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November 28, 2005

The Honorable Thomas Trimarco
Secretary, Executive Office for Administration & Finance
Commonwealth of Massachusetts
State House, Room 373
Boston MA, 02133

Dear Secretary Trimarco:

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts has spent more than a year evaluating the most appropriate and available open standards to make sure that its office documents can be widely shared, read and saved for years to come. The focus on fairness and thoroughness throughout this process ensured that the best interests of its citizens were tantamount. It was only after this inclusive process that Massachusetts selected the OASIS-approved OpenDocument format (ODF).

Recent press reports have suggested that Microsoft's Office 12 XML-based format would also be an acceptable choice, despite the currently proprietary nature of the product. While Microsoft has promised to eventually submit Office 12 to a standards body, the Commonwealth must act on *existing* open standards to best serve its future needs for document exchange. Just as an agency would not purchase a product before its actual availability, so too would it be a mistake to rely on a single vendor's promise to submit a new product to a standards body at some point in the future. The Commonwealth owes no less to its taxpaying citizens.

It is clear to us that if Microsoft responded to the Commonwealth's decision in this matter by agreeing to include the ODF standard in future releases of the Office product, then the state could be assured of the many benefits of interoperability based on open standards. Those include healthy competition for desktop software within the agencies of the Commonwealth, increased choice and competition, and perhaps most importantly, the assurance of better pricing and greater innovation. But that is a business decision only Microsoft can make.

The Commonwealth's process began as an effort to ensure that the documents created by its agencies would be owned by those offices and by its citizens for all eternity -- without the need to negotiate or pay for continued access to them again in the future each time a new version of proprietary software is released. This process began as an effort to break away from the lock-in to certain expensive technologies, the costs of which ultimately accrue directly to taxpayers. This process began with a desire to create a level playing field so that innovation in the market would flourish, enabling better delivery of government services.

This process should not end with the acceptance of a promise from those who seek to maintain a costly status quo, which accrues only to one company's bottom line and denies the citizens of the Commonwealth the value they deserve from their tax dollars.

Only after a specification has been approved by a broadly supported standards body – one that demonstrates acceptable levels of openness by being available to all competing products – should the Commonwealth consider including that open standard as one of its own. This "spectrum of openness" includes the ability of multiple, competing vendors to participate in creating the standard. It also includes the presence of a wide range of developers using the standard, including those from the open source community, who have sufficient rights to produce competing products. These are characteristics that the Commonwealth can only judge at the conclusion of a proposed standards process (e.g. standards body ratification).

The Commonwealth must also carefully weigh the negative implications of having two competing standards for its office documents, especially since one of the primary goals of this process has been to guarantee the future accessibility and interoperability of those documents.

We trust that the Commonwealth will continue to exercise due diligence in open standards evaluations and in its technology selections in the future. We look forward to assisting the state in any way we can to reach the laudable goals reflected in this move toward truly open standards.

Sincerely,

Carl Cargill
Director, Corporate Standards
Sun Microsystems, Inc.

c: Governor Mitt Romney