and Bruins alternate captain Andrew Ference have made videos for the ground-breaking You Can Play Project, which is dedicated to improving the climate for the LGBTQ community in professional sports, and Ference has raised money for the project. Additionally, Bruins player Shawn Thornton has spoken out favorably to the local press about the need to welcome gay athletes. This award will mark the first time a professional hockey team has been honored by an LGBTQ organization and the second time any professional sports team has been so honored, second only to professional soccer club DC United.

“The Boston Bruins organization has been tremendous in showing its support for our You Can Play Project to end homophobia in sports. Bruins management has been incredible in facilitating our access to players and in supporting our efforts behind the scenes,” said You Can Play co-founder Patrick Burke. “The Bruins players have been happy, if not eager, to assist us with videos, to help with fundraising, and to express their support for LGBTQ athletes. From Zdeno Chara to Shawn Thornton to Andrew Ference, the Bruins have made it clear to gay hockey players everywhere that any athlete who can help the Bruins in their quest for their next Stanley Cup is welcome in the locker room.”

The Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless has been instrumental in raising awareness of the plight of unaccompanied homeless youth, up to 40 percent of whom are LGBTQ. Last year, the Coalition for the Homeless was an instrumental partner in a successful effort to ensure passage of a measure creating a first-in-the-nation commission charged with making recommendations to the state on ways to more effectively support homeless youth to become self-sufficient.

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About MassEquality

MassEquality is the leading statewide grassroots advocacy organization working to ensure that everyone across Massachusetts can thrive from cradle to grave without discrimination and oppression based on sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression. We do this by partnering across issues, identities and communities to build a broad, inclusive and politically powerful movement that changes hearts and minds and achieves policy and electoral victories.

“The Coalition is so grateful and humbled to be recognized by MassEquality. The dedication, capacity, and power of MassEquality’s staff and membership have greatly enriched our campaign and work towards the shared goal of ending unaccompanied youth homelessness across the Commonwealth,” said Robyn Frost, Executive Director of the Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless. “We look forward to even deeper collaboration in the years ahead.”

Esmond Harmsworth has been an activist and funder of LGBTQ issues since the mid-1980s. He has been one of the leading funders, as well as a board member, volunteer, and friend of almost all of the LGBTQ organizations in New England as well as nationally. He has been especially involved, over the years, with the marriage issue and with LGBTQ youth issues, including both Maine ballot question campaigns and in marriage in Massachusetts. He is also an attorney and a partner at a literary agency.

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