CHAIRPERSON JAMES:

Mr. Farrow? He is not here?

Ann Witney?

MS. WITNEY: Thank you. My name is Ann Witney, I'm a resident of the town of Harvard and I'm employed as a public school teacher in a suburb west of Boston.

I'm speaking in support of the Massachusetts Lottery and the aid it brings to cities and towns. During the season of taxes and town meetings, the theme in both the town I work and the one in which I live has been one of raising the money needed to meet the school budgets for the upcoming year.

Education budgets in Massachusetts are primarily funded with local property taxes. In recent years, the state has increased state funding for education as it implements education reform programs. But the base of educational funding continues to come
from local property taxes. These funds are no longer sufficient to meet the growing demands placed on education.

There is a statewide trend towards school populations increasing. Many towns, including my own, have been faced with expanding or reopening closed buildings or building new schools to accommodate this increase. Along with this is the need for additional teachers, buses and materials, such as computers, to meet newly implemented state standards.

Many cities and towns, not so fortunate, have class sizes at the elementary level of over 27 students. As a first grade teacher I know this is unacceptable. To meet these and other needs, many town are faced with overrides of the Proposition 2«, which limits property tax increases to 2« percent.

Many experts feel the effects of increased population, coupled with the loss of capital from proposition 2« are just beginning to be felt. School budgets are not the only place where towns must face overrides and debt exclusions, so requests for, say, a new town fire truck, might color taxpayers' willingness to also pay higher taxes in order to hire new teachers.
Last year, the town in which I teach did not pass the override, a sign that taxpayers have had enough with increases. As a result, we are constantly faced with budget cuts. Happily, one increase that is in our favor is the aid sent to towns and cities from the State Lottery. Direct Lottery aid to cities and towns has increased in the last three years.

Some of the money received comes from the arts fund, which goes for example, to arts enrichment programs in the schools, an essential part of the curriculum. A much larger sum goes into the general operating budget of the town, which indirectly and directly supports the public schools. Money spent on public libraries, improved roads or fire and police protection or other town needs, thereby free up funds for education.

As an educator, I am of course concerned about the problems of compulsive gambling and I am pleased that the Lottery also recognizes this and contributes to programs to address this issue. The availability of Lottery funds helped to support excellence in schools. From my perspective, the Lottery is beneficial to the cities and towns of Massachusetts.
1 Thank you.

2 CHAIRPERSON JAMES: Thank you.